

Blue note

To go blue water cruising is to have a swimming pool in your back yard. Yet that can make you fussy, as **Jess Lloyd-Mostyn** notes

iving on a boat with kids means that you are in and out of the water a lot. It is a welcome way to cool off from the tropical heat of the day and is an equally useful pacifier if the children have got a bit wild – it's our backyard, our swimming pool, our plaything.

So, you can imagine how as parents we've been encouraging their swimming skills. This isn't always so easy. We had a long period of time in New Zealand where the waters seem a lovely temperature to us, especially as we remember braving the icy waves in Cornwall as kids. But, for a child who is just learning and not necessarily moving about in the water quite so much, our kiwi swims were often fraught with whingeing, especially when showering off afterwards exposed to the breeze. So we invested in wetsuits to make the temperature and the grumbling more manageable. And we've always tried to make sure that we get their heads underwater too, just for a moment, to get them accustomed to holding their breath, shutting their mouths and keeping relaxed when they're under. Quite easily done with a little baby in the tropics but not quite so straightforward with a toddler in cold water – so we'd pick our moments.

And we learned not to push it. We had other ways of keeping the tiddlers connected to the sea, using the paddleboard to get them close to dolphins, playing with the kayak around the marina docks, getting them used to lifejackets on dinghy trips or simply popping on an Attenborough programme about the ocean. Even a bath full of water in the cockpit can keep these two happy for hours.

Our return to the warmth of the South Pacific coincided with both little ones being at the right age and stage to really progress in the water. At two and four they were quite well-matched physically with our son's sheer persistence and strength making up for what he lacked in his big sister's co-ordination and eagerness to please. Past seasons had us get comfortable with swimming off the boat with a baby attached. This started with simple things such as using swim noodles to keep her buoyant



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and taking her on our snorkelling trips in a little yellow floaty seat, her chubby legs dangling down while reef sharks and rays swam round her toes. Now our lessons advanced to one-on-one time with either child, to practise or explore a particular aspect of staying afloat. Other times we're all in together, switching partners and playing round the boat or off a beach.

Although I've always been a fair enough swimmer I've never been particularly relaxed swimming with our small fry at anchor. Being out of my depth, with an additional 10 to 15kgs of toddler desperately clawing at my neck and dragging me under wouldn't put me in a very easy frame of mind. So I'd tend to favour beach swims with them or hang back and let James take the lead.

But all of that has changed. There's a significant difference that's made up of equal parts latitude and attitude. Bye-bye wetsuits, it's so warm that when

we jump into the water it's like jumping into a warm bath. It's meant that all the complaints about cold winds, chilly water or icy rinse-downs have stopped making swim time more fun for all of us. The heads are dunked under, this time with extra lessons in blowing bubbles, using goggles or a snorkel. Also, it happens with a lot more regularity as we're always looking to jump in and cool off, even if it's just for a quick session. This helps the new skills to be remembered next time as it has become more of a constant in all our lives.

And their abilities and talents in the water have also taken a sudden leap. James and I can now both swim round the boat at anchor with a child each. No slipping off our backs into the blue oblivion, no tightening stranglehold to the jugular and no dragging us under. Both kids are happy, confident and comfortable in the water, holding their bodies up with only minimal assistance from us, which in turn makes us a lot more relaxed too. Our daughter bounces up to me full of stories of her latest adventure with her dad. She is now able to swim solo and even snorkel independently, which has the added incentive of opening up a whole new world of marine life. Soon they'll be swimming circles round us and I couldn't be more proud of either of them.



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Jess and James left the UK in 2011 in their Crossbow 42 and have sailed halfway round the world, growing their crew en route. Follow their journey at water-log.com