

This article is written for parents who wish to teach their children how to swim – in their own pool. We encourage you to study more how to teach swimming to your children, by also visiting our Recommended Resources listed after the conclusion of this article.

Swim Lesson Planning & Preparation

Teaching kids how to swim requires only a few instruments, first and foremost being a swimming pool. Teaching your child how to swim could be more fun in groups. As you make your annual / seasonal swim lesson plans, spread the word to other parents who may like to join-in.

For Swim Students:

1. **Swimsuit.** Take them shopping for their new swimsuit each year, and instruct them never to go swimming without wearing a swimsuit. Teach that swimming in clothes and shoes is unsafe.
2. **Sunscreen.** Protect their skin while they are in the pool or on the pool deck. A tight fitting swim shirt or large hat can also be used to protect the skin from too much sun.
3. **Kickboard.** For use when learning simple strokes and for kicking exercises, a foam kickboard (not inflatable) can be used in multiple ways during a swim lesson.
4. **Swim Diaper.** For those not yet potty trained, a swim diaper, worn over a regular diaper.
5. **Good Health.** Delay the lesson if your child has an illness or needs a nap.
6. **Towel.** And dry clothing to change into after the lesson is over.

For Swim Teachers:

1. **Swimming Pool.** Learning to swim in lakes, streams and oceans can be unsafe, due to deep mud, currents and riptides. A shallow wading pool or ‘baby pool’ is the best place to start, if available. Otherwise, use the shallow end of a pool, preferably with walk-in steps. Aboveground pools or large spas can also be used for teaching toddlers to acclimate to water and learn basic swim skills.
2. **Swimsuit.** Set the example of never swimming without a swimsuit. Hat, but no sunglasses.
3. **Enthusiasm.** Bring a big smile and a big heart to each swim lesson, with some patience and empathy too!
4. **Swim Lesson Plans.** Unless you memorize it, use a binder that you can stand up, with plastic sheet holders to hold your lesson plan on the edge of the pool.
5. **Schedule.** Just like other important things, schedule swim lessons for a solid time slot on your calendar. Once or twice per week, for 8-12 weeks could be appropriate.
6. **Pool Noodle.** Can be used to provide you added buoyancy, or for kicking and floating drills.

SWIM LESSON TIPS:

- Each swim lesson for infants and toddlers should last only 15 minutes; up to 30 minutes for 3-5 year olds, and up to 45 minutes for children over 5 years old.
- The ratio of swim teacher to swim student should be 1:1 for children under 5 who have not reached swim stroke and treading water proficiency.
- Slow and steady. There is no time limit on progressing from one swim level to the next. Some children will take longer on certain levels, and swim lessons may need to be repeated, perhaps several times, until the swim student can confidently progress to the next level. Stay positive, and encourage the swim student toward short term objectives and long term goals.
- Maintain arm's length distance at all times during swim lessons and constant focus on the swim student. Don't allow any distractions whenever a child is around the pool.
- 82 degrees or warmer is most suitable for teaching kids how to swim. Colder pool water will detract from their ability to learn to swim.
- Using a USCG approved foam life vest may be helpful at other times, but not during the swim lesson. Likewise, don't use water wings, or 'swimmies', because they interfere with proper swim movements, and allow for bad stroke development. Using floatation devices will under-utilize key muscle groups needed for swimming and could also provide a false sense of security.
- Feed your swim student 1 hour before the lesson, and give fluids after the lesson.

SWIM COLLEGE: Ability-Based Swim Lesson Plans

SWIM COLLEGE is not an actual organization, and this curriculum is offered as a generalized outline of possible swim lesson plans. Our swim lessons should be considered a class syllabus only, more instructor study is prudent before beginning an in-home swim training program.

SWIM COLLEGE curriculum is not based on age, but rather on ability, no matter if infant, toddler, pre-school age or much older, the same basic progression is used. In the early years, you may need to repeat previous swim lesson plans as a refresher, and to re-acclimate to the water.

SWIM COLLEGE is arranged as a 4-year curriculum, but students are encouraged to do post-graduate work and continue studying each summer for a total of 6+ years. Swim students can begin at any age, but if possible start between the ages of 12-24 months. Plan each season's swim lessons for 8-12 weeks, once or twice per week.

