

# Parent Swimming Advice

 International  
**Learn  
to Swim  
Week**

**IIFSTA**   
International Federation of Swimming Teachers' Associations

  
**sta**  
Health Leisure Life

# Introduction

Welcome to STA's Parent help pack – this guide will include useful hints, tips and advice when your child is learning to swim.

The Swimming Teachers' Association (STA) is an independent swimming teaching and lifesaving organisation and delivers the highest quality training across four key business areas – Swimming Teaching, Lifesaving, First Aid and Leisure Management. Founded in 1932, STA is a registered charity whose objective is: **The preservation of human life by the teaching of swimming, lifesaving and survival techniques.**

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## Why is it Important for Your Child to Learn to Swim?

Swimming is a life skill and one that everyone should possess, especially as the world's surface is covered by 71% of water (NGWA National Ground Water Association). Would your child know what to do if they ever faced a dangerous situation in water?

Providing the right opportunity and support for your child to Learn to Swim is very important; being able to swim is an essential life skill just like reading and writing.

Plus its fun, and opens up a world of new opportunities for young learners. Learning how to swim means your child can enjoy playing as a family and with friends on holiday, and participate in other fun aquatic activities like water polo, snorkelling, sailing and much more!



## Why is Swimming from a young age important?

Our children are our most precious gifts and as parents we want to make sure that they are always happy, healthy and safe; making sure they are confident and safe in and around the water is an important part of this.

Getting young children into aquatic activities from an early age and helping them develop this lifelong activity has always been, and continues to be, a key priority for STA.

First and foremost: it is fun! Going swimming does not have to mean rigorously practising strokes length after length. It's about enjoying the water as a family – it's the one activity you can all join in and have fun together.

Playing with your baby in water also helps them to feel safe and secure and it helps to boost their confidence. This is thanks to the skin-to-skin contact, regular eye contact and big smiles.

Teaching babies in water relies very heavily on this empathy and awareness on the part of the parent. A calm, relaxed approach achieves far better results than an anxious, fearful one – young babies have no concept of fear, they accept every new experience they are introduced to by smiling or crying, relying on the empathy of their parents to guide them the maze of discovery.

Joining a baby swimming class can also help with this. It is important, however, that children are taught by trained instructors that use a recognised baby swimming programme. Programmes such as STA's STARFISH learn to swim programme for 0-2 years olds have been developed specifically for babies and will ensure that your youngster will reap positive experiences in the water. They are structured to help them to develop physically, emotionally, intellectually and socially, while equipping them with key safety and safe holds skills in the water.

Swimming also keeps your baby active, fit and healthy - research as also shown that swimming can have a positive impact on baby's sleeping and eating patterns.

Most importantly, you are teaching your child to be water safety aware, and giving them a key life skill that could one day save their life.

## Movement Skills

When a child goes swimming they are equipped with a set of skills which are developed from birth. These skills will aid your child's swimming development and movement in the water by forming the basis of swimming strokes.

The movement skills that aid the development of swimming strokes are:

Walking

Running

Jumping

Kicking

Balancing

Throwing

Catching

Rolling

Hopping

Skipping

Leaping

Galloping

# Baby Swimming

## Getting Started

Having a splash around with your baby in the bath is the best way to get your little one used to the water and to build confidence.

Water is a natural environment for a newborn, and nurturing this natural affinity to water with fun bath time activities will make the transition to the swimming pool much easier when the time comes.

## Games and activities to try at bath time:

- Support baby and make eye contact to ensure baby feels secure, encourage baby to splash their hands and kick their legs.
- Introducing toys will make bath time fun; sponge toys and watering cans can be used to get baby used to having water sprinkled over their body. This is also a great way to build confidence and to help your child get used to the touch, feel and sensation of water running over the body. This can be built up gradually initially starting on their shoulder and back to ease them into it, gradually increasing it to the head and face, providing the child shows no signs of distress and the child is leading the play session.
- Singing songs or rhymes is a great way to engage and relax baby.
- Blowing bubbles in the water is also a good way for helping older babies / infants have confidence in getting their face wet in the water.



