

AUSTSWIM GUIDELINES INFANT AND PRESCHOOL AQUATICS

Background and Terminology

These guidelines have been developed by AUSTSWIM and are deemed best practice for baby, infant and preschool swimming and water safety education.

Aligned with child development milestones, the content provides guidelines to teachers, parents program managers and facility managers for child focused lessons that take into consideration individual development, need and readiness of each student.

The term 'infant and preschool aquatics' refers to classes where parental and student water safety knowledge and learning is the focus. AUSTSWIM teachers of infant and preschool aquatics are responsible for students within these classes. AUSTSWIM teachers are not qualified or responsible for general supervision of an aquatic environment.

Note: The generic term 'parent' is used throughout this document. This reflects the person responsible for the child and may include, but is not limited to, guardian, carer, grandparent etc.

AUSTSWIM Infant and Preschool Aquatics Charter

AUSTSWIM infant and preschool aquatics guidelines provide best practice for:

1. Aquatic industry accreditation
2. Public and private venues, including hotel/motel, apartments, body corporate, schools, resorts and holiday parks delivering programs to meet the diverse needs of communities
3. Community members visiting pools
4. Scope of the AUSTSWIM Teacher of Infant and Preschool Aquatics in program delivery.

Infant and Preschool Aquatics Focus

Infant and preschool aquatics swimming and water safety programs introduce parents and children to water. These programs must educate parents in quality supervision of children when in, on and around water. Water familiarisation and safety are core learning outcomes for this age group.

Force is never a feature in any aquatic learning environment. Parents and teachers must allow for students to learn and develop at their own rate.

It cannot be stressed strongly enough that at no time does a baby, infant or preschooler's confidence or ability in water eliminate the need for constant supervision by an adult when in, on or around water.

Details relating to parent supervision can be found at
<http://lsv.com.au/pool-safety-services/watch-around-water/>

1. ACCREDITATION AND LICENSING

Training

The Department of Education and Training is responsible for national policies and programs that help Australians access quality Vocational Education and Training (VET).

The AUSTSWIM Teacher of Infant and Preschool Aquatics skill set includes nationally recognised units of competency from the SIS10 Sport, Fitness and Recreation Training Package that is the national framework for skills development for the industry.

Current units of competency for the Infant and Preschool Aquatics skill set may be found at <http://www.austswim.com.au/Training/AUSTSWIMCourses/TeacherofInfantandPreschoolAquatics.aspx>

The VET skill set includes basic competencies for the Infant and Preschool Aquatics course. AUSTSWIM Infant and Preschool Aquatics Licence requirements are, however, over and above the aforementioned skill set. These additional AUSTSWIM requirements are documented on the AUSTSWIM website at

<http://www.austswim.com.au/Training/AUSTSWIMCourses/TeacherofInfantandPreschoolAquatics.aspx>

Scope of Accreditation

Successful completion of the AUSTSWIM Teacher of Infant and Preschool Aquatics course incorporates extended learning elements aligned with ISO 17024 accreditation and AUSTSWIM standards. Teachers who hold this accreditation are licensed and insured to teach students from 6 months to 4 years of age.

AUSTSWIM encourages teachers to enhance their knowledge, skill and understanding through attendance at annual conferences, internal and external workshops, enrolling in further formal training programs and peer networking and learning opportunities. Ongoing professional development is a requirement when renewing the AUSTSWIM Licence.

2. PUBLIC AND PRIVATE VENUES

It is the responsibility of the employer to provide employees/contractors with practices which include a thorough workplace induction, details and protocols for Emergency Management and Risk Assessment. Employees/contractors must be aware of relevant manufacturer warranties and Australian Standards relating to the use and operation of equipment, hoists, other accessories and program equipment as listed in these Guidelines.

