



Guidelines for the Participation of 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.

2.3.2 Class Ratios

The design of the aquatic facility, the Teacher’s skill and experience, the ability level and experience of the Caregivers and young Children, the environmental conditions all may impact upon the prudent Caregiver/ young Child to Teacher ratios.

The table below documents the industry consensus.

Classification	Age Indicator	Ratio
Prenatal	Prenatal	Exercise and education program for the parent
Newborn	Under 4 months	Home education program
Baby, Toddler	4 months to the 42 months	1:1 Caregiver/ Baby, Toddler <i>Max 7 Caregiver/child couples per Teacher</i> <i>Varied water</i>
Preschooler	42 months to 60 months	<i>When teaching in shallow water</i> 1:5 Preschooler/Teacher <i>When teaching in deep water</i> 1:1 Preschooler /Teacher <i>When teaching in varied water</i> 1:4 Preschooler /Teacher

Note: A “**transitional period**” is recognised and has been identified between 30 months to 42 months. Depending on maturity and development, a young Child of this age may be classified as either a Toddler or Preschooler.

2.3.3 Teachers, Parents and Pool Management Guidelines

- Constant supervision by a competent Adult must be in place at all times, regardless of the Child's increasing confidence and ability
- Rules of behaviour for activity in, on or around water should be taught as an integral element of all aquatic programs
- Aquatic programs for Newborn, Babies, Toddlers or Preschoolers must **not** carry an implicit guarantee ensuring safety in and around water
- Terms that may imply such guarantee (e.g. "drown proofing", "water proofing, "water safe" and "safe") must not be used. Rather words such as "safer", "water wise" and "more familiar" denoting improvement by degrees are encouraged
- Newborn, Babies, Toddlers or Preschoolers must be properly supported to prevent the swallowing of water
- Techniques that cause distress are not acceptable. This is often evidenced in forced submersions and forced back floating

2.3.4 Teacher specific Guidelines

Teachers of Newborn, Babies, Toddlers or Preschoolers should:

- hold an appropriate qualification as recognised by ASCTA such as the Swim Australia™ Teacher of Babies and Toddlers accreditation. This recognises specific training in Newborn, Baby, Toddlers and Preschooler aquatics and a sound understanding of the aquatic implications of early childhood development
- continue their education and professional development to stay current with new trends
- hold a current certificate in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and be competent in the recovery and resuscitation of Newborn, Babies, Toddlers or Preschoolers and their Caregivers
- respect and nurture the bond between Caregiver (especially the Parents) and Child
- directly model to Caregivers, positive behaviour management strategies
- educate Caregivers on the need to respect their Child's individuality and not to make comparisons with other Children
- educate Caregivers on the developmental implications of a Newborn, Babies, Toddlers and Preschoolers aquatics program
- understand and communicate the importance of play in the education of the developing Child
- understand that a primary role of the Teacher is to monitor and guide the education of the Child through the Caregiver
- display an understanding, aptitude, patience and enthusiasm for interaction with Newborn, Babies, Toddlers or Preschoolers
- where it can reasonably be expected; recognise when a Child is unwell, and be familiar with the common symptoms of contagious diseases that may put the Child or others at risk. Teachers must not attempt to diagnose the condition but rather recommend the Parent seeks professional medical advice

2.3.5 Clothing Guidelines

Appropriate clothing should be worn by Newborn, Babies, Toddlers or Preschoolers, Caregivers and Teachers.

- Newborns, Babies and non toilet trained Toddlers should wear non - padded pants that fit snugly around the legs to ensure that bowel motions do not enter the pool. It is essential that Caregivers and Teachers can quickly see that a bowel motion has occurred
- During the summer months, Caregivers should be advised to provide protection for their Child's feet against hot surfaces such as outdoor pathways and metal surfaces. Appropriate sun protection as per the Sun Smart polices should be followed such as using SPF 30+ sunscreen, protective clothing, hats and utilising available shaded areas
- During the cooler months, Caregivers should be advised to dry their Child, change them into warm dry clothing and encourage Children to wear head coverings when leaving the facility

Teachers and Caregivers should remove jewellery especially neck adornments which may be grasped by the Child and should wear secure swimming apparel appropriate to the lesson.