For teaching toddlers how to swim, parents may consider professional swim instruction by a qualified instructor, when available. Most municipal and educational pools offer swim classes for kids, or you can search for a local swim instructor at swimlessons.com.

Begin each swim lesson with some safety training, and give reminders and praise for the safe swimmer throughout a lesson. Spend as much time as is needed on each section before moving into more advanced skills. Some swimming skills will take longer than others – be patient and encouraging towards small objectives and larger goals.

SWIMMING 101:

Safety Rules: Every swim lesson should have a pool safety component. In the early years, pool safety should focus on definitive rules such as no swimming alone, no swimming without a bathing suit, stay in the shallow end. As a young swimmer develops greater awareness, more advanced pool safety education should be taught, and reviewed annually.

Acclimation: Don't rush this step, even a small pool can seem intimidating to a young child. Standing in the shallow end, have the swim student sit on the edge of the pool, or on the pool steps, with their feet in the water, and start with a little splashing to get used to the temperature. Pull them up close to your chest when they are ready, and hold them closely while smiling and having fun, moving into the shallow end. Gently dip your body lower until the water is up to the child's shoulders, bouncing up and down with a reassuring smile. Using pool floats to rest the child on while you stand, holding your student are helpful at many stages during beginning lessons.

Submersions: Proceed deliberately slow; this can take several lessons to perfect. Gradually dip lower in the water, looking and smiling at your student until you can get up to their chin. Slowly dip both of your mouths below surface, and blow bubbles just under the surface. Once you've mastered the blowing bubbles by mouth, the next milestone is going over the nose, eventually dipping fully underwater and looking at each other without blowing bubbles, holding your breath for 1-2 seconds. Taking an exaggerated breath, or blowing in babies face can cue them to hold their breath.

Kicking: Hold your child in front of you and help them to begin kicking their feet, showing them a slow and steady underwater kick. Using a foam pool float or large kickboard can be helpful for kicking exercises, to help support the student comfortably. Practice front kicking and back kicking until they can do it on cue, it's one of the most important skills of swimming.

Backfloat: Use both hands to support your student's head and body while back floating and breathing. Stand behind them and try to encourage eye contact, to help keep your students head down and eyes back. A song or gentle rocking can help to calm anxiety. Float for 30-60 seconds, or until your student becomes fussy, gradually reducing your hand support.

Frontfloat: Use both hands to support your student's arms while front floating. Start with head up front floating, supporting your student. Work up to face-in-the-water front floating, which can take some time to master. It may help if you can sit on the floor with your student floating on the surface, within arm's reach. A snorkel and mask can be used for older students.

SWIMMING 201

Safety Rules: Review of previous swim safety rules such as never swimming alone, or without a swim suit and staying in the shallow end. Jumping in safely means feet first, in shallow water, where you can see the bottom. Diving head first is never safe, and should be reserved for competitive swimmers. Practice skills of getting to the edge of the pool from a short distance away.

Breath Control: A sophomore swimmer is not very coordinated with breathing around water, they may inhale some water and cough. When this happens, respond with smiles and encouragement, and resume when they regain their composure. Separately practice blowing bubbles and breath holding under water. Practice breathing while back floating and front floating, with support.

Rolling: This has reminded me of a dog trick, but being able to roll over, from back to front and vice-versa, is an important early skill. Start with a supported and comfortable back float, and help your student to turn right by throwing right the left arm and pushing the left elbow back. Start with these mechanics and gently ease into the skill of rolling from a back float to a front float, with support, and the reverse, rolling from front to back. The student should be able to roll themselves easily, with breath control.

Kicking: Practice a flutter kick in several ways during each lesson, to build the muscle memory of a movement which is actually quite complicated. In more advanced swim students, the swim kick develops to use the entire lower half of the body, the hips, knees, ankles and toes. For now we are splashing water, motor boating, and kicking rhythmically. Use a pool float or kickboard for student support while you give some assistance

Jumping In: Jumping off of the side of the pool's shallow end and into your waiting arms is both fun and scary for a young swimmer. You can start from a seated position if needed, and work your way up to jumping in towards you, submerging and resurfacing to your waiting arms. Teach them to jump out into the pool, away from the wall. You can practice on land, and show them how far they can jump.

