

LEARN TO SWIM WALES – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. How long will it take for my child to learn to swim?

How long is a piece of string?! Like any new skills that we learn, different people take different amounts of time and find some skills easier to learn than others. If your child experiences more time in the swimming pool environment outside of lessons there is a high probability that they will progress more quickly as they will have additional opportunities to practice and in the early phase increase their confidence surrounded by close friends and family. It is recommended that each centre records the date that a swimmer starts each Wave and if necessary identifies ways to support any swimmers that are in any one Wave for longer than 40 weeks.

2. How much will it cost me to book my child into swimming lessons?

The price of lessons will vary from provider to provider and depending on whether you wish to book group, small group or 1:1 lessons. Some providers organise their programme in blocks of lessons ranging from school terms to 8 – 12 weeks blocks and more and more providers are now offering continuous programmes running 50 weeks of the year payable by direct debit.

3. What does my child need to bring with them?

Different organisations may have different requirements regarding what equipment is required. Your child will need appropriate swimwear – for girls ideally a one piece costume and for boys ideally trunks or tight fitting shorts. Fashion swimwear, such as board shorts, might look trendy but they can actually make it a lot harder for children to learn to swim as they increase the resistance to the water. Some children may prefer to wear goggles whilst in the swimming pool, this may be essential for some people who need to wear glasses or contact lenses as you can get prescription goggles. Some swimming pools insist that all swimmers wear a swimming hat whilst in the pool and it would be recommended that swimmers either tie their hair back securely or wear a swimming hat – this can minimise any distraction or frustration from hair getting in their faces whilst swimming. Most organisations will provide any equipment required during the session, such as buoyancy aids, toys and floats but if you have your own (such as a Swimfin or other fixed buoyancy aids) check with the organisation if it can be used. It would also be recommended that swimmers have a drinks bottle with water or weak squash during their lesson as swimming pool environments are usually warm and it is important they stay hydrated. Always remember a towel to get warm and dry after the session, and any toiletries that are used to shower afterwards. In colder months, it would be recommended that a coat and hat are worn after swimming to help minimise any illness developing and to attempt to keep the body temperature constant.

4. Does my child need to wear a swim cap?

It is not compulsory to wear a swim cap but individual pools may have different regulations. It can be beneficial to wear a cap as they can improve your child's swimming experience because long hair is heavy and can make swimming more difficult. If your child is working on breathing and head rotation, it can make it very difficult for them to take a breath. We recommend that you braid the hair or pull the hair back into a ponytail if not wearing a swim cap.



5. What if my child cries or is afraid?

It is very common for a child to cry or be afraid when starting something new. All teachers will be trained to deal with the most fearful of students and there should always be someone on hand to assist if necessary. We recommend the use of simple distraction techniques; toys, songs and games to help calm and reassure them and we will never dunk a new swimmer under the water. A child may cry for several weeks in a row, but be patient. Consistency and praise are key in your child's progress. If you need help getting your child into the pool, please ask our staff for assistance and be sure to let us know any information that will help us get to know your child better (favourite toys, special songs, heroes, etc). We would recommend that you take your child to the pool where they are having lessons prior to the lesson so that they are familiar with the environment and the more often you can take them to the pool before commencing lessons the easier they will find the transition into learning new skills.

6. What should my child do to get ready for their session?

Before their session they should change into their swimwear, go to the toilet, remove any jewellery and have a shower to rinse off any dirt on their body – remember the swimming pool is to be enjoyed by many people and all users need to display high levels of personal hygiene whilst using the facility. Ideally the child should be familiar with the environment and know where their lesson will be taking place and also where the accompanying adult will be during the lesson for reassurance. It is not recommended to have a large meal prior to going swimming or participating in any physical activity.

7. What if my child is unwell?

Use your best judgement, but if your child has flu-like symptoms such as a fever, vomiting or has stomach or digestion problems, you should not bring them to class.

8. What qualifications should teachers have to deliver the Learn to Swim Wales Framework?

All Aquatic Teachers working in a Learn to Swim programme will hold a recognised qualification. Ideally teachers will hold the Swim England Level Two Swimming Teacher certificate which enables an individual to deliver a lesson unsupervised, or they will hold the ASA Level One Swimming Assistant (Teaching) certificate where they deliver sessions under the direct supervision of an individual with a Level Two certificate. All teachers are subject to an enhanced DBS disclosure according to current legislation and should attend Safeguarding and Protecting Children and Young people training every three years.

9. Will the teacher be teaching in the water or from the poolside?

Teaching from the poolside provides the best position to oversee the whole group in terms of safety and to provide appropriate feedback on the performance of each learner within the group. Teachers must position themselves so not only can they be seen and heard, but so they can always watch the entire class.

It is recognised that in some circumstances the pool operator or teacher will have assessed the risk and may feel it is more appropriate to teach from within the water. This practice should only be considered after carrying out a risk assessment giving careful consideration to all the potential factors.