2.3.6 Safety procedures and pool guidelines

- Any Child having a bowel movement should leave the water immediately, be washed with soap and changed into clean clothing before re-entering the pool. Soiled clothing should be quickly and carefully cleaned and placed in a sealed container for disposal or sanitising
- Pool and associated facilities should meet or exceed standards specified by the relevant State and Local authorities regarding safety, water purity and sanitary conditions
- Teachers should have a working knowledge of the facilities emergency evacuation procedure and ensure participants in their program are fully aware of these procedures
- Caregivers should be educated about the safety aspects of all equipment used within the program
- Floors and passageways must be free from obstructions and have appropriate wet-area flooring
- Dressing rooms and changing tables should be well maintained, sanitised regularly and have supporting materials provided such as soap and disposal bins
- Special attention must be given to the placement of equipment such as mats and kickboards to avoid the risk of patrons slipping
- Teachers should be aware that pregnant Mothers or Caregivers carrying young Children may have restricted vision and be more unsteady on their feet. Be particularly vigilant with trip hazards and uneven surfaces, steps or changes in pool depth
- Teachers should be aware of the safety and comfort implications of varying water depths for Caregivers during activities

2.3.7 The care and storage of toys and equipment.

- All toys and equipment should meet the Australian Toy Standard (AS/NZ 8124)
- Special care should be taken that toys and equipment will not fit into a Child's mouth nor contain any small removable parts that could cause choking
- Toys and equipment are to be maintained in a safe working condition at all times
- All toys and equipment are to be made from non toxic materials
- A regular cleaning schedule should be in place to thoroughly disinfect toys. Extra care should be taken in disinfecting the inside of all hollow toys
- Children must be within arms reach of the Teacher or Caregiver and in their view at all times, particularly around large equipment such as mats and platforms

2.3.8 The use of attached or worn Teaching Aids

- Teachers must be aware that the use of aids may assist with the gaining of confidence and skills but can mask the Child's true aquatic ability
- Aids should only be used in controlled teaching situations
- Flotation aids worn on or attached to the body are not life saving devices and must only be used under competent Adult supervision
- Such flotation aids must be acceptable to the Australian Standard 'Flotation Aids for Water Familiarisation and Swimming Tuition'; Australian Standard AS 1900-2002
- Aids must be checked prior to use to ensure correct fit and usage is achieved
- Children can quickly become dependant on aids leading to a false and potentially dangerous sense of their swimming ability without aids
- Overuse of aids may decrease the Child's ability to perform previously learnt skills without an aid

2.3.9 Water temperature and class duration

- The water temperature should be between 30 to 33 degrees Celsius. This provides for optimal learning comfort and enjoyment
- Newborn, Babies and Toddlers become cold very quickly. Caregivers should wrap their Newborn, Babies and Toddlers in a towel when out of the water. The learning of aquatic skills should never take precedence over the Child's comfort
- Children who display signs of lost body heat should be immediately removed from the water, dried, clothed and kept warm
- In-water class times should not exceed thirty (30) minutes for Babies and Toddlers (Newborn should not be in formal classes)
- Frequent, short learning experiences are best as Newborn, Babies and Toddlers need to avoid becoming cold and tired
- Teachers must be aware of the risks associated with pregnant Women overheating in water temperatures higher than 34 degrees

2.3.10 Caregiver involvement and education

- Aquatic education programs must involve the education of the Caregivers
- Caregivers should be in the water as an active class participant
- The Caregiver is the primary educator of the young Child and must assume responsibility for the supervision and aquatic education of the Child
- Programs should communicate safety rules, goals, techniques and expectations of Newborn, Baby and Toddler aquatic education activities
- All Children must be fully supervised including Siblings who may be waiting while their usual Caregiver is in class with a younger or older Sibling. Caregivers must be made aware that their “in the water” Child needs their full attention and that they cannot supervise other Siblings adequately whilst participating in a class