## What to consider when looking for a pool

Many parents may be nervous about taking their baby swimming for the first time; at what age can they start? What should a parent take? What do they need to wear? What activities should they do? These are questions parents often come across.



*Many parents may be nervous about taking their baby swimming for the first time and will have lots of questions. Here are a few to ensure your chosen pool is suitable for you and your baby:*

### **What should the water temperature be?**

The water and air temperature will need to be higher for babies than for general swimming - at least 30°C (or 32°C for babies 3 months or younger) with air temperature being 1°C above the temperature of the water.

### **What depth should the water be?**

It is important that the water is shallow enough that you are able to stand comfortably to support your baby effectively.

## **Are baby changing facilities available?**

Make sure there are suitable changing rooms for both you and your baby. You will also need somewhere safe to place baby while you get changed.

*If you are looking for Swimming lessons, there are some additional questions to be asked:*

## **Is the teacher appropriately qualified?**

Check that your teacher holds the STA Level 2 Award in Aquatic Teaching - Baby and Pre-School or equivalent.

## **Is the teacher appropriately insured?**

Don't be afraid to ask your teacher for details.

## **Does the teacher come recommended by local parents?**

Often personal recommendation is the best way to find a good teacher.



So, you're ready to enter the pool...

Your first swim together – what should be in their swimming bag?

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## Top Tips: What Should be in Your Baby's Swim Bag

1. Swimming costume / shorts, swim nappy and neoprene nappy cover
2. Suitable footwear for poolside and changing areas
3. Three towels: 1 for poolside and 1 for changing area and 1 for the adult
4. Shampoo, shower gel, hairbrush and any other additional toiletries required
5. Extra set of clothing
6. Healthy drink and snack.



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## Getting into the pool

Ask a friend or partner to hold your baby whilst you get into the water, alternatively take a towel to place on poolside. Lie your baby on the towel whilst you climb in. Your baby can then be lifted into the water when you are ready. Activities to play in the pool can be found in our **Baby game resource below**.

## Baby Swimming Games

### Baby & Spoon Race

A little race can be set up by adults holding their babies in the basic safety hold or if the baby can sit independently then the seat hold may be used. Ensure the water comes up to the babies' shoulders to aid support. Parents can then set off at steady walking pace across the pool, talking to their baby whilst moving across the pool.

### Humpty Dumpty (encouraging your baby to enter the pool)

Engage with your baby on the poolside edge / play raft to the rhythm of Humpty Dumpty. When it comes to the 'had a great fall', encourage your baby to enter the water by their own will. Parents can support and encourage this process. This process needs to be baby led, if a baby shows any sign of distress or unwillingness, the action can be adapted to make big splashes in the water with hands / feet.

### If you're happy and you know it....

If you're happy and you know it, make a splash (splash splash)  
If you're happy and you know it, make a splash (splash splash)  
If you're happy and you know it, then your face will surely show it  
If you're happy and you know it, make a splash. (splash splash)

If you're happy and you know it, kick your legs (kick kick)  
If you're happy and you know it, kick your legs (kick kick)  
If you're happy and you know it, then your face will surely show it  
If you're happy and you know it, kick your legs. (kick kick)

If you're happy and you know it, shout "Hurray!" (hoo-ray!)  
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If you're happy and you know it, shout "Hurray!" (hoo-ray!)

## Incy Wincy Spider

Sing the Incy Wincy Spider rhyme. On the line 'down came the raindrops and washed the spider out', parents could use a watering can to act as the raindrops falling on the baby or baby's body. Alternatively, if you do not have a watering can, parents can scoop the water with their hands and let the water droplets drip from their fingers.