Factors to take into account include pool depth, ability of learners, age of learners and the use of flotation aids and lifesaving support. At all times the teacher must be able to clearly see all learners and be close enough to provide appropriate methods of manual support should this be required. In this way it may be practicable to supervise up to six learners, ratios may need to be reduced to ensure safety and effective teaching. Ratios greater than this should not be considered unless additional helpers are available in the water. (Reference: Safe Supervision for Swimming Teaching and Coaching)



10. How will my child's progress be assessed and rewarded?

The Learn to Swim Wales Framework outcomes should be continually assessed as your child attends lessons. There should not be a final assessment however to progress into the next level all outcomes need to be achieved competently and consistently.

As your child progresses through the programme their achievements will be rewarded with different awards in the form of badges, certificates and depending on your organisation progressive online interaction if your lesson provider uses technology.

Depending on the organisation they may choose to implement other rewards to acknowledge achievements and to enhance the experience of your child and to increase motivation and confidence.

11. Why does my child need to be considered to be a safe swimmer?

Ensuring your child learns to swim at an early age not only provides endless health and social benefits, but could also one day save their life. Sadly, drowning is still the third most common form of accidental death in children, so learning to swim really is an essential life skill.

The great thing about swimming is that children of any age, size or ability can take part – and it is more accessible to children with disabilities than most other sports. But that's not all, as learning to swim:

- keeps your child's heart and lungs healthy, improves their strengths and flexibility, increases their stamina and even improves their balance and posture
- gives your child more opportunities to make friends and gain confidence
- opens the door to countless other sports and activities, including swimming with dolphins, scuba diving in exotic locations, rowing and sailing or even becoming the next Olympic champion
- is a skill for life that once learnt is rarely forgotten – there are even events for swimmers aged over 100
- can provide challenges for your child

12. My child has a disability. Can they take part in these lessons?

Yes! All providers and teachers must ensure that lessons are inclusive to all.

The aim of the Learn to Swim Wales Framework is to ensure that all swimmers, regardless of ability or disability, are taught the fundamental aquatic skills that they can take forward into whatever area of aquatics they wish to pursue.

Providers and Teachers must ensure that participants with a disability or individual needs are accommodated and that sessions are adapted if and when required; this includes lessons having assistant teachers if necessary.

Group allocation should be made by individual assessment and needs and not umbrella classification; for example, some participants with a disability are best served in the main programme, whereas others may require bespoke provision or additional support.

It should be recognised that some participants may only be able to achieve limited outcomes due to their individual needs. If a swimmer is physically unable to complete a certain skill due to a physical disability, for example limb length difference, appropriate discretion should be used to ensure progress is still made to maximise the swimmers aquatic competency. So it is essential that appropriate exit routes are identified for these swimmers and that they are progressed through the pathway according to their needs and motivations. Following lessons we encourage swimmers with disabilities to progress to their local swimming club. There is a Paralympic pathway supported by Swim Wales for those swimmers with physical, visual and intellectual impairments who would like to progress to competitive swimming following their lessons.

13. What is the Learn to Swim Wales Framework?

The Learn to Swim Wales Framework is a nationally recommended programme for the delivery of learn to swim lessons. The Framework covers all vital skills required for participation in aquatic activities and disciplines, starting with Adult and Child water confidence classes through to early competitive participation in aquatic clubs and fitness participation. The programme incorporates all of the recognised FUNdamental movement and aquatic skills, the four strokes, personal survival and water safety.

The Learn to Swim Wales Framework aims to ensure that regardless of any differential factors or circumstances every child can learn to swim and therefore have the opportunity to choose aquatic activities as a part of a healthy lifestyle.

14. How does the Learn to Swim Wales framework align to long term aquatic development / the Athlete Development Support Pathway?

To create a nation of active and healthy people, all children must be given a solid foundation in basic (fundamental) movement, sport and aquatic skills to build on later in life, this foundation is called 'Physical Literacy'.

Research shows that without the inclusion and development of fundamental movement skills, many children and young people withdraw from physical activity and sport and turn to more inactive and/or unhealthy choices during their leisure time.

Active Start: boys and girls from birth to approximately 6 years.

At this stage physical activity should be fun, safe and stimulating, focusing on:

- early fundamental movement skills
- free play
- child-led and teacher-led activities
- encouraging and prompting new skills

FUNdamentals: girls aged approximately 6 – 8 years and boys aged approximately 6 to 9 years

The stage will still involve unstructured activities as well as introducing and developing core aquatic skills. Fundamental skill development should still involve informal play, but also more structured, fun activities that develop physical literacy.

This stage it is important to focus on:

- fun, structured activities
- development of fundamental movement skills
- development of core aquatic skills

Learning to Train: girls aged approximately 8-11 years and boys aged approximately 9-12 years

This is where the focus starts to be more on specific skill development required for advanced swimming and the other aquatic sports.

During this stage it is important to focus on:

- fun, enjoyment and participation
- developing sport specific movement skills
- technical practice and skill development

15. Why might swimmers be playing games rather than swimming widths or lengths?

By delivering lessons in a fun and enjoyable way, providers and swimming teachers are starting to build the foundations for lifelong participation in aquatics.