2.3.11 Health whilst in aquatic programs

It is vital the Child, Caregiver and Teacher are in good health whilst undertaking activities in an aquatic environment where close contact, warm water an effective medium to convey infection exists

- The Caregiver should ensure that they and the Child are in good health prior to participating in aquatic programs
- Pertinent health information about pre-existing conditions should be obtained from the Caregivers before a Child is accepted into an aquatic program. Teachers and Caregivers need to be aware that physical and emotional health varies, from time to time, in each individual. Medical and personal information should be stored, released and disposed of as per the Federal Government privacy principles
- Pre-existing medical and health conditions of Caregivers that may effect their in-water participation must also be collected prior to commencement within a program
- Teachers must ensure Caregivers understand the importance of regularly updating any changes to the health status of the Child or their self.

2.3.12 Further aquatic readiness considerations

- Readiness for each stage of aquatic activity will be determined by both the maturity of the Child and previous aquatic experiences
- The number of participants in a class should allow for close supervision and individual attention
- Programs should include movement, exploration, games and provide Caregivers participation in various developmentally appropriate activities
- Development of specific skills in aquatics should not take precedence over a Child's enjoyment of the water, but should be seen in relation to their overall development
- The first key to learning is the emphasis placed on a positive, safer and more enjoyable aquatic environment

2.4.0 Guidelines specific to each age grouping

In the following sections, the stages of development and growth and the impact this has for the Caregiver and Teacher of Babies and Toddlers are detailed.

An understanding by Teachers will allow them to better judge the potential mental and physical capabilities of specific Children participating in their aquatic programs.

2.4.1 Participation in formal Aquatic Programs

- From about 3-4 months of age, Newborn begin to gain control over their posture and under normal circumstances they can raise their head and look about
- Newborn about 3-4 months of age are able to engage in social interactions and are becoming very aware of their environment
- The involuntary reflexes are now rapidly becoming integrated into voluntary movement patterns and Newborn are gaining control of posture and movement

2.4.2 Support for Babies aged four to eight months

- Aquatic activity is very much a sensory experience in the early stages. Teachers must have a sound understanding of reflexes and be proficient at reading the Babies' non verbal cues
- Caregivers need to be taught appropriate holds that provide adequate support for the Baby
- The aquatic environment can cause a Baby to become unstable. They may not have the ability to lift their head and breathe independently when in the water
- Teachers must understand how reflexes relate to breath control and their implications to the submersion of Babies
- Unsupported back floating is not recommended for Newborn and Babies under eight months of age. The buoyancy of a Newborn or Baby enables them to float with minimal support of the head and neck. However this is not a voluntary skill and the Newborn or young Baby is unable to adjust and make changes to their position. Independent back floating places a Newborn or young Baby at higher risk of swallowing water, developing hyponatremia, and becoming emotionally traumatised

2.4.3 Progressive Skill Development for young Children

- Head, arm and leg proportions mean a Newborn or young Baby is still top heavy and may balance, streamline and propel differently to a Preschooler or older Child
- The learning of skills by the Child is directly related to active participation in educational programs and to the frequency of practice. Prolonged absence from an activity will often result in significant regression of skills
- Only when a Newborn, Baby or Toddler can demonstrate a learnt response to a cue for breath control can submersions be initiated. Initially submersions should be brief and few in number. Once the young Child can consistently initiate submersions and demonstrate competent breath control, submersions can become longer and more frequent. The emphasis in these experiences should be free of force
- Teachers must have an adequate understanding of the righting (rolling over) and postural reflexes and their implications on teaching Newborn, Babies and Toddlers to back float
- Activities should be modified to cater for the young Child's increased mobility, independence, and growing understanding of their world around them
- ASCTA recognises the desire of individuals and agencies to use an aquatic environment as a method of enriching the life experience of young Children. The emphasis in these experiences should be free of force, punishment or threat

