SWIM LESSONS CURRICULUM

The YMCA Swim Lessons program uses a skill-based approach designed to meet the needs of local Ys and the people they serve.

CATEGORIES

The swim lessons curriculum allows for both standardization and flexibility. The curriculum organization ensures that swim lessons programs look and sound the same at every Y across the country. But the way students move through the curriculum can be adapted to meet the needs of all Ys in all communities.

At a high level, the curriculum is organized into three general categories:

Get the TOOL
Swim Lessons Program Overview*

Learn more about the various components of the program and how they fit together.

*All tools highlighted in Get the Tools feature boxes can be found in the Aquatics community on Link.

- **Swim Starters** develops water enrichment and aquatic readiness in children.

  Recommended age range: infants and toddlers (6 mos.–3 yrs.)

  In the two stages that make up this parent-child category, children learn to be comfortable in the water. Rather than teaching children how to survive in the water or become accomplished swimmers, Swim Starters focuses on developing swim readiness skills through fun and confidence-building experiences. Parents[1] also learn essential skills in Swim Starters. Close supervision is the best way to prevent drowning. Parents learn how to supervise children in the water, how to prevent accidents, and how to plan for emergencies.

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[1] We define *parent* broadly to include all adults with primary responsibility for raising children, including biological parents, adoptive parents, guardians, stepparents, grandparents, or any other type of parenting relationship.

- **Swim Basics** develops personal water safety and basic swimming skills in students of all ages.

  Recommended age ranges: preschool youth (3–5 yrs.), school-age youth (5–12 yrs.), teens and adults (12+ yrs.)

  In these three stages, students develop a high level of comfort in the water by practicing safe water habits, engaging in underwater exploration, and learning how to swim to safety and exit if they fall into a body of water. Group activities that reinforce learning help students progress. By the end of this series of stages, students achieve basic swimming competency by learning two benchmark skills:

  – Swim, float, swim—sequencing front glide, roll, back float, roll, front glide, and exit
  – Jump, push, turn, grab

- **Swim Strokes** introduces and refines stroke technique in older students.

  Recommended age ranges: school-age youth (5–12 yrs.), teens and adults (12+ yrs.)

  In these three stages, having mastered the fundamentals, students learn additional water safety skills and build stroke technique, developing skills that prevent chronic disease, increase social-emotional and cognitive well-being, and foster a lifetime of physical activity.

Once students have progressed through the stages in all three categories, they have the opportunity to follow three different pathways:

- Competition—for students who want to swim competitively either at the Y or for a different organization
- Leadership—for students who want to become a lifeguard or otherwise use swimming skills in their professional career
- Recreation—for students who want to make swimming a part of a healthy lifestyle and a way of getting the recommended amount of physical activity per day

STAGES

Each category of the curriculum is further divided into stages. The early stages focus on basic swimming readiness skills. Once those are achieved, the focus shifts to stroke introduction, refinement, and technique. This approach provides students with a solid foundation for refining their swimming skills as they progress through the stages of the program. The stages form the core of the curriculum and, when sequenced, provide a clear path to mastery for students. The use of stages in the curriculum underscores the importance of progression toward a goal.

Get the TOOLS

Swim Lessons Infant & Toddler / Preschool Skill Continuum

Swim Lessons School-Age / Teen & Adult Skill Continuum

Explore the skills students learn throughout the program.

SWIM STARTERS STAGES

Swim Starters stages are designed to be taught in eight, 30-minute lessons.

