

Games teach water skills to kids in fun ways

By Tara Marion

When children are comfortable in the water, they are less likely to panic. Pool games are an excellent way to acclimate and allow children to feel comfortable. “The more comfortable they are in the water, the more relaxed they are to learn how to swim, so it’s important for our kids to know that water’s fun,” said Deb Noble, aquatics director at the YMCA, 2900 W. Centre Ave.

Not only do pool games teach children to have fun in the water, but they also teach specific skills.

Frog man teaches underwater swimming. Basically an underwater relay, two teams’ swimmers go under water and move a diving ring closer toward a goal.

“Tag”-based games teach basic water skills and provide hours of fun. These games include Marco Polo, Sharks and Minnows and Are you Hungry Mr. Shark?

Obstacle courses are just as fun for children to create as they are to swim through. “You can use all different types of things to create your own obstacle course: Hula Hoops, chairs, ‘noodles,’ back balls and rafts,” said Noble.

Other water activities for children include synchronized swimming, relay races and diving for treasure, the last of which is now packaged as a game.

Jim Wedel, who owns Michigan Swim Pool Inc., 5977 Portage Road, said the product includes three sunken artifacts: a ship’s wheel, pirate’s sword and old wreck’s anchor.

Wedel said there are a lot of other diving products on the market as well: sticks, rings, disks, mermaids, eggs, crabs and clams. Each clam contains a colored pearl, whereas the eggs have “trash” or “treasure.”

Dry land sports, such as volleyball, basketball, badminton, football, water polo and hockey can be easily adapted to the water.

With water polo, said Noble, “You don’t need nets or anything. We just set up a kick board or anything that can be knocked over on either side of the pool.”

For water hockey, you sink a hockey puck to the bottom of the pool and use just the blade of the hockey stick to hit the puck.

Because this game is played underwater, participants usually wear masks and snorkels.

There is also an inflatable version of this game available, said Wedel. On a floating game rink, two players try to squirt a ball into their opponent’s goal.

When purchasing toys for children, Wedel said parents should consider their ages and swimming ability, but safety is always the most important consideration. Said Wedel, “Nothing beats parental supervision.”