'Incy Wincy spider went up the water spout  
Down came the rain  
And washed the spider out  
Out came the sun and dried up all the rain  
And the Incy wincy spider went up the spout again  
The teeny tiny spider went up the water spout  
Down came the rain  
And washed the spider out  
Out came the sun and dried up all the rain  
And the teeny tiny spider went up the spout again  
The big humongous spider went up the water spout  
Down came the rain  
And washed the spider out  
Out came the sun and dried up all the rain  
And the big humongous spider went up the spout again  
Incy wincy spider went up the water spout  
Down came the rain  
And washed the spider out  
Out came the sun and dried up all the rain  
And the Incy Wincy spider went up the spout again' x2



# Expert Advice from STA

## When you are in the water

Swimming is a brilliant way to bond with your baby. You have skin to skin contact, focus on just you and your baby by singing songs, playing and interacting with your baby in a relaxed environment.

You don't need armbands, floats or a baby seat as these do not fully support your baby and can restrict the movements - holding them and supporting them as they explore the water is preferred.

Make sure your baby's body is in the water at all times; holding them out of the water will cause them to get cold.

You can hold them in the Cradle Hold. This is where you cradle the baby in your arms so they can see your face and the water is level with their chest, but their head is well above the water. In this hold you can sing as you gently rock your baby to and from. Rock a bye baby, row row row your boat work well in this hold.



Another hold for older babies is the Safety Hold; your baby is facing away from you, and you bring an arm around their chest and under their arm so that your baby's chest is supported on your forearm. The other hand can support your baby under your baby's bottom. This is good for babies to chase toys or gain confidence by splashing hands, you doing little bounces with them, whilst facing them.

And finally, remember not all swimming sessions will go swimmingly! If your baby is going through a development change or is learning a new skill, they may become unsettled or not wish to take part in an activity. This can happen from time to time, however, don't become disheartened, just stay relaxed and calm. Go back to close holds, cuddles, singing and activities which they enjoy.

# How you can help your child's Swimming journey

## Be positive & Supportive

Once your child is old enough to start structured swimming lessons unaided (without a parent / carer in the water), it is important to support them through their swimming journey, making sure that you offer praise and motivation at every stage.

## Be consistent

Swimming is a vital skill for any child, so consistent attendance to swimming lessons is very important. It also means that they maintain and develop the skills they have learnt, which will help progression and improve your child's swimming ability.

## Have fun as a family

Outside of swimming lessons, swimming as a family is a great way to help your child and build their confidence – it's also fun and is one of only a few activities that you enjoy together as a family.

## Speak with your Swimming teacher

To help, find out how your child is doing in their lessons from their swimming teacher. Find out where they might be struggling and try to help them when swimming as a family. (Please be mindful that the swimming teacher may not be able to hold a full conversation at poolside as they may have a busy schedule. Find a mutual time that is convenient for both parent and swim teacher to talk about the progress of their child).

**Most importantly, try to make your child's Swimming experience joyful!**



# Family games to play in the pool

Go swimming as a family and increase your water confidence together. Try these fun activities:

## Splash Tag

One person is on in and attempts to 'tag' the other person.

**Promotes:** Walking, paddling and running through the water.

## Whirlpool

Form a circle, walk in one direction (clockwise) slowly increase to a jog, then run. Stop and try to go in the other direction (anti-clockwise).

**Promotes:** Running through water, teaches about current, resistance.

## Stuck in the Pool

Form a circle, walk in one direction (clockwise) slowly increase to a jog, then run. Stop and try to go in the other direction (anti-clockwise).

**Promotes:** Running through water, teaches about current, resistance.

## Rockets

All participants lined up against the pool wall. Push and glide and see how far you can glide.

**Promotes:** body position, streamlining, water confidence and breathing.



## What's the time Ollie Octopus

One person plays Ollie the Octopus at the pool's end facing away from the water. The others stand some distance away, then ask Ollie the Octopus the time. They must creep forward each time until Ollie the Octopus turns around to tell them the time. Once close to Ollie the Octopus, (Ollie) respond 's 'fun time' to which they will chase the others back to the start line trying to catch one of them.

**Promotes:** Running through water, walking, paddling.

## Ever-growing Octopus

One person stands in the middle as others try to cross from one end to another. If you are touched by the person on (the octopus) you must join them and make the octopus grow.