Swim Wales and the Learn to Swim Wales Framework promotes the use of the 'learning through play' delivery method, that has been found, through educational research, to be the most effective method by which children learn.

Learning to swim should be fun and enjoyable for the participant and for the teacher. Teachers are encouraged to utilise a variety of methods, games, activities and scenarios, limited only by their creativity, to achieve the outcomes. Therefore, you might see your child playing games and moving in the pool in different ways to traditional lengths or widths. By adapting the tasks delivered, how the environment and space available is used and the equipment used within a session the children are challenged in different ways and they might be distracted into performing a task they do not realise they can accomplish. Using this delivery method, children will have a positive learn to swim experience, which will help to fulfil one of Sport Wales and Swim Wales' aspirations: 'Every Child Hooked on Sport for Life'.

16. What happens if by the end of a block of lessons a swimmer has not achieved all the outcomes in the class they have been working on?

The child must complete all outcomes in order to receive the Bubbles, Splash, Wave, Skills, Water Competence Cymru or Distance award. If a child continues to struggle to complete all outcomes over a considerable amount of time an individual plan of support should be discussed between the lesson provider, teacher and parent.

17. What can I do to help my child?

The earlier that a child becomes familiar with the aquatic environment and being in and around water the better. Even if you are not a strong swimmer just taking your child to the pool and playing and having fun in the water will help them develop their confidence and enjoy the positive experiences that the water can bring them.

In the home, encourage your child to have a bath and play in the water. Encourage them to get their hair wet and introduce them to putting their face in the water.

18. How many children should be in the group?

This may vary according to the provider of the Learn to Swim programme, however Swim Wales recommends that for non-swimmers and beginners – young children, normally of primary school age or adults learning to swim, the pupil:teacher ratio should not exceed 12:1. This ratio is based on safety requirements rather than quality of provision. (taken from the Safe Supervision for Teaching and Coaching swimming document).

19. Should I look for Private or group lessons?

Depending on your chosen lesson provider there could be different options available to you to choose from for your child. There may be one to one lessons, small group lessons and group lessons. It is up to you which option you choose but there will be differences in price. It will also depend on your child as to what method of delivery will enable them to thrive. One to one lessons can be useful where there is a specific skill or outcome that they are finding difficult. Group lessons offer children another opportunity to increase their social interaction with different children that they do not necessarily go to school with and to learn and develop from. There are guidelines for the number of children who should be in a group so you can ensure that your child will get all of the attention that they require from the class instructor.

20. How early should my child learn to swim?

You can take your baby swimming at any age, both before and after they have been vaccinated. It doesn't matter if they haven't completed their course of vaccinations yet.

The earlier that a child experiences being in and around water the easier they will find it to develop their aquatic skills. The great thing about swimming is that you can introduce a baby to the water and once they have developed their skills they can continue to access swimming for the rest of their life.

21. Why does my child need to learn all four strokes?

There are four recognised strokes used to move through the water. Different people naturally find different strokes easier to learn than others. It is necessary to teach and learn all four strokes to demonstrate competency and confidence in the water.

22. What are the sections of the Learn to Swim Wales Framework?

There are 4 main sections of the Learn to Swim Wales Framework:

- Bubbles – Bubbles provides a fully supported introduction to the aquatic environment for babies and young children with an accompanying adult, specifically aimed at children aged 0-3 years.
- Splash – Splash encourages a young child’s increasingly independent and guided discovery of the aquatic environment to develop water confidence, specifically aimed at children aged 3+.
- Wave – the main ‘Learn to Swim’ area. Children typically aged from 4/5 years are taught the necessary swimming and aquatic skills to teach them to swim, skills to take part in other aquatic activities such as water polo and also are taught vital water safety skills so that they learn how to be safe in and around water.
- Skills – This section of the pathway breaks into the various aquatic disciplines of swimming, water polo, diving, synchronised swimming and lifesaving. Skills taught in the Waves are progressed and developed with specific emphasis on being discipline specific. These classes can either be delivered in a Learn to Swim programme or at the introductory section of clubs.

23. How will consistency be guaranteed when teachers are assessing?

Teacher resources detail the expected standards for passing an award. Videos are available for teachers to view to help with interpretation of the assessment criteria. All teachers who deliver the Learn to Swim Wales Framework will have undertaken a CPD seminar to ensure that all providers are aware of the delivery requirements and assessment standards. The provider has a part to play in supporting consistency between sites and teachers for example by holding teacher meetings, delivering in house training and supporting teachers to access CPD training relevant to their needs.

24. Why choose the Learn to Swim Wales Framework?

By choosing the Learn to Swim Wales Framework providers and parents can expect a varied programme and therefore enhanced sessions keeping children engaged in the learn to swim process. Learn to Swim Wales is a nationally recognised programme designed by industry experts covering all ages and abilities. The pathway incorporates all the aquatic disciplines and widens opportunities available for children.

Author:	Hanna Guise
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