

## Learn-To-Swim Frequently Asked Questions

### **Q: How would you describe McCollum Park Pool Learn to Swim Program?**

**A:** Safety, Fun and Learning. We make the class safe, positive and fun, because people must enjoy coming here to learn and return. The best way to accomplish these objectives is by making games out of the skills. Our hope is for students to enjoy the water as they learn key skills in a safe environment.

Our highly trained instructors maintain effective class organization and conduct classes in a safe environment. Low student to instructor ratios, age and skill appropriate levels, depth and temperature of the water and space are examples of how this program excels.

Swimming should be fun. We want the students to continue coming to us until they have reached a proficient level of swimming. Making lessons enjoyable also makes it easier for the students to learn- especially the pre-schoolers!

Our third objective, learning, is our end goal and cannot be achieved without safety and fun. Key elements of learning include the following eight categories:

- Appropriate review of skills
- Skill practice and method appropriate to students ability and completion requirements
- Balanced group and individual practice time
- Effective lesson planning
- Individual attention to students
- Positive and effective feedback
- Effective demonstrations
- Variety and creativity within the lesson and skills being taught

### **Q: What is the best age to begin enrolling my child in swimming lessons?**

**A:** Generally, children at four years of age are ready to enroll in swimming lessons appropriate to their comfort and skill level. For some preschoolers, especially those who have not had water experiences or who show fear, having parents with them may be helpful for the first several lessons. For these children, consider enrolling in our Aqua Tots program. Many preschool children are independent enough to participate in swimming classes without a parent. These children should be placed in the appropriate "Learn-To-Swim" level with children of similar age and abilities.

### **Q: What causes fear of the water?**

**A:** Some of the more common causes of early fear of the water have to do with the way parent or caretakers related to their children in and around the water. These causes include:

- Being raised by parent or caretakers who are afraid of the water and have either knowingly or unknowing communicated this fear to their children
- Being raised in an environment that prevents childhood water play, whether as a result of lack of opportunity or parental actions
- Being forced into water activities beyond the ability or comfort level
- Being carelessly handled in water experiences
- Being involved in or witnessing a traumatic water accident
- Having a fear of the unknown or a general fear of new experiences

**Q: What helps prevent fear of the water?**

**A:** No matter how cautious you are, fear cannot always be prevented. You can help reduce fear in the following ways:

- Provide enjoyable, non-threatening, water activities that are simple and fun, to build confidence and success
- Arrange for regular contact with a water environment for your child
- Select safe water environments and supervise all water play
- Treat water mishaps sympathetically, but do not alarm your child
- Be aware of your facial expressions and choice of words so that you do not signal panic or fear
- **Try using goggles.** This may help children explore under water
- Teach your child “respect” for the water and water rules without implied threats or fear
- Lead by example. Follow rules and enjoy the water with your child. Get your face wet and perform some of the simple and fun activities in the program

**Q: What if my child already has a fear of the water?**

**A:** Respect your child’s feelings. Teasing or getting angry only makes matters worse. Progress slowly by following these guidelines:

- Provide plenty of time for your child to adjust to the new setting
- Concentrate on activities your child is comfortable and ready to attempt
- Expose your child to other children who are having fun
- Enjoy the water yourself with your child

**Q: How many lessons is it going to take for my child to “swim”?**

**A:** Children vary widely when it comes to learning a skill. In general, each child’s readiness is influenced by physical development, previous experiences, home environment, parental attitudes and individual preferences. For most skills, there are simple prerequisites, activities and lead-ups that can prepare the child to perform those skills. For example, before children are ready to put their entire face in the water, they may need to practice blowing bubbles, washing the face, splashing and putting parts of the face in the water. It may take 30 – 80 lessons before a child can swim independently. However, to make sure your child does learn to swim well, be sure that he or she completes all of the learn-to-swim levels.

**Q: What if my child cannot keep up with the class?**

**A:** The progress of your child is not compared to any other child. Because children have different experiences and backgrounds as well as different learning styles, they acquire skills at different times. The instructor can adapt and adjust the level of difficulty to the individual child. That way, your child will feel a part of the group and will practice at his or her level. If you believe that your child needs to be in a different level class, consult with the instructor or the facility program coordinator.

**Q: What can I do to help?**

**A:** You will be taking the first step by enrolling your child in swim lessons. You need to have your child attend class on a regular basis, work together with the instructor and take time for other practice and water play opportunities outside the program. Also, throughout the session of swim lessons, take the time each day to read the Learn-to-Swim booklet with your child and practice the activities suggested. Doing this will help extend the lesson experience beyond the water and encourage discussions about safe practices in and around the water. In addition, consider participating with your child during swim lessons on Parent Participation Day. This is a way to learn up-close the skills your child is developing and ways to assist them outside of class time.

**Q: How many levels should my child complete?**

**A:** Your child should complete all of the Learn-to-Swim levels to develop full swimming competency. A child who has only completed level 3 or 4 may have acquired just the basic skills for swimming. It may take several seasons for a child to successfully complete all levels. If he or she swims only during the summer months, skills will be diminished. Regular practice is necessary to retain skills and progress to the next level.

**Q: Will my child become “drown proof” after participating in the Learn-to Swim Program?**

**A:** Participation in any swimming lesson program does not “drown proof” your child. It is only the first step in developing your child’s water safety and swimming skills. Year-round practice, regular exposure to water and positive encouragement are the tools needed for developing your child’s comfort level in water and improving his or her swimming skills.