SWIMMING 301

Safety Rules: Continue skills of swimming short distances to the side, steps or ladder. Practice skills of touching bottom and pushing off the pool floor to resurface. Discuss pool barriers – fencing, gates, doors, and how they can protect non-swimming people and animals.

Breath Control: Continue to practice front floating and back floating breathing exercises, and practice rolling and dipping while holding breath. Gradually increase the time underwater, but to no more than a few seconds. If the child is over 3 and they like to jump, go into water just deeper than their head and practice bouncing off the bottom and springing up above the water.

Dog Paddle: It's very exciting when your student begins to paddle short distances. To start you can provide a little lift to their swimsuit, or support under their belly. Perfecting the doggy paddle means slowing it down, taking deeper strokes and using a longer kick stride, for a less tiring stroke.

Back Sculling: Floating on their back, teach your student to use their hands and wrists like fins, to paddle slowly (sculling) and help stay afloat easier. Add in some arm motion and the arms can be used like boat oars to move more water. Add in a back kick for faster propulsion, encouraging and demonstrating a proper back flutter kick.

Dive and Rise: With the student on the edge of the shallow end wall or on the pool steps, have them push off underwater, extended like Superman, and glide to your waiting arms 4-6 feet away. Add in a front breast stroke pull if possible.

Treading Water: As they gain more comfort and skills in the water, you can assist them with treading water skills by giving light support and helping them to coordinate their arms and legs to keep them afloat while using the least amount of energy.

SWIMMING 401

Safety Awareness: Review rules of the pool such as no swimming alone (If adult must leave, you must leave), and no swimming without a swim suit. No diving. No running. No horseplay. No glass. Keep the gate shut. Give your child a small responsibility for pool safety around your home pool, telling him or her how important their help is in making the pool safe Give praise for positive safety behaviors.

Straight Kick: This is advanced kicking, working on the involvement of the entire leg A true ‘flutter kick’ motion, is below the surface of the water, with fluidity and full leg coordination. We constantly work on kick improvements throughout *Swim College*, until it becomes automatic, or something the swimmer doesn’t have to think about.

Backstroke Kick: The backstroke kick appears to be a mirror image of the front kick, but in fact there are small differences in the stride and rhythm of kicking while back floating. Different muscle groups are also used. Give the backstroke kick as much practice time as the straight kick. Playing slow rhythmic music can be used to help establish a tempo.

Freestyle Breathing: As a precursor to freestyle stroke, teach the method on dry land first, using a short bench to lay your student upon. Dry land videos of swimmers in slow motion could also be used demonstrate the motion in action. Demonstrate and practice in the pool with light support for your swimmer. Practice for several sessions, with support and without kicking, until the motion of turning the head to breathe in coordination with the opposite hand thrust, becomes nearly natural.

Freestyle Stroke: Bringing together three skills – kicking, pulling and breathing, freestyle stroke is what separates the non-swimmer from the swimmer, when they continue beyond basic stroke development. For many children, this may not come until ages 5 or 6, even for those with advanced motor skills. Take it slow and stick with it – and always end your swim lessons on a positive note.

Advanced Treading Water: Now we enter survival swim training territory, and most boys will like it when you give it that name. Review the basics of treading water with hands and arms sculling and legs doing a modified ‘bicycle kick’. Practice rhythmic breathing while treading water until your swim student can tread water for 30-60 seconds, with you within arm’s reach.



Water Rescue Basics: Review the rules. Praise your student (gold star!) when they show safe water behavior (entering/exiting safely, shutting a gate or door, or leaving the pool with you if you have to run inside the house). If appropriate for your child, instruct on what 911 is and when it may be appropriate to dial 911 for water rescue. Young children should be taught to find an adult for any kind of small or large emergency at the pool. If appropriate for your child, CPR demonstration and discussions can be held – no giggling!

