

Swimming for the Ages

Swimming looks different for different age groups. Choose swim lessons with safety and quality instruction in mind.

Infants/young toddlers

- The American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend infant water survival classes. Babies may exhibit swimming reflexes but cannot move their head far enough out of the water to breathe.
- Classes for children ages 1–2 should focus on splashing, singing, and games while held by a caregiver. Infants should not be submerged in water because they are likely to swallow too much.

Older toddlers/ young preschoolers

- Parent-child lessons for children ages 2–3 should introduce swimming readiness skills, basic safety, and fun in the water. Lessons may include kicking, throwing a ball, and floating with support.
- Children this age may have unearned confidence, thinking they can swim on their own. An adult should always be within arms' reach of a child in water.



Older preschoolers

- Most 4–5-year-olds are ready for formal swim lessons. Children's attitudes toward water may fluctuate; they may be ready and confident one day and worried the next.
- Lessons focus on floating independently, submerging their head in water for 5–10 seconds, gliding through water, treading water, and using coordinated kicking and arm movements.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



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