2.4.4 Appropriate Activities

- Programs that include movement exploration, water adjustment, fun, games and Caregiver/Child involvement are appropriate
- Development of specific skills in aquatics should not take precedence over the young Child's general well-being, but should be seen in relation to overall development
- Consideration should be given to the developing Child's intensely curious behaviour, propensity to make believe and the development of vivid fears
- Trust is a cornerstone of the relationships that build between Teachers, Caregivers and Children. Without trust, anxiety and fear are more likely to compromise the enjoyment of all activities. Enjoyment is an integral part of insuring activities are suited to the age and ability of each group

2.4.5 Parent Education

- The aquatic program may be the young Child's first formal educational experience
- Teachers of Babies and Toddlers should be capable of offering emotional support to Caregivers in their program and creating a nurturing, positive environment
- It is essential that Caregivers understand the rationale for any formal aquatic program for their Child
- Programs need to cater for varying levels of mobility and Caregivers must be educated about the safety implications of this increased mobility
- Teachers of Babies and Toddlers must have an adequate understanding of, and be capable of educating Caregivers on the implications of separation anxiety

2.4.6 Outdoors Lessons

Teachers of Babies and Toddlers conducting programs in outdoor facilities should consider the following:

- Structure the class activities and duration in consideration of water and air temperature
- The air temperature and often the water temperature within outdoor venues cannot be controlled. Lessons held in cooler climates should be scheduled to maximise the benefits of the warmest part of the day
- Lessons held in warmer climates should be scheduled towards a cooler time of the day
- Children should be kept active within the water and not left sitting on the edge where cooler air temperature may cause rapid loss of body heat
- The positioning of the sun must be taken into account, especially when back floating

2.5.0 Starting water familiarisation

The following sections of this Unit have been developed from materials produced by Dave DuBois.

Caregivers are often drawn to the obvious benefits that swimming lessons can offer their Children, but many feel unsure at what age they should start. It is natural to feel some caution. Caregivers might question how Children learn to swim when they are so young and what type of activities they will be involved in. Relating swimming to the process a Child goes through when learning to walk can help us to understand. Walking is a complex, physically demanding activity that requires intense coordination and balance, yet Children learn how to walk at a relatively young age and, for the most part, teach themselves. Acquiring water mobility and swimming skills happens in very much the same manner with Caregivers and the Teacher of Babies and Toddlers there to assist at each step of the way.

While water safety lessons may help to address safety issues, lessons will also continue to refine the strokes helping the Child to become a safer more efficient swimmer, and of course lessons are a fun, healthy activity for children.

It's important to remember that before birth, Newborns were immersed in a fluid environment inside their mother's womb. So, we aren't really talking about when to "introduce" a Child to the water, but rather, when to "reintroduce" them to the element that they called home for close to nine months.

For most Caregivers, the home bath is probably the best and most convenient place to continue developing the affinity that many Newborn have with water. This can begin once the Newborn is home and the umbilical cord has healed. Often Newborn are bathed in a sink or counter top tub. The bathtub is another option and should be used at every opportunity. Fill it up with warm water, get in with your young Child and let them enjoy the full benefit.

The young Child doesn't even need to go under water at this early stage. Using a secure and gentle hold let them feel the buoyancy and the movement of the water over their skin. These early bath experiences should be free from stress and a lovely way to build rapport with the water. This is a special time for Caregiver and young Child and can allow additional bonding, even for males! Mums may choose to breast feed their Child in the tub to associate the water with a calm and relaxed feeling. Using a flannel and eventually a cup, the young Child can be introduced to the sensation of water on their face. Starting from an early age, lays a great foundation for joining a regular aquatic program later on.

2.5.1 What age for formal lessons?

So, when should 'formal' lessons start?

There are a few different guidelines and opinions; however the recommendation of ASCTA is that Babies can start a formal program at 4 months of age. Some of the reasons for waiting until 4 months are to allow a medical history to develop, allow the Newborn's immune system to strengthen and allow bonding to occur with the primary caregiver. After 4 months, lessons in a gentle and developmentally appropriate program can, and should, be started right away.

Once a lesson program has begun, how long should it go on?

Swimming and water safety lessons are not an event, but rather a long-term process. Attending lessons as a regular part of a Child's weekly routine through their Baby, Toddler, Preschool and early School years is a great plan to ensure proper development of their aquatic skills.