**Q: Does Early Aquatic Experience lead to superior child development?**

**A:** Child development literature does provide some possible guidance. It has been demonstrated that early enrichment experiences resulted in few profound effects on normal children. Early water experiences had very specific enhancement effects only on swimming skill. Other early child development researchers have demonstrated the ability to enhance development for children from deprived environments.

**Q: Can and should young children learn advanced strokes?**

**A:** When young children are observed swimming or moving in the water, they are not swimming at the same developmental level as persons using advanced formal strokes. Instead, they are demonstrating a basic aquatic loco motor pattern that is prerequisite to later advanced formal strokes. These children should be learning the basic aquatics skills and strokes before being introduced to advanced formal strokes.

**Q: Are certain methods of teaching swimming to young children superior to other methods?**

**A:** Operant conditioning techniques [one type of associative learning in which there is a contingency between the response and the presentation of the reinforcer] may be effective for teaching specific simple tasks or ordered performances, but there is little published evidence to indicate its superiority over other methods of aquatic instruction. Overall, operant conditioning is less desirable than student-centered learning when the child is capable of actively participating in the learning experience. There is little evidence to support the superiority of any particular teaching technique over another, especially when used with infants and young children. The Instructors in the McCollum Park Pool Learn-to-Swim program are highly skilled and trained individuals who are able to assess and implement the learning style and technique which best fits the needs of each individual student.

**Q: Do children automatically learn to swim simply by playing in the water?**

**A:** The most efficient and rapid learning can occur under the guidance of a trained swimming instructor. The instructors in the McCollum Pool Learn-to-Swim program are properly prepared instructors and play leaders who are able to (a) encourage youngsters to improve at their own developmentally appropriate rates of learning, (b) supply appropriate feedback and practice situations, and (c) provide necessary challenges to children.

**Q: Are young children put at increased risk of disease, injury, or other harmful health conditions when place in the water?**

**A:** When the water is well maintained and other participants in the program are in good health the risk to a child’s health is minimal. Children in group situations whether in child care or in extended families, might contract viral and bacterial diseases. However, there is nothing inherent in the aquatic environment that makes it either more or less healthy than other environments for infants and young children.

**Q: Does swimming-pool water act as a “culture” for bacteria and other harmful parasites that cannot be killed by the chlorine?**

**A:** Carefully maintained swimming pools are no more (and likely less) prone to spreading disease than any other environment. The McCollum Park pool is maintained by highly skilled staff and technologically advanced equipment which effectively prevents the spread of disease through the water. However, physical contact in the water and pool environment can transmit disease just as it does in daycare and family settings.

**Q: Is forced submersion a cause of hyponatremia [water intoxication] and psychological traumas to young infants?**

**A:** A child may swallow various quantities of water whether submerged or not. The submerged child may swallow water whether the submersion is initiated by themselves or forcefully. A child may be scared by the water environment whether submerged or not and whether forced or not. Because the terms force and submersion have been used together, they have become powerfully associated. Force is a relative term. Anyone who submerges a child underwater is “forcing” the child under in the sense of overcoming the body’s natural tendency to float, but this can be done gently and lovingly. Even a child’s crying is not always a good index for evaluating the situation. Some children cry as a manipulation technique, and others cry from fatigue, or the unexpected. Some terrified children might not even whimper! The McCollum Park Pool Learn-to-Swim program creates an environment of caring, play, and fun. It certainly does not involve force, except in extreme cases where a child’s immediate health or safety is at risk. Submersion itself may or may not be part of the fun, depending upon

the parent, the child, and the situation. Submersions should have educational value, be controlled and limited to when the student is ready.

**Q: Does swimming increase middle-ear infections in young children?**

**A:** Existing medical studies of young children being in swimming pools supports allowing young children to swim. It is doubtful that swimming causes or even contributes to middle-ear infections, and it is equally doubtful that water exposure during an infection aggravates the condition.

**General Community Water Safety Questions**

**Q: What type of rescue equipment do I need for my home pool?**

**A:** It is recommended that at a minimum you have the following equipment available in a prominent and accessible location(s):

- Reaching equipment such as a reaching pole
- Throwing equipment, such as a ring buoy with a line attached
- Extra lifejackets
- A well-stocked first aid kit
- A telephone or mobile phone with emergency numbers posted near the phone.

**Q: Why is it not recommended that “water wings,” swim rings or other inflatable flotation devices be used as a personal flotation device?**

**A:** Inflatables, such as water wings, swim rings and other flotation devices, are not designed to be used as substitutes for U.S. Coast Guard approved life jackets or life vests or adult supervision. Swimmers may go beyond their ability and fall off the inflatable, which may lead to a drowning situation. Inflatable materials deteriorated in sun and rough pool surfaces, leading to deflation and leaks.

**Q: My child has been invited to a pool party. What can I do to ensure his or her safety?**

**A:** Make sure to ask the following questions before you allow your child to attend the party:

- What type of supervision will be provided?
- Are the individuals who are responsible for supervising swimmers trained in CPR, first aid and water rescue techniques”?
- What type of safety rules do you have at your pool? (Be sure to review these rules with your child before the day of the party)
- Can I accompany my child to the party?

**Q: What is the minimum water depth required to perform headfirst dives?**

**A:** Diving should only be attempted in an area clearly marked for diving. Water should be a minimum of 9 feet deep with no obstructions for dives from the deck. Diving from a diving board should only occur if there is a safe diving envelope [the area of water in front of, below and to the sides of a diving board] that is deep enough so that a diver will not strike the bottom, regardless of the depth of the water or the design of the pool.