

# **STARplex Swim School**



## **Waterbabies' Program**

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**From babies to champions....it's what we love to do!**



# Swim School

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## Waterbabies' Program

Drowning is the biggest accidental killer of children under the age of five in Australia. It is our goal at STARplex Swim School to reduce the national drowning rate by offering quality instruction to young children promoting water awareness, safety, confidence and swimming ability. We believe introducing children to the water at a young age can help in developing a healthy respect for the water and the ability to enjoy swimming in a safe manner.

STARplex Swim School offers four levels in our Waterbabies' Program which is ability based and aimed at children aged 6 months to 3 years. Our Waterbabies' Program is divided into two age groups, 6 months to 18 months and 19 months to 3 years. The separation enables us to better cater for the differences in social, emotional, physical and mental abilities at these ages. An adult is required to be in the water with the child assisting the instructor throughout the 30 minute lesson. It is important parents realise that young children can quite often sense a parent's emotions and can inadvertently adopt a parent's feeling towards the water environment. It is therefore vital that parents themselves remain relaxed and reassuring when introducing the child to the water and conducting lessons with them.



These classes are available Monday-Friday 8.30am-10.30am and selected evenings, Saturday 8.30am-12.00pm and Sunday 9.00am-12.00pm. It is our policy at STARplex Swim School that children are required to wear Huggies Little Swimmers when participating in our Waterbabies' Program.

Our Waterbabies' Program includes various activities and games to encourage the following skills:

- Water familiarisation
- Water confidence
- Breath control
- Paddling
- Submersion
- Floating
- Gripping
- Kicking
- Freefalls and safety jumps
- Rotation
- Climbing
- Flotation aids

In addition to all the joys and benefits of swimming, we can eventually teach young children skills that will increase their chances of getting to safety if they should find themselves in the water in an unsupervised situation.

Children are motivated to learn through what they perceive to be play and fun. Our program attempts to teach water familiarisation and safety skills through various rhymes and activities, which are skill based, yet enjoyable for the children involved. The skills we want the children to learn must be repeated at least weekly. Although this may become boring to some parents, it is important they understand repetition is vital to a child's learning experience.

We encourage newcomers to visit the pool and observe our Waterbabies' Program prior to their first lesson. Our learner's pool provides an optimal water temperature and design for enhancing the child's learning experience. The following section describes aspects of preparation that can help the child to adapt more readily to the program.

## Preparation for Submersion

- ★ Introduce the child to the water in a warm, relaxing environment eg bath, shower, indoor pool.
- ★ Allow the child to experience the water in an encouraging and fun way eg watering cans or water toys.
- ★ This equipment is a great tool for introducing water familiarisation and confidence with the water.
- ★ Use a watering can for example to pour water over the child following these gradual progressions.
- ★ Start with the toes, legs and hands allowing the child to enjoy and play with the water.
- ★ Build towards watering the child's shoulder and back.
- ★ Start introducing the water to the neck and back of head, gradually progressing towards the top of the head and over the face.
- ★ Once the child is accustomed to water over the face, the teaching cue for submersion can be introduced.
- ★ The teaching cue used at STARplex Swim School is '**Child's Name - 1, 2, 3 - Go**'
- ★ Encourage the child to inhale by blowing on the face just prior to pouring water over the head.
- ★ It is important to smile, praise the child and provide reassurance and encouragement throughout the preparation process.
- ★ If at any time the child becomes upset, try to avoid emphasising the child's anxiety and remain relaxed, cheerful and reassuring.

## Submersion Process

- ★ Hold the child at an arms' length at eye level
- ★ Ensure you have the child's attention and use the trigger words: '**Child's Name - 1, 2, 3 - Go**'
- ★ Slightly raise the child, blow the face, and then slowly draw them through the water in a smooth and continuous action.
- ★ After submersion it is important to smile and praise the child in order to relax and reassure the child.