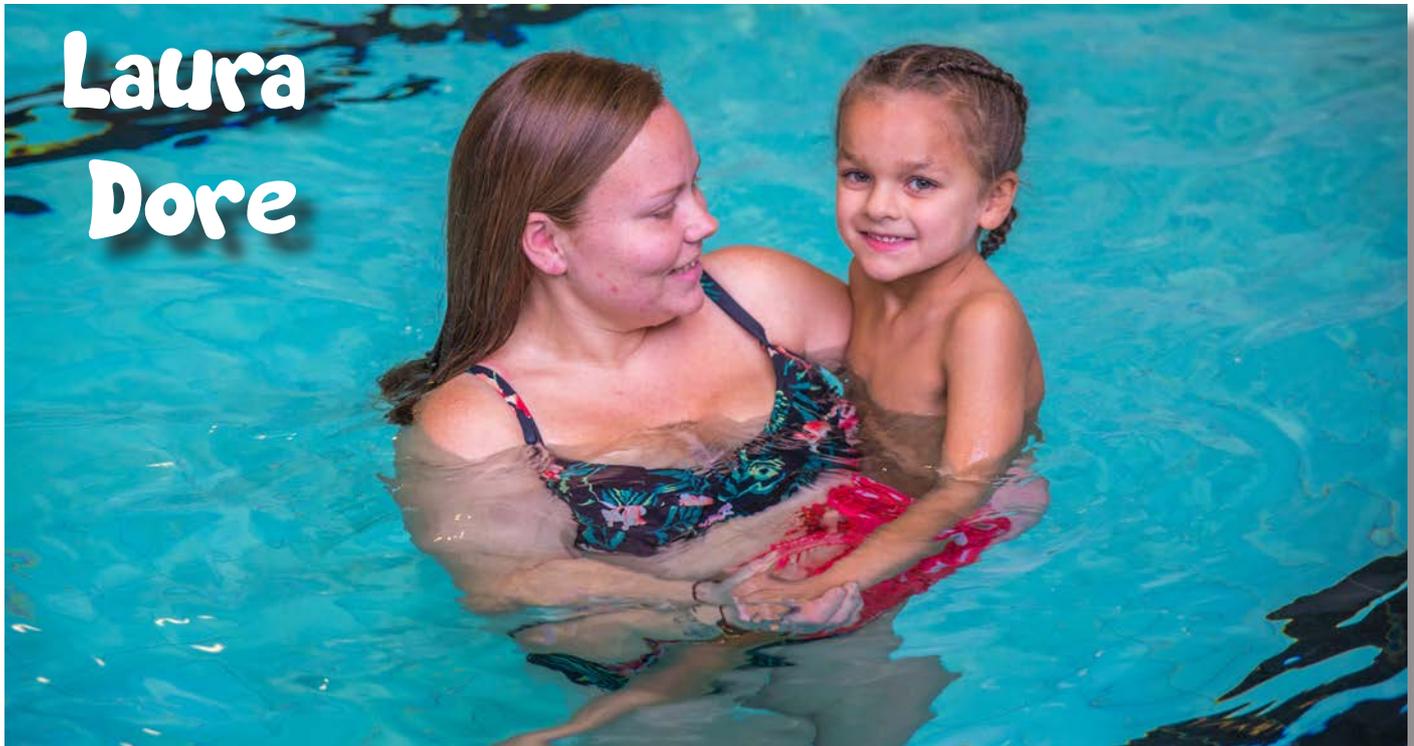
**Promotes:** Walking, paddling and running through the water.



**For more fun games / activity ideas,  
download the complete ILSW Resource Pack**

# Hear from parents who take their children swimming

STA have gathered feedback / opinions from parents who have been through the swimming development of their child / children.



**Laura  
Dore**

## Why did you decide it was important for your child to learn how to swim?

It is an extremely important life skill that has so many benefits with the most important being safety. I believe all children should be taught swimming from a young age as that is one of the most vital lessons in life.