Starting early and continuing long term will allow your Child to fully experience all that the water and the aquatic lesson experience has to offer.

By way of summary:

- (Understanding) It is natural to feel some caution or have uncertainties about when to begin
- (Perspective) Newborn are in a fluid environment for close to 9 months inside their mother. So, we aren't really talking about when to "introduce" a Child to the water, but when to "reintroduce" them to the water
- (Starting in the bath) The family bath is probably the best and most convenient place to begin working with a Newborn – getting in the tub, supported floating, getting comfortable with water on the face. Once lessons have begun, the bath can assist with skills practiced in class
- (Starting Age) 4 months is a generally accepted age for starting a lesson program - allows a medical history to develop, allows the immune system to strengthen, allows bonding to occur.
- After 4 months, lessons in a gentle, developmentally appropriate aquatic program should be started as soon as possible.
- Swimming and water safety lessons for young Children under 6 or 7 years of age should be a consistent, year round activity building toward a lifelong skill of proficient and safe aquatics

2.5.2 More than just swimming lessons

Water familiarisation, learn to swim, water safety and survival lessons, call the lesson what you like, but the major motivating factor for the majority of Caregivers choosing to take their Children to formal aquatic lessons is so the Child learns how to “not drown”

The Swim Australia™ Teacher Course Theory CD ROM provides detailed information about Child drowning rates in Australia and overseas.

The main “at risk” age group is young male Children, 15 to 30 months of age with 9 out of 10 drowning events occurring in backyard swimming pools, with others occurring in and around home water sources such as bath tubs, fish ponds, nappy buckets and dams near houses on farms making up the bulk of the remaining 10%.

2.5.3 A checklist of items for a Teacher of Babies and Toddlers

Please consider the following sections when reviewing your approach to teaching water safety:
Do you provide comprehensive safety information to Caregivers?

- Guidelines for Caregivers about the layers of protection (Kids Alive – Do the Five!, Safer 3, etc. fence the pool, shut the gate, learn how to resuscitate, teach your kids to swim, always supervise, tell someone else when you go swimming, sun safety etc)
- Communicate expectations of behaviour around the swim school environment (unbroken chain of supervision, etc.)
- Does your swim school demonstrate the “best practice” standard of how to act around the water?
- And encourage extending that behaviour to the backyard pool and family time around the water?

2.5.4 Always Supervise

Here are some guidelines about supervision that are very specific and address the issue of “always supervise”:

- “A young Child who can swim needs the same supervision as one who has not had lessons.” (Water Safety New Zealand)
- “The Royal Life Saving Society Australia recommends that all Children be constantly supervised whenever they are in, on or near water. This even includes public swimming pools where lifeguards are on duty.”
- Also from Royal Life Saving Society Australia “Supervision is defined as constant visual contact from within a distance of 3-5 metres. For Children aged less than 4 years, Caregivers should be in the water “within arms reach” of the Child
- Supervision does not include an occasional glance at the Child while reading or snoozing. Neither should supervision lapse in response to a distraction. If a distraction such as another Child or telephone ringing demands attention, the Child should be removed from the water and secured in a safe location where access to the water is restricted until supervision can recommence
- Swimming pool fences, flotation aids or water familiarization lessons are not a substitute for supervision

2.5.5 Tips for Caregivers at home

- Keep a phone nearby when supervising (to use in emergency, not to answer in case it rings)
- Let the phone ring, when supervising (don't be distracted by answering it)
- Inflatable aids are not a substitute for supervision
- Are you CPR trained and do you know what to do in an emergency?

NSW Health Department - Home safety check list (Questions to ask when at home):

- Is your child being supervised?
- Have you emptied the bathtub?
- Is the lid on the nappy bucket?
- Have you made sure that your Child cannot gain access to the pool or spa? (Is the gate self closing mechanism operational?)
- Have you checked for other water dangers such as open drains, garden ponds, creeks or dams?