At the venue the student may require special consideration to be given to:

- staff ratios ensuring safe and effective class sessions
- equipment and aids that are in good working order
- water and air temperature that comply with Guidelines for Safe Pool Operations (GSPO)
- water depth that is suitable for the specific activity
- adherence to the Disability Discrimination (DDA), Privacy and Racial and Vilification Acts.

The AUSTSWIM teacher should operate within their level of comfort and training in addition to maintaining a duty of care towards students at all times.

Supervision

The AUSTSWIM teacher is responsible and owes a duty of care to students in the class, not other users at the facility.

The AUSTSWIM teacher may be considered the sole pool supervisor where class students are the ONLY students in the pool. Employers, however, must ensure the AUSTSWIM teacher is competent in:

- facility function
- emergency management
- current water rescue competency*
- current resuscitation and first aid qualifications.

** Perform Basic Water Rescues unit of competency that must be assessed on an annual basis by the employer or Certification for Pool / Surf Lifeguard, Bronze Medallion*

Emergency / Evacuation

After securing the safety of students in the class, the teacher may be required to assist in any emergency action or processes as and when they arise under the direction of a responsible person, example, facility duty manager, chief or area warden.

It is an employer's responsibility to assess and ensure employees and contractors ongoing competency of all emergency management and current water rescue, resuscitation and, in the case of a sole operator, a mandatory first aid qualification.

Size and Ratios

| Age Common Term | Maximum Ratio / Water Safety Supervision Requirement | Learning Indicator |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|
| Birth to 6 months Baby | With parent at home | Sensory exploration |
| 6 months to 1 year Infant | 1 - Teacher of Infant and Preschool Aquatics to 8 - children accompanied by a parent | Parent education, water familiarisation and initial independence |
| 1 – 3 years Toddler | 1 - Teacher of Infant and Preschool Aquatics to 8 - children accompanied by a parent | Parent education, water familiarisation and initial independence |
| 3 – 4 years Preschool | 1 - Teacher of Infant and Preschool Aquatics to 5 - children OR 8 - children accompanied by a parent | Water familiarisation, confidence and basic skill development. Parent education In the case where parents are accompanying children in the water. |

Parent Participation

Aquatic programs must include the education of parents, whether they are in or out of the water, to ensure they understand the rationale for the program and their supervisory responsibilities.

In infant and toddler classes, parents join children in lessons to support learning, comfort and enjoyment. This does not cease once a child reaches the age of 3. Where possible, parents are encouraged to accompany and support positive learning up to the age of 4.

Parents often have various beliefs and expectations about aquatic programs, their children's capabilities and the definition and importance of appropriate supervision. It is imperative that formal and informal education of parents is an integral, ongoing part of the program, and that this is clearly communicated at both teacher and venue levels.

The student - teacher, parent - child ratios have been designed to:

- facilitate and compliment the learning environment
- enable teachers to maintain vigilant supervision of the full class at all times
- provide individual feedback
- enhance parent water safety education and familiarisation.

Water Quality

Facilities must be maintained in accordance with standards, legislation and guidelines specified by state, local authorities and industry regarding safety, water purity and sanitary conditions.

- Water purification standards for public swimming pools and spa pools are available from state/territory health authorities.
- Industry best practice GSPO detail facility operation standards.
- The person(s) responsible for monitoring water quality must be suitably qualified and comply with legislation requirements.
- Teachers should be aware of pool water quality and report any concerns to the appropriate personnel.

Outdoor Venues

Swimming and water safety programs can be conducted in outdoor pools. Employers and teachers must consider weather conditions and water temperature as these may necessitate an adjustment to class structure and duration. Lessons should not exceed 30 minutes duration and students must be kept active in the water and not left sitting or standing on the edge of the pool, as the cooler air temperature may cause rapid loss of body heat or sun rays may have a burning effect. The learning of swimming and water safety must never take precedence over the child's comfort and welfare.

Air and Water Temperature

For optimal learning, the water temperature must be a minimum of 30°C and the air temperature similar to the water temperature (that is, not significantly warmer or colder). This provides an environment that is comfortable, enjoyable and optimal for learning. As previously stated, whether indoor or outdoor lessons should not exceed 30 minutes duration and students must be kept active in the water and not left sitting on the edge.