## Submersion –Some Points to Consider

- ★ Do not submerge a child until they are comfortable with water over their face and are accustomed to the cues.
- ★ Initially, the child should be held face to face with the parent when teaching the 1-2-3-lift and under.
- ★ During the child's first few lessons there should be no more than three brief held dips until the child has comfortably acquired breath control.
- ★ Once the child has learned to consistently hold their breath on the lift cue, the time underwater and the number of submersions can gradually be increased.
- ★ It is important to maintain a horizontal body position when submerging the child. If the child is submerged in a vertical position, water is more likely forced up the nose, which can be very uncomfortable for the child.
- ★ Keep the movement smooth and continuous by walking backward throughout the submersion process rather than pushing them up and down in the water.
- ★ Be consistent with cues.
- ★ It is important once the cue is given to submerge without hesitation unless it is obvious the child is not ready.
- ★ You can encourage the child to take a deep breath prior to submersion by seeing and hearing you make a deep inhalation on the lift cue.
- ★ As the child progresses to the point of longer submersions, we begin to free float the child from parent to teacher and vice-versa.
- ★ For children who are comfortable with water over their face but begin to cling after submerging, toys and high-fives are great distractions.
- ★ If a child is continually distressed after submerging, don't force them. Try focussing on a related skill such as pouring water over a toy, then over the child's face.
- ★ If the child has their mouth open during submersion, it does not necessarily mean the child will swallow the water. Many children are able to block the flow of the water with their larynx.
- ★ It is important to remain calm and reassuring if the child does ingest water.



## Watertots

Our Watertots Program is designed for children aged 18 months to 3 years who have mastered the skills offered in our water babies' class, yet do not have the emotional maturity or social skills to participate in our Pre-school program. The program is aimed at teaching the child more advanced swimming and water safety skills with a primary focus on building the child's confidence and independence.

Our Watertots program includes various activities and games to encourage the following skills:

- Floating
- Free floating
- Independent floating
- Gripping
- Breathing
- Submersion
- Independent climbing
- Kicking
- Boardwork
- Paddling
- Torpedos
- Rotation and regaining swimming position
- Safety jumps and other entries

## Tadpoles

Our Tadpoles level is designed for children who have progressed through our Watertots program and have developed a good level of water confidence and advanced swimming skills. The level is structured similarly to our Pre-school program and is aimed at preparing the children for this transition.



It is important to realise that all of the classes offered are long-term programs and require patient and dedicated parents. A child will not learn swimming skills in ten easy lessons. Repetition is a vital component of a child's learning experience. A child's success at this level will be highly dependent upon their opportunity to regularly practise their swimming skills. A break over winter for instance is detrimental to a child's progress due to their relatively short retention spans. In contrast, the child's progress is more likely to improve with opportunities to explore and practise their swimming skills at the pool outside of normal lessons.

Parents should be aware that it is very common for children of this age group to have difficulty adjusting to swimming lessons; particularly if they are unsure about the water environment. We ask that parents be patient and allow some time for the child to form a bond with their instructor and to learn to trust and adapt to their new environment. Most children will settle within a few weeks, however if the child is still distressed after this time it is important to discuss any concerns or issues with the supervisor on duty. Some children will also struggle adapting to a new instructor when they change classes. It is very common for children to form a strong bond with an instructor and we ask parents to be supportive and patient whilst their child transitions into their new class and instructor.

Be aware that we are a child-paced centre and always strive to do what is best for the child. Our instructors are very experienced in working with this age group and are about showing patience and encouragement whilst taking them through their learn to swim journey.

The program is designed for children to continue until they reach three years of age; however some children will be ready to transition into our Pre-school program prior to this time. It will be at the supervisor's discretion as to whether a child will benefit from this remembering that we promote child paced learning and need to ensure the child is ready both physically and emotionally.

Finally, it is important for parents to realise that swimming skills act as a vital supplement to supervision and physical barriers. Although it is the responsibility of the adult to ensure the safety of their child, lapses in supervision can and do occur. The skills learnt in our Waterbabies' Program can help serve as the final safety against an unsupervised water entry. Just remember to never become complacent because your child has mastered swimming safety skills. **NO CHILD SHOULD EVER BE CONSIDERED DROWNPROOF.** Constant eye supervision is essential when children are in and around an aquatic environment.