Stage A: Water Discovery

Parents accompany children in this stage, which introduces infants and toddlers to the aquatic environment through exploration and encourages them to enjoy themselves while learning about the water. The goals of this stage include the following:

- Encouraging parents to set developmentally appropriate expectations for infants and toddlers enrolled in swim lessons

- Introducing and emphasizing basic water safety to parents and providing a positive family aquatic experience

- Building relationships among and between parents and children by providing opportunities for fun and interaction in the water

A	Water Discovery Skills
Breath control	Blow bubbles
Swim on front	Front tow Front float
Swim on back	Back float Back tow
Water safety	Roll Wall grab
Benchmark	Water exit Water entry

Stage B: Water Exploration

In this stage, parents work with their children to explore body positions, floating, blowing bubbles, and fundamental safety and aquatic skills. The goals of this stage include the following:

- Encouraging children to move purposefully in the water in response to visual and verbal cues and using toys and flotation devices

- Emphasizing basic aquatic safety to parents

- Building relationships among and between parents and children by providing opportunities for fun and interaction in the water

B	Water Exploration Skills
Breath control	Blow bubbles
Swim on front	Front tow Front float
Swim on back	Back float Back tow
Water safety	Roll Monkey crawl
Benchmark	Water exit Water entry

Stage 1: Water Acclimation

Those students younger than 3 years old who are ready to progress may move into a parent-child version of stage 1 (see full description in next section) that is adapted to their age and ability. If offering stage 1 as a parent-child offering, have no more than one instructor for every four to six parent-child pairs so that the parents may transition out of the pool when the child is ready after the fourth or fifth lesson.

SWIM BASICS STAGES

Swim Basics stages are designed to be taught in eight 30-minute lessons for preschoolers. Modify lesson length, as necessary, to fit the needs of your school-age, teen, or adult students.

Stage 1: Water Acclimation

Students develop comfort with underwater exploration and learn to safely exit in the event of falling into a body of water in stage 1. This stage lays the foundation that allows for a student's future progress in swimming. Students in this stage focus on the following:

- Exploring the aquatic environment and personal skills with instructor help

- Developing basic skills to propel and glide through the water with instructor help

- Learning basic aquatic safety and accepting some of the responsibility for safe practices

1	Water Acclimation Skills
Breath control	Submerge
Swim on front	Front glide Front float
Swim on back	Back float Back glide
Water safety	Water exit Roll
Benchmark	Jump, push, turn, grab Swim, float, swim

Stage 2: Water Movement

In this stage, students focus on body position and control, directional change, and forward movement in the water while also continuing to practice how to safely exit in the event of falling into a body of water. Students in this stage focus on the following:

- Exploring the aquatic environment and personal skills without instructor help

- Developing basic skills to propel and glide through the water without instructor help

- Learning basic aquatic and boating safety and accepting some of the responsibility for safe practices

2	Water Movement Skills
Breath control	Submerge
Swim on front	Front glide Front float
Swim on back	Back float Back glide
Water safety	Water exit Roll Tread water
Benchmark	Jump, push, turn, grab Swim, float, swim

Stage 3: Water Stamina

In this stage, students learn how to swim to safety from a longer distance than in previous stages in the event of falling into a body of water. This stage also introduces rhythmic breathing and integrated arm and leg action. Students in this stage focus on the following:

- Integrating arm action, leg action, and rhythmic breathing in back and front glides
- Developing forward movement on the front and back
- Practicing skills and safety techniques in deep water

3	Water Stamina Skills
Breath control	Submerge
Swim on front	Swim on front
Swim on back	Swim on back
Water safety	Water exit Roll Tread water
Benchmark	Jump, swim, turn, swim, grab Swim, float, swim

SWIM STROKES STAGES

Swim Strokes stages are designed to be taught in eight 40-minute lessons. This category also offers teens and adults of all abilities—those just learning to swim or those wanting to build on existing skills—the opportunity to receive instruction tailored to their specific needs.