## Did you have any fears about taking your child swimming?

As a family we go on holiday a lot so when the children were younger and couldn't swim, I used to be worried about being around the pool and the sea. Having 3 children it was so hard to keep an eye on all of them, I worried that they may possibly fall in and with pools sometimes being busy they would go unnoticed.

## What obstacles do you believe parents may face when planning to take their children swimming?

Having the help and support sometimes needed whether it being group lessons as I had 3 children under a certain age, I was physically able to take all 3 swimming at once because of restrictions. Also, I believe sometimes parents are worried if they are not very good swimmers, they find it hard to be able to take their children and be confident in the water with them.

## What would be your advice to parents who are unsure about taking their child swimming?

There's plenty of advice and support out there if they need it. If you are worried for any reason, try find someone to go with you to give you support. Never show your fears to your child or that will make them worry.

## Why do you think it's important to learn how to swim?

Safety! How can anyone feel safe and confident around water if they have never been taught to swim. whether it's being around pools, lakes, seas, ponds any kind of water environment a person needs to possess the skills to know how to act and be safe in any situation.

## What would you say to parents to get their children swimming?

Whether you go for fun or enrol your children into lessons your spending money on a valuable life skill.

## Do you think its beneficial to swim as a family? If so, why?

Yes, because if a child sees their parent feeling confident and safe within the water it's going to put them at ease. If they know that they're in safe hands with family members, it's going to make them enjoy it a lot more.





**Jessica  
Hyland**

### **Why did you decide it was important for your child to learn how to swim?**

I decided learning to swim was important following a family holiday where Kyren feared going in the water and having to constantly worry and watch him if he was near or around water. Whether this be a swimming pool or on the beach. He is now very confident around water and I am happy that he would know what to do if himself or anyone else got into trouble in the water. Learning to swim has helped open many doors for my son such as becoming a national water safety ambassador as well as competing in triathlons, which helped him gain so much confidence through achieving regular swimming awards and recognition.

### **Did you have any fears about taking your child swimming?**

I was initially worried about him refusing to go in the pool without his rubber ring and arm bands when on holiday, but the swimming teachers were brilliant and were able to re-assure him and give him the confidence to learn.

### **What obstacles do you believe parents may face when planning to take their children swimming?**

Swimming lessons can be costly, especially for those that have more than one child. Having to fit lessons around working commitments, I found a lot of the classes for beginners or non-swimmers were either during the day or straight after school which for a parent that works a normal day of 9-5, can be impossible to manage.

## What would be your advice to parents who are unsure about taking their child swimming?

Do it, it is the best thing I have decided to do; my son loves swimming and now goes 3-4 times a week. Being able to go on holiday and having the confidence that your son / daughter knows how to swim and can keep themselves safe. Swimming also provides children the opportunity to excel and achieve awards outside of the school environment, helping them to build confidence and prove their abilities. Learning to swim can help give your child various opportunities and the chance to take part in many different sporting activities that they would not be able to do otherwise such as Canoeing, Scuba diving and Triathlon among others. The confidence, enjoyment and health benefits of swimming are unmeasurable.

If you are unsure, go along to your local pool and discuss your concerns with one of the swimming teachers, many pools also offer a taster lesson to see what it's like. All lessons are done based on ability and children can progress at their own rate, gradually building their confidence and skills. Just remember not to let your uncertainty be a barrier for your child's development.

## Why do you think it's important to learn how to swim?

Learning to swim is a crucial life skill, ok they might not want to be the next Michael Phelps, but you never know when they may need the basic skills and ability to swim to safety, in case of emergency or the ability to float or tread water. Hundreds of children drown each year and many of these could be prevented through educating them around water safety and teaching them to swim.

## What would you say to parents to get their children swimming?

Swimming is a great and inexpensive activity to do as a family during school holidays. It is an essential skill that their Son/ Daughter can carry through life. Learning to swim and gaining confidence at a young age it a lot easier than doing this as an adult later in life.

## Do you think its beneficial to swim as a family if so, why?

Yes, especially for children who are potentially lacking in confidence to be independent in the water, if children can see and associate swimming with fun and enjoyment, they are more likely to be encouraged and motivated to learn.