

# Guidelines for Babies, Toddlers and Preschoolers in Aquatic Education Programs

## 1: Introduction

Following research undertaken by the ASCTA Teaching Committee in 2004, 2005 and 2009\*, ASCTA has adopted guidelines for the participation of Infant, Babies, Toddlers and Preschoolers in Aquatic Education Programs, based on the following principles:

- Participation in aquatic activities should be an enjoyable experience for Newborn, Babies, Toddlers and Preschoolers and their Carergivers.
- Newborn, Babies, Toddlers and Preschoolers should be able to learn at their own pace and never be forced to participate in Aquatic programs or activities.
- Irrespective of their aquatic ability, Newborn, Babies, Toddlers and Preschoolers are never safe when in or around water and must be under constant ADULT supervision.
- All techniques and activities must be developmentally appropriate, non traumatic and respect the rights and dignity of participating Newborn, Babies, Toddlers and Preschoolers and their Carergivers.

The following guidelines outline the recommended conditions for Infant, Babies, Toddlers and Preschool Aquatic Education Programs. They are not intended to direct Teachers specifically on how to instruct classes as various suitable and effective methodologies exist. They are to be used by Teachers as the basis for the development of safe, effective and positive programs, and by Caregivers as a guide to the selection of a suitable program for their child.

*\* Initially, this process was undertaken in 1997 by a joint ASCTA-AUSTSWIM taskforce that consisted of the ASCTA Teaching Committee and the AUSTSWIM CEO. ASCTA has then undertaken peer review with leading industry experts both in Australia and internationally.*

## **2.0 Philosophy**

One of the most commonly asked questions of Teachers of Babies and Toddlers is “At what age should I start my young Child in formal swimming lessons?”

This question is closely followed by “What can I hope for my Child to achieve at *XZY* age?”

There is of course no definitive answer to these and other common questions about Baby and Toddler aquatics, but this course and this particular Unit of Study will provide a solid base of knowledge about the pedagogy (teaching science), skill development and achievements of Babies and Toddlers that professional Teachers of Babies and Toddlers should have.

## 2.1 Terminology

It is important to understand the terminology used consistently throughout all Units of Study.

Whilst there is some contention about actual age breakdowns, what has been determined for use throughout this course is the consensus of the course reference group and is based on the standards for the imbedded course competency and generally accepted terminology already in use.

Prenatal	the mother and the unborn child
Newborn	0 – 4 months
Baby	4 – 24 months - exact age of characteristics will vary due to development speed
Toddler	25 – 42 months – exact age of characteristics will vary due to development speed
Pre-schooler	43 – 60 months
Caregiver	Parent, Guardian or responsible adult for Child at that time
Child/ren	A prepubescent or pubescent boy or girl (i.e. between birth and 18 years of age)
Young Child/ren	A Newborn, Baby, Toddler or Preschooler
Teacher	A qualified and accredited Instructor who facilitates skill acquisition for Learners either individually or in class situations
Toys	Playthings which are not teaching, rescue or floatation aids
Aquatic program	A planned sequence of lessons progressively increasing the capabilities of a learner in skills related to water familiarisation, mobility, buoyancy, water safety including personal safety and survival, and swimming
Water familiarisation	Introduction to water and basic buoyancy, mobility and survival skills. Acquisition is primarily through experience and discovery learning
Swimming and water safety lessons	A structured, focused and formalised process to teach swimming strokes, personal safety and rescue skills
Aquatic facility	The pool or other aquatic learning location and its immediate surrounds
Learner	A Student of any age in the process of acquiring new skills
Parent	Permanent guardian of the child, usually the biological parent or adult adoptee
Swimmer	A person generally possessing the skills to move safely and efficiently through the aquatic environment they are in. A swimmer in one environment may not be a swimmer in another environment
Deep	Area where a Learner is unable to comfortably stand
Shallow	Water of a depth where the Learner can comfortably stand
Varied depth	An area where the Learner has access to a shallow water zone such as platforms, ledges, steps etc
ASCTA	Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association

## 2.2 Good Reasons for Teaching Babies and Toddlers to Swim

The points in this section have been principally adapted by Barbara Nolan from The Baby Swim Book, Kochen, C.L. Ph.D and McCabe, J. B.A.; Leisure Press, 1986; and used by Swim Australia in handouts at Parent-Baby Expos.

