

3 Simple Ways Water Can Calm Your Children

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POSTED ON
[October 25, 2016 \(October 25, 2016\)](#)



Water is everywhere. Our bodies are 70 percent water and about the same percentage of the earth's surface is covered in water. It's no surprise that throughout time people have been attracted to water for its many beneficial properties – like beauty and tranquility.

Now, science actually shows that being in and around water can calm our bodies and minds. Wouldn't you love to be able to calm your children using something as simple and available as water? Here are three ways that water can help your children relax.

Observe it

Have you ever lost yourself in the beauty of the ocean, a flowing waterfall, or even an aquarium? You are certainly not alone. Water is known to give us a sense of peace and serenity. In fact, medical studies have found less cortisol (the stress hormone) and more serotonin, oxytocin, and dopamine (the feel-good hormones) in people as they spend time in, on, or around the ocean.

A couple years ago, marine biologist Wallace J. Nichols dove into this topic in his book "Blue Mind: The Surprising Science That Shows How Being Near, In, On, or Under Water Can Make You Happier, Healthier, More Connected and Better at What You Do." He believes that we all have a "blue mind,"

which he describes as “a mildly meditative state characterized by calm, peacefulness, unity, and a sense of general happiness and satisfaction with life in the moment” that’s triggered when we’re exposed to water.

When we’re around water, our brain becomes engaged in our environment and we enjoy pleasant sensory stimulation. We become so focused on the water that we enter a mindful state. As a result, we enjoy lower stress levels; relief from anxiety, pain, and depression; improved mental clarity and focus; and better sleep.

Water also inspires a sense of awe, as we take in the vastness of the ocean or swim in a large lake. These experiences make us aware of and appreciate our place in this immense world. Such awe-inspiring experiences boost our mood, making us feel happier and calmer. This happens because our nervous system reacts in the opposite way to awe than anxiety. Instead of the “fight or flight” response kicking in, awe keeps us still and relaxed, benefiting both our body and mind.

Water also provides soothing sounds that help us feel calm, as evidenced by all the relaxation and sleep aids that use sounds of water – whether it be crashing waves, the pitter patter of rainfall, or the rush of a flowing river.

Why does the sound of water cause this reaction? Studies show that it’s based on how our brain interprets different noises. These slow, rhythmic whooshing sounds are non-threatening, which is why they calm us down. Also, the sound of water is a type of white noise that helps drown out other noises that might cause us concern.

Find ways to expose your children to awe-inspiring water scenes and sounds, such as:

- Plan trips where you can visit impressive water sights like Niagara Falls, the turquoise sea in the Caribbean, waterfalls in Hawaii, and the Great Lakes.
- Visit marine nature centers and aquariums.
- Spend time at the beach and encourage your children to express how the scene makes them feel in creative ways like writing, painting, or singing about it.
- Go fishing or on a boat ride or cruise.
- Listen to water sounds to calm your children at bedtime.



Immerse yourself in it

Spending time in water has a tremendous soothing effect. Some believe this is because it's reminiscent of the time we spent in our mother's womb surrounded by amniotic fluid. It may also be related to how the water makes us feel weightless and free.

Studies show that floating can actually change our brain waves and reduce cortisol levels, therefore making us feel more relaxed. There is an actual floating therapy now where individuals can visit a float center to spend time in a dark, private room floating in water as a form of meditation. A 2001 study in the Journal of the Canadian Pain Society found that spending time in a flotation tank effectively decreased anxiety and depression and increased optimism.

Swimming is also known to boost endorphins that increase feelings of well-being. Plus, the rhythmic strokes and sound of water make swimming very relaxing. Research shows that swimming produces the same relaxation response as yoga, increasing calming chemicals and allowing us to enter a meditative state. When we swim laps, we can focus simply on our strokes and breathing, making it easy to shut off all the noises and activity going on outside the pool.

Baths and showers have been used as ways to escape daily stress for ages. By practicing some mindfulness during a bath or shower, we can really focus on the sensations on our skin and the sounds of the trickling water. This helps us be in the moment and forget our worries.

Look for opportunities for your children to spend time in water:

- Sign them up for swim lessons or join a swim team.
- Encourage them to practice floating on their back in the pool.
- Choose vacations where you can enjoy swimming and water sports.
- Turn bathtime into a mindfulness moment by asking them questions about how the water feels and sounds.
- For older children and teens, visit a spa or float therapy center together.

Drink it

Let's also not forget how critical water is to our health. By simply drinking enough water throughout the day, children can minimize feelings of stress and anxiety. Water plays such an important role in how our body functions. All of our organs, including our brain, need water to work properly. If we're dehydrated, our body is strained and we can become stressed and edgy. Dehydration can actually cause symptoms that feel like anxiety, such as dizziness, muscle fatigue, headache, feeling faint, increased heart rate, and nausea.

Dehydration has also been linked to higher cortisol levels. According to the Calm Clinic, water appears to have natural calming properties. Drinking water can be soothing, and our body can benefit from the added hydration when we are stressed.

It is so important that we encourage our children to drink enough water every day to help them stay balanced. The amount of water a child needs depends on several factors like activity level and local weather, but in general children should drink at least six to eight cups of water per day.

Your children will probably need more water if they're participating in sports. It's suggested that they drink a half cup to two cups of water every 15 to 20 minutes while exercising. For specific recommendations, see the Dietary Reference Intakes (DRIs) developed by the Institute of Medicine (IOM).

As one of our most important natural resources, water provides so many benefits including improving our health and happiness. Have fun exploring new ways for your children to enjoy water through their senses – and you will be grateful for how calm they are as a result.

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Lindsey Slott • a year ago

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I love how you include the science behind water's many benefits! Water is one of the 5 elements that I discuss in my blog "5 Element Parenting", where the ideal parenting style depends on the 5 element type of the child and parent. Kids of the other 4 elements (wood, fire, earth, and metal) especially need these water activities to balance them out.

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Sandi Schwartz → Lindsey Slott • a year ago

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Thanks for your feedback. I am going to check out your blog right now!

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Jennifer • a year ago

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We're a water family over here! My kids love being near bodies of water (whether it's a pool, our bathtub, or the ocean!), and I can definitely see the difference in their behavior and well being - it's the oddest thing! But not surprising, considering I probably react the same!

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Emily Bandler • a year ago

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This is such great insight. We love spending time in the water. In fact the kiddos have swim lessons today!

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Sara @ The Sanity Plan • a year ago

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This is a great article. I have noticed that my kids react very well to water exposure. I will use bath-time as an activity if they are particularly agitated or cooped up in the house. I also notice that my kids are very calm with the sound of the water running, so I will often put them in early on in the bath and set the volume of water to low to extend the time that it takes to fill the bath.

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