Backstroke Basics: The backstroke begins with a good back float and a solid back kick. Add to it a head-back shoulder rotation windmill motion, scooping lots of water on your down stroke. Breathe rhythmically with the stroke and really stretch out long to bring kicking, stroking and breathing together.

Eggbeater Kick: This is the kick used by water polo players to lift them out of water to their waists. A very powerful kick, but at much slower rates, it's an easy way to tread water and conserve energy. Each leg moves in opposite rotation to the other, so that the upper leg is pumping up and down while the lower leg is swirling in a circular rotation from the knee to ankle.

Breaststroke Kick: The eggbeater kick has been said to be a modified breast stroke kick, which is also known as the frog kick, where the legs are drawn up and then squeezed together while being thrust out to full length. Practice kicking while holding onto and facing the wall or a large float. Small kickboards can be used for further training. Dry land bench training or videos can also be used, along with demonstrations.

Breaststroke Basics: Pushing off the wall and gliding, like superman, is a good place to start. The motion of the stroke used in breast stroke is a hard one for younger kids, and will take some practice. I think of the stroke motion as an upside down heart. Pull down from the top, then join hands below your chest and bring the arms back up the middle. Keep the torso flat, (no rotation) and bob up for air as you bring your arms back close the chest.

Advanced Freestyle: Picking up on what was learned in earlier lessons, the stroke mechanics of the freestyle or crawl can be fine-tuned for both distance and endurance. Stronger breathing skills, more powerful strokes and less turbulent kicking are the objectives.

 **DOCTORAL STUDIES**

Advanced Water Safety: Review of the pool rules. Topics include Layers of Protection and the shared responsibility of keeping gates and doors locked, to protect animals and people that can't swim from drowning dangers. Review of water rescue basics (call an adult). Shallow water blackout danger from hyperventilation should be discussed with your swim students.

Advanced Breaststroke: Fine-Tune the mechanics of breast stroke to increase distance and endurance. A simple proficiency can be quickly gained, but greater coordination between the kick and stroke comes with practice.

Advanced Backstroke: Same as above, additional stroke practice is necessary – even though a student may already understand the basic stroke mechanics, added practice always improves muscle memory and stroke development.

Advanced Breath Control: When you let out all of your air, you'll sink slowly to the bottom. Practice this in shallow water, rapidly exhaling a big breath to sit on the pool floor. Tea party time! Another breath holding exercise is gliding from the wall with a breast stroke kick. Exhaling while sinking to the shallow end floor, and pushing off the floor to a big breath above water

Deep Water Diver: Is your swim student ready for the deep end? If they can swim across the deep end, they should be able to dive down into the deep end, holding your hand or having you within arm's reach. Practice letting out chest air to dive into deeper water, then push off the bottom to resurface rapidly. If you have a diving board available, you can practice proper dive technique, or teach diving safely from the edge into deep water.

Butterfly Stroke: For those that want to learn all of the major swimming strokes, even more than improving upon the other three, we have the butterfly stroke. Start with learning the butterfly kick, also known as the dolphin kick. Add the stroke by moving both arms simultaneously over the shoulders and pulling hard through the water while coming up for air. The butterfly stroke is arguably the most difficult coordinated movements in swimming, requiring practice to reach a basic stroke proficiency.

Recommended Resources: Please consult other online resources for more in-depth information regarding teaching young children how to swim. An excellent free program is provided by [uSwim](#), from Australia. There is more free swim teaching information on [swimator](#), and also great learn to swim [drills](#) by Beth Jenkins.

[Swimkids](#), is another great online resource for tips on teaching kids how to swim. [Swimming.org](#) is a British site with very good learn to swim information using the ASA Foundation Framework. Everybody Swim has a very useful Youtube [channel](#).

Before teaching your kids how to swim, download and read the [Red Cross](#) swimming and water safety manual.

Conclusion

Swimming lessons should be a part of every summer season. Make it a priority to have at least 8-12 weeks of progressive swim lessons every year. Begin early, and continue annual swim training for up to 10 years, for best results.

Teaching kids to swim is not easy, but it's important. If you have a pool in the backyard, it could be the most critical skill that your child learns, for their own safety around water and your own peace of mind.

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