- Newborn and Babies less than a year old accept the water more readily than older Children
- Fear of water is acquired as Children grow older. The longer a Child is kept away from water, the more likely the Child will develop aqua-phobia
- Newborn and Babies can exercise more muscles in the water, they are less restricted by gravity and their ability to sit or stand improves. This increased strength often manifests itself in early acquisition of physical skills such as walking
- Swimming improves a Baby's or Toddler's cardiovascular fitness. Although Babies and Toddlers are limited in how much they can improve their endurance, swimming does have a beneficial effect
- Early mastery of water movements gives Children a head start in learning basic swimming skills
- Water helps improve co-ordination and balance by forcing Babies to move bilaterally to maintain their equilibrium
- Warm water combined with gentle exercise relaxes and stimulates young Children's appetites. They usually eat and sleep better on swimming days
- Doctors often recommend swimming as the exercise of choice for asthmatics. For many asthmatics, exercise produces bronchial hyperactivity. Swimming stimulates less wheezing than other forms of exercise, possibly because the warm, moist air around pools is less irritating to the lungs
- Babies and Toddlers flourish in the focused attention their Parents lavish on them during swimming
- As young Children learn how to manoeuvre in the water on their own, their independence and self-confidence blossoms
- Swimming provides Newborn, Babies and Toddlers with lots of skin-to-skin contact with their Parents that psychologists say may deepen the bond between Parent and Child
- Water familiarisation and learning to swim is not only a fun, healthy activity but a safety measure as well. (Drowning is a close second to car accidents as the major cause of accidental death in Australia and a significant cause in many developed countries for under 5 year olds. For each drowning, many more are left with permanent brain damage.)

*“Children can do things in the water that they cannot do on land. No restricting clothing or nappies to hinder them and they can move in a three dimensional room – the water room.”*

Dr Ludmilla Rosengren, 2005

### **2.3 Guidelines for Baby and Toddler Aquatic Education Programs**

Some of the materials throughout this course have been purposely provided more than once in a number of different formats to reinforce the importance or so that sections are cohesive and comprehensive in their presentation.

### **2.3.1 General Guidelines**

Following initial recommendations made in 1997 by a taskforce consisting of the ASCTA Teaching Committee and the Austswim CEO and further research by the ASCTA Teaching Committee in 2004 and 2005, ASCTA adopted guidelines for the participation of Newborn, Babies, Toddlers and Preschoolers in Aquatic Education Programs, based on the following principles:

- Participation in aquatic activities should be an enjoyable experience for Newborn, Babies, Toddlers or Preschoolers and their Caregivers
- Newborn, Babies, Toddlers or Preschoolers should be able to learn at their own pace and never be forced to participate in Aquatic programs or activities
- Irrespective of their aquatic ability, Newborn, Babies, Toddlers or Preschoolers are never safe when in or around water and must be under constant ADULT supervision
- All techniques and activities must be developmentally appropriate, non traumatic and respect the rights and dignity of participating Newborn, Babies, Toddlers or Preschoolers and their Caregivers

The following guidelines outline the recommended conditions for Newborn, Babies, Toddlers or Preschoolers Aquatic Education Programs.

The guidelines are not intended to direct Teachers of Babies and Toddlers specifically on how to instruct classes as various suitable and effective methodologies exist.

They are to be used by Teachers of Babies and Toddlers as the basis for the development of safe, effective and positive programs, and by Caregivers as a guide to the selection of a suitable aquatic program for their Child.

