



Whoa, Mom! I'm not so sure about this water stuff.



Don't worry, pup. Swimming is what seals do best.

Swimming lessons start early if you're a baby seal. Everyone into the water, now!

# SWIM CLASS, SEAL-STYLE

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On the California coast, *harbor seals* gather on rocks and beaches, resting and warming up in the sun. But it won't be long before the mothers and pups in the photo at **right** head out to sea.

Swimming means survival, and a seal pup can swim as soon as it's born. The little one **above** is just a few days old—and it's already trying out its skills. Like a good swim coach, Mom will help her baby become a super swimmer. Read on to find out how she teaches her pup all about how to survive, seal-style.



## LESSON 1: SWIM WITH A BUDDY .....

In the beginning, a harbor seal pup sticks very close to its mom. She's a good swim buddy and a great teacher. The pup will spend only three to six weeks with Mom, so it has to learn fast.

At **right**, Mom shows off a favorite seal trick called

*bottling*. She rests with just her nose above the water and bobs like a floating bottle.

Mom is completely at home in the water. But her pup gets tired and cold quickly in the chilly ocean. That's when the best way back to shore is a ride on Mom's back!



## ..... LESSON 2: KNOW YOUR LIMITS

Swimming takes a lot of energy, and Mom knows when her pup needs a break. The two head for land (**left**). They'll *haul out*, or pull themselves up onto the beach or a nearby rock for a rest. Like a hungry kid after school, the pup can't wait for a snack. It will nurse on Mom's rich milk, which is 45 percent fat and as thick as ice cream! (Human milk is only 4 percent

fat.) These "milkshakes" are just the thing for a fast-growing pup. Putting on a thick layer of fat called *blubber* will help it stay warm in the cold water.

Mom needs to eat, too. She'll swim out for a quick meal of fish or squid. When she returns, she'll find her pup by listening for its special cry. Then, it's back to seal swim school!

## LESSON 3: STAY NEAR THE SEA .....

At **right**, Mom waits patiently for her clumsy pup to haul out onto a slippery rock. Moving on land isn't easy for harbor seals. Their bodies are round and heavy. Unlike their cousins the sea lions, seals can't turn their back flippers forward to walk on them. Instead, they use their front

flippers to help them flop along on their bellies.

Whether they're on a rock or on the beach, Mom and her pup will always stay close to the water's edge. Then, if they sense danger, they can quickly slip into the sea. And as soon as they hit the waves, they'll be clumsy no more.