Consider who is supervising your Children:

- Are they capable of acting in an emergency?
- Are they drinking? Alcohol, even in small quantities affects someone's ability to supervise
- Are they physically capable of affecting a rescue if they inadvertently fall in the water or running after a young Child who suddenly runs off?
- Think about who is being asked to supervise your Children

2.5.6 Swim School Standards

Have you established specific Teaching Standards for your swim school that address safety issues in the following areas?

- Are manageable class sizes maintained? (specific ratios have been previously suggested)
- Are classes grouped or graded according to similar skills? (avoiding beginners being grouped with advanced swimmers)
- Have you established maximum Teacher distances from Children, for example, “within an arms’ length for beginner levels or non swimmers”?
- Do you have an established procedure for entries & exists of your pool? (safest possible, supervised, railing provided)
- Do you use a safety oriented class organisation that:

uses strategies to avoid back turning by the Teacher and keeps the class within view?

minimizes how far the Teacher gets from young Children?

maintains movement and activity?

Are all staff and pool users aware of proper equipment use, placement and storage?

For example, “Are platforms moved into other teaching areas at the end of a class?” Other Teachers may be unaware of this change of location so the risk of impact by their Students is increased.

Staff training should educate Teachers about the safety related Teaching Standards suggested above.

Teachers should include safety related skills in each class, along with familiarization, mobility, swimming skills or stroke development skills for more advanced swimmers.

Teachers should emphasis that water safety skills are not only practiced during “safety weeks” or periodic safety themes but are a regular part of the Child’s water experience in every lesson.

Some of the rescue skills that can be practiced, as ability and development allow might include:

- turn around swims of various types where children practice reorienting back to the wall
- climbing out, if possible
- floatation – back floating, rolling from front to back
- sculling, paddling or treading water

- swimming without goggles for a few minutes each class. Many swimmers who use goggles can become dependent on them and turn into virtual non swimmers if they are without them. The ideal would be that while swimmers may use their goggles for comfort and orientation, they know they can swim without them as well. The best way to achieve this is a little practice each day
- exposure to “rough water” – Water is not always as calm as the pool. As a swimmer’s skill increases, it could be beneficial to expose them to a different scenario in the pool, perhaps by making some waves with kickboards as they swim, or involving it in a game. The intention would be for a subtle experience, not to surprise, frighten the Child, or extend them beyond their abilities. Kept within reason, this could supply valuable experience that would help prepare the swimmer and help delay the onset of panic if they find themselves in more turbulent water than they are used to
- exposure to Cooler water – Just as with the rough water, described above, water is often cooler than in the heated learn to swim pool. A gradual and gentle exposure to cooler water can help prepare the Child for that experience. For locations that have a bigger or cooler pool, this may be as simple as making a supervised exploration into that pool, to try it out
- exposure to Rescue scenarios – What would they do if their friend was in trouble? Ask them. Role play. Many Children’s tendency will be to help their friend and attempt a rescue. While this is admirable in its intention, it will most likely end up in a multiple drowning if they try to swim out to their friend. Correct rescue techniques can be practiced, but it should be encouraged that their primary response be to get help/get an adult/call 000
- the Child being exposed to swimming with their clothes on? Most Children who fall in unexpectedly are not prepared to enter the water. Organise occasional lessons where Children wear clothes and shoes. Less experience learners may commence with just a T-Shirt and progress with experience to long pants, long shirt and shoes over a number of lessons
- the Child simulating a fall, or unexpected entry (closely supervised), into the pool from a variety of places (side of pool, steps, etc.) to prepare them for the unexpected and reduce the chance of panic
- the Child grabbing a stick or pole offered to them in the water. Can they accurately underarm throw something that floats to another Child without falling in?

2.5.7 Communication within the Teaching environment

Swim Schools and Teachers should use consistent agreed terminology and vocabulary when

- speaking
- writing materials and on signs
- on the Internet – email, website, etc,

Language to use:

- a. “Safer”
- b. As safe as possible
- c. Another layer of protection
- d. Refer to the advice from Royal Life in 2.5.4 for suggestions of how to describe supervision
- e. More? Brainstorm with your staff or colleagues

Language **NOT** to use

- a. Safe
- b. Drownproof
- c. Pool safe
- d. Water safe
- e. Complete Water Safety