Some students become cold very quickly, even when the air temperature appears to be warm. Teachers must monitor closely and adapt practices to ensure minimal time out of the water.

Infants and preschoolers who display signs of loss of body heat or heat exhaustion should be removed immediately from the water, dried and clothed. The wellbeing of the student is paramount.

In circumstances where air and water temperature cannot be maintained at optimum levels, lessons must be cancelled or appropriate alternative learning options provided.

Information Disclosure and Privacy Act

Medical and other pertinent information that may impact on participation and learning should be disclosed. Parents/carers and adult students have a right to choose whether or not to disclose information. Every effort must be taken to encourage disclosure of information pertinent to or impacting on students taking part in swimming and water safety education programs.

Disclosed information is subject to legislation within the federal Privacy Act and as such is subject to protection controls as it is disseminated to regular and replacement teachers.

3. SCOPE OF THE INFANT AND PRESCHOOL AQUATICS TEACHER IN PROGRAM DELIVERY

Role and Responsibility

The AUSTSWIM teacher must:

- arrive at the class with sufficient time to ensure set up of equipment
- implement the 'observe, analyse, modify and if necessary adapt' teaching strategy for all parents and students
- ensure appropriate positioning to enable full scanning of the roped off designated class area at all times
- include teaching procedures, methods and techniques that are age appropriate, non-traumatic and respectful of the rights of the child.
- take into account the readiness of each child to participate or attempt a particular activity or skill
- be strongly reminded that at no time must force be used
- teach the parent to teach the child.

Participation

The focus of a program must be water familiarisation, water safety, personal survival and parent education. Skill development will occur over time with appropriate programming and positive guidance.

- It is essential that the curriculum enables children to develop water familiarisation and confidence as critical foundations for learning knowledge, skill and understanding in an aquatic environment.
- The curriculum incorporates parent-learning outcomes that include supervision, water safety and personal survival.
- It is important that parents understand that enrolling their child into a swimming and water safety program does not relieve them of their responsibility to supervise young children in and around aquatic environments.

Aquatic Education

Terms such as 'drown proofing', 'waterproofing' or 'water safe' should never be used, as they suggest some sort of guarantee of safety in, on or around water. Parents must supervise their infants carefully at all times when they are in or near water.

Parents must assume responsibility for the supervision and learning of their infants. Teachers must support parents by communicating safety rules, goals, techniques and expectations of infant aquatic education.

Teacher Monitoring

- Teachers closely monitor a child's response, model respectful management and assist parents to provide appropriate physical and psychological support of their children.
- Parent support and hold techniques are monitored to ensure that unrealistic expectations are not placed on the child.

Education focus is also directed to parent. Teachers take on the role of facilitator, which involves:

- developing rapport with parents
- informing parents of the program philosophy and aims
- guiding parent best practices
- introducing equipment, songs and activities
- providing education on the risks associated with aquatic environments.

Parental Guidance

Ongoing parental education and guidance helps provide parents with a greater understanding of their child's achievements and readiness to participate at varying levels. Attempts and participation should be valued by providing encouragement and must be free of force, punishment or threat.

Children must be treated as individuals and be permitted to progress at their own rate. Children need reassurance, encouragement and acceptance of their differences. This will provide them with a sense of trust in the adults who care for them and in the environment, so they can develop initiative, autonomy, self-confidence and high self-esteem.

It is essential that teachers and parents understand and appreciate the differing physical, social, emotional and cognitive development of each child, and can assess the child's readiness to participate in, or attempt, a particular skill.

