



v1 16 December 2018

The International Swim Schools Association represents a diverse range of leading aquatic educators, who are engaged in providing positive learning experiences for the children and families they serve.

There are a wide range of needs served by these Swim Schools and individual swimming teachers. The culture and area of the world in which they operate can influence which needs are prioritised.

In regions where paediatric drowning is prevalent, water safety and drowning prevention are often given a strong focus. Other's primary aim may be to develop parent-child bonding and attachment, along with a broad scope of developmental benefits for the child. These areas of focus are not mutually exclusive, and all should be addressed by all programs.

ISSA Position Statement #3

What to look for in a good Swim School.

1. Takes pride in friendliness and helpfulness

A good Swim School will be pleased for you to see their program before enrolling. They will have lots of happy customers prepared to tell you about their experiences and children's success. The swim school will be inclusive of all community members.

As a provider of educational services, the school will have a warm and welcoming atmosphere. Staff will strive to meet your family's needs, answer your questions and address your concerns.

2 A student centred teaching philosophy

Skills will be appropriate for the student's age, development and ability. Students should never be placed under toxic stress during a swim lesson. Nervous beginners will be reassured and gently introduced to new skills as they gain confidence.

3 Safety at all times

The good Swim School will always use equipment wisely and ensure children are vigilantly supervised when under their care. This would be part of the Swim School's broader risk assessment. An Emergency Action Plan should be in place

4 Parental involvement

Young children need the security of having a parent or trusted carer close by. Where parents/carers have been participating in the water, particularly where babies are concerned, a good Swim School will factor in the readiness to separate when moving the child to the next level. The parent/carers should stay in view, showing positive interest, as this is important to all young children – especially preschoolers and nervous beginners. A good Swim School will educate parents/carers on the benefits of their positive involvement – encouraging same.

5 Well qualified staff and ongoing training

All teachers/instructors should be appropriately trained to teach the level of their students. Where applicable qualifications exist, preferably national, they should be held. A good Swim School will have a core of experienced teachers with specialist training, and will have consistency of philosophy and methods throughout the Swim School. Ongoing development of all staff is a feature of the Swim School.

6 Well maintained, clean pool and facilities

Pool water will be clear and well sanitized, reflecting water treatment, circulation and filtration systems that are appropriately designed and fit-for-purpose for programmed use. Good Swim Schools will test their water quality at regular intervals throughout the day and be happy to share the results.

Babies, young children and beginners respond well to warm water (30-34oC, 87-93oF) and warm air. Where water temperature is below the minimum noted and/or air temperature is not warm, a good Swim School will adjust lesson length and closely monitor learners to ensure they remain comfortable and relaxed.

7 A progressive approach

Classes should be based on a sound progression of swimming and water safety skills. A good Swim School will provide parents with information explaining the Swim School's philosophy, levels and skill progression.

8 Water safety skills

A good Swim School will teach children appropriate water skills whilst acknowledging that no child is ever water safe or drown-proofed. Children must not be traumatised in order to teach survival skills. Parents will be educated on appropriate water safety messages and taught that constant, adult supervision is the most important factor in drowning prevention. The responsibility of a child's safety in and around water is always on the adult.

9 Well grouped classes

All children in a class should be at approximately the same level. This allows the teacher to better cater for individual needs. A good Swim School will give consideration to, and provide for where possible, children with additional needs.

10 Small class numbers for young children and beginners

The environment, including water depth, will affect the number of children that can be safely and effectively catered for in a group. Check recommendations for maximum group numbers for each level with the relevant body (eg, national association). A good Swim School will adhere to the guidelines and be pleased to make them available.

11 Short lessons for learners

Young children and beginners will need shorter lessons to avoid becoming cold and tired. Advanced swimmers will benefit from longer sessions to build fitness and endurance.

12 Maximum “time on task”

Children need to repeat skills many times to learn and remember them. A good Swim School will provide repetition and “perfect practice” – they are the key to developing good swimming technique and water safety skills. This will be achieved within the readiness and physical and emotional comfort of the learner. Keeping in mind that young children learn best through play, explanation and engagement.

13 Interesting and challenging activities

Activities should be varied, stimulating and with an appropriate level of challenge that motivates each child and keeps learning in a good progression. Activities will be carefully planned to develop and practice aquatic skills.

14 A comprehensive and professional program

Programs may be ongoing, providing a range of programs from beginners through to more advanced swimmers. In the broader context, the Swim School should have a ‘Normal Operating Procedure’ in place.

15 Commitment to swimming as a lifelong activity

The Swim School should be able to recommend a good coaching program and club, where one exists. A number of Swim Schools will provide higher level coaching programs and will encourage developing swimmers to pursue swimming competition or other aquatic activities such as life-saving or water polo.

16 A motivating system of recognition

Children in a good swim school will be confident and happy to participate. Swim Schools will have a practice in place to recognise and reward participation, effort, achievements etc. They may be formal, with a certificate system or the like, and/or informal: with smiles and laughter the norm and praise given in large doses. Care is taken to ensure such systems do not result in actually creating fear and/or demotivating.

17 Education beyond skill development

In addition to the focus on the development of swimming and water safety skills and knowledge, the Swim School should be actively educating their customers (eg, parents/carers) on the learn to swim process (eg, explaining progressions) and water safety.

18 Industry Involvement

A good Swim School will strive to achieve high standards through Membership of the International Swim Schools Association (ISSA) and their applicable national body, where one exists. Ongoing development of their staff and their programs should be evident.

To summarise; **A GOOD SWIM SCHOOL WILL:**

LISTEN to you! Your family's needs should be well catered for.

BE PROUD to show off their program, facilities and inclusiveness.

NURTURE your child. Bring out the best in them!

FOCUS on the children and their needs.

QUALIFY their teachers well. Experienced and qualified teachers will give your child the best opportunity to learn. Check that they have a nationally recognised certification.

MAINTAIN water, pool surrounds and facilities. Clean pools are healthy pools.

PROVIDE an interesting, creative and fun learning environment.

ORGANISE the teaching program and the class schedule well.

GROUP classes according to age and ability.

LEAD with organised and professional management.

HAVE OPPORTUNITY for advancement, and support and encouragement for swimmers wanting to compete and/or make swimming a lifelong activity.

ENCOURAGE your child with motivating awards and praise.

EDUCATE participants on the learn to swim process and water safety.

SHOW PROFESSIONALISM with Membership of the International Swim Schools Association; and where one exists, their national Swim Schools association. Additionally, where appropriate accreditation exists, the teachers should have the recognised qualification.

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