Swimming with Water Safety

- Water safety knowledge, skill and understanding must be emphasised and practised in every activity of every lesson.
- Ongoing parent education by teachers will assist parents to understand the inability of young children to take responsibility for their own actions and safety in an aquatic environment. Teachers must consider water safety at all times when programming and conducting the lesson. They must take every opportunity to emphasise safety and ensure vigilant supervision throughout the lesson.
- Program personnel must establish clear rules, routines and practices to incorporate the development of water safety awareness in all lessons. Routines and practices such as
 - waiting for an adult before entering the water
 - turning upon submersion
 - grasping the pool side and
 - floating will assist parents to understand their child's limitations and will assist children to begin developing cognitive understanding of the rules, dangers and skills necessary for safer participation and personal survival.

Student Health and Wellness

Parents must ensure children are in good health to participate in swimming and water safety lessons. Disclosure of information pertinent to learning and participation in lessons is encouraged.

Teachers monitor children on a regular basis to gauge their general wellbeing; optimum learning requires children who are in good health. Reduce the risk of cross infection from unwell children not participating in classes.

Appropriate programs include movement exploration and development, games, water safety practices and parent involvement in various land and water activities.

Safe Water Practice

Rules of behaviour for activity in, on or near water must be taught as an integral element of the swimming and water safety program.

Children develop and begin to gain an understanding of their environment, however, they still do not have the capacity to understand a dangerous situation.

Teachers and parents provide guidance and direction on what is appropriate and safe behaviour. Children must never be considered water safe; they must always be supervised in, on and around water.

Student Readiness

Readiness refers to willingness and preparedness rather than a child's age. Learning activities must be child centered where physical, social, emotional and cognitive development are considered, respected and closely monitored.

Readiness for participation and progress varies depending on a range of internal and external influences. These may include:

- temperament
- prior experience
- sense of trust
- past and current family situation
- parent styles
- environment.

Program Equipment

Note: Parents need to recognise that flotation aids are not lifesaving devices or a substitute for adult supervision, and should be used only under competent adult supervision. Parents purchasing flotation aids must ensure these are acceptable under the Australian Standard AS 1900-2002 'Flotation Aids' swimming and water safety.

Equipment must be age appropriate and safe. Students must understand their own natural abilities and not become reliant on flotation aids.

Equipment and teaching aids may improve the quality of swimming and water safety programs by providing distraction, motivation and a sense of independence. Teachers must select equipment and teaching aids that are clean, in good condition and suit the interests and capabilities of students.

Flotation aids may assist with gaining confidence, independence and skill. Activity undertaken with flotation aids must also be attempted without the use of aids enabling students to understand how their body moves, reacts and responds in water.

Clothing and Swimwear

All students must ensure that they are protected against the sun's harmful rays in outdoor venues. Teachers and parents must wear appropriate swimwear and may choose to wear a rash vest for infants to grasp.

Infants who are not toilet trained must wear appropriate swimwear that is firm fitting around the legs and waist in case of toileting accidents.

Parents may be advised of appropriate clothing for children and the availability of commercially available products.

Parents must be advised of management policies and procedures for unexpected bowel movements. In advising of appropriate swimwear, consideration must be given to cultural diversity and inclusion.

Reflecting Human Development

Infant and preschool aquatic programs must reflect characteristics that replicate key child developmental stages. These characteristics determine readiness to engage in, and learn from, participation in swimming and water safety programs.

The physical, social, emotional and cognitive development milestones of each key stage provide a guide to appropriate teaching methods.

The age categories form a useful basis for planning, grouping and program implementation.

Baby - Birth to 6 Months

Extensive research, medical and industry consultation has resulted in AUSTSWIM **not** recommending formal swimming and water safety programs for infants under 6 months of age.

During this period, parents should be given advice on using the family bath to introduce infants to appropriate aquatic experiences at home to prepare them for formal learning at 6 months.

In introducing infants less than six months of age to public swimming pools, care must be taken to ensure the health needs of infants are adequately catered for through a consideration of:

- water hygiene
- water and air temperature
- baby handling techniques.

Infant - 6 Months to 1 Year

Infants participating in aquatic activity programs in a communal pool must be at least 6 months old.

Infants with minimum head control should be properly supported to prevent them from swallowing an excessive amount of water. Water intoxication could pose a potential health risk to the infant. Submersion of infants should be avoided (or, if unavoidable, minimised).

Parents must be taught to observe, analyse, modify and review their hold and support technique to ensure they are conscious of the amount of water an infant has ingested.

Should an infant's stomach appear distended (bloated) they should be removed from the water immediately.

Parent-child and teacher-child ratios

For this age group, ratios of one child per parent, with a maximum of eight parent-child pairs to one teacher, are recommended.

Parents with more than one infant will need another adult to assist them in the water (or on pool deck for back to back sibling classes). These ratios enable teachers to monitor and guide parents in their supports, holds and techniques.

Ratios may need to be reduced depending on the location, shape and size of the teaching area.

Toddler - 1 to 3 Years

Students in this age group are becoming capable of learning basic aquatic techniques. Emphasis should be placed upon parental understanding of readiness and progress variations. Ideally, programs should be centered on physical, social, emotional and cognitive development with water safety education based on play, games and activities.

Aquatic programs for infants under the age of 24 months should be promoted as water familiarisation (getting to know and experience life in the water).

Active Participation and Frequency of Practice

In this age group there must be an increase in active participation and frequency of practise. Understanding, independent thinking, problem-solving skills, age-related behavioural expectations and the retention of motor skills are dependent upon reinforcement and repetition throughout the lessons. These opportunities should be enjoyable and free of force, punishment or threat.

Toward Independence

Initially, toddlers require in-water participation of a parent. As independence emerges, particularly from around 3 years of age, some toddlers may be ready to progress to a group without in-water participation of parents.

This will depend upon the toddler's social and emotional development, previous experience and aquatic readiness, and the availability of an appropriate pool space or platform where the toddler can stand independently.

Keys to readiness may include:

- independent recovery to a safe and stable stand position
- listening and responding to teacher instructions
- spending time taking instruction directly from the teacher rather than the parent
- independent collection and use of equipment and teaching aids.

Parental involvement is still, however, recommended and encouraged. Teachers and parents must provide children with the time and opportunity to transition from parent and child classes to predominantly teacher-led classes. The length of the transitional phase will be highly dependent on the readiness of the individual and may take up to six months.

Transitioning and transitioned class ratios are a maximum of one teacher to five students. This allows for appropriate supervision and competent instruction for a smooth transition toward preschool lessons.

Activity

Programs that include movement exploration, adjustment to water, fun, games and parent – toddler involvement are appropriate for this age group.

Development of specific skills in swimming and water safety must not take precedence over the child's general well-being; rather, they should be seen in relation to overall development. Teachers must provide opportunities for children in physical, social, emotional and cognitive development through a variety of teaching methodologies. Long periods of sitting, waiting and listening can cause frustration in this age group, which is likely to result in disruptive behaviours.

Preschool - 3 to 4 Years

Preschool children at this stage may participate in swimming and water safety programs independently of their parents.

A low student–teacher ratio of one teacher to five children allows for better supervision and time to cater for the needs of the individual student in a group setting.

Knowledge, skill and understanding develop together with water safety education, based on educational games and activities.

It is important that parents understand that the philosophy of the program for this age group is a combination of building water confidence and aquatic skill development.

Activity

Students must be kept as active as possible, while the teacher continues to ensure that vigilant supervision is provided.

AUSTSWIM recommends the utilisation of group teaching patterns and circuits to maximise activity, practise and learning within safe boundaries.

Conclusion

Successful teaching of infant and preschool aquatics programs is dependent on the knowledge, skill and understanding of early childhood development and philosophy of aquatics for this age group.

The key to learning is the establishment of a positive environment that promotes aquatic safety and enjoyment. Emphasis should be placed on a happy, non-threatening, secure atmosphere that will provide the infant and preschoolers' motor, cognitive and personal development.