Stage 4: Stroke Introduction

Students in this stage develop stroke technique in front crawl and back crawl and learn the breaststroke kick and butterfly kick. Water safety is reinforced through treading water and elementary backstroke. Students in this stage focus on the following:

- Developing the front crawl and back crawl
- Introducing components of the breaststroke and butterfly
- Practicing safety techniques in deep water

4	Stroke Introduction Skills
Swim on front	Front crawl Breaststroke Butterfly
Swim on back	Back crawl
Water safety	Dive Resting stroke, elementary backstroke Tread water
Benchmark	Endurance

Stage 5: Stroke Development

Students in this stage work on stroke technique and learn all major competitive strokes. The emphasis on water safety continues through treading water and sidestroke. Students in this stage focus on the following:

- Developing stamina in the front crawl and back crawl
- Developing the breaststroke and butterfly
- Building endurance techniques for deep-water safety

5	Stroke Development Skills
Swim on front	Front crawl Breaststroke Butterfly
Swim on back	Back crawl
Water safety	Dive Resting stroke, sidestroke Tread water
Benchmark	Endurance

Stage 6: Stroke Mechanics

In this stage, students refine stroke technique on all major competitive strokes, learn about competitive swimming, and discover how to incorporate swimming into a healthy lifestyle. Students in this stage focus on the following:

- Developing endurance in the competitive strokes
- Developing skills related to competitive swimming like flip turns
- Enhancing skills and building endurance in deep water

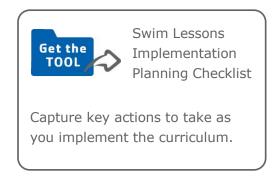| 6	Stroke Mechanics Skills
Swim on front	Front crawl Breaststroke Butterfly
Swim on back	Back crawl
Water safety	Dive Resting stroke, elementary backstroke or sidestroke Tread water
Benchmark	Endurance

The Swim Instructor Toolkit, available in the Aquatics community on Link, includes all of the tools and resources staff need to deliver the curriculum for YMCA Swim Lessons.

IMPLEMENTING THE SWIM LESSONS CURRICULUM

Follow the steps below as you implement the curriculum.

STEP 1: UNDERSTAND
Review the curriculum and the tools and training available to help your Y implement it. A good understanding of what's available allows you to successfully take the next step, which is to customize your program to meet the needs of your community.

Get the TOOL → Swim Lessons Implementation Planning Checklist

Capture key actions to take as you implement the curriculum.

STEP 2: ASSESS
The swim lessons curriculum is designed to be flexible. After you assess the needs of your Y, your students, and your community members, decide in which session you will convert to the updated curriculum. Also decide how you will customize it to meet students where they are. For example, the ages identified are recommendations. You can modify the criteria to enroll students in a particular stage and choose to offer only those stages that best fit your student population. Some Ys find it effective to separate 3- and 4-year-olds from children ages 5 and older, or extend the school-age group to 15 years of age.

	Stages							
	A	B	1	2	3	4	5	6
Infant	X*	X*						
Toddler	X*	X*	X*					
Preschool		X	X	X	X	X		
School age			X	X	X	X	X	X
Teen			X	X	X	X	X	X
Adult			X	X	X	X	X	X

*Parent-child lessons.

Below are some examples of how Ys can operationalize the curriculum, but they are by no means the only ways:

- **Option 1:** Enroll students by stage and age group, for example, by offering stages for infants and toddlers, preschoolers, school-age youth, teens, and adults. In this example, a Y could offer the following:

- Water Acclimation: Toddler
- Water Acclimation: Preschool
- Water Acclimation: School Age
- Water Acclimation: Teen
- Water Acclimation: Adult

- **Option 2:** Enroll students by stages based on skill level, without accounting for age. In this example, a 5-year-old and a 7-year-old could be in the Stroke Introduction stage together. In this example, a Y could offer the following:
  - Water Acclimation: Youth (preschoolers and school-age youth combined)
  - Water Acclimation: Teen and Adult

- **Option 3:** Enroll students by age group (e.g., infants and toddlers, preschoolers, school-age youth, teens, and adults). Then assess them at the first class with the goal of sorting them into skill groups by stage.

STEP 3: EDUCATE

As with any change, setting expectations and communicating early and often is essential to managing the transition effectively. Begin working with Y staff and volunteers well in advance of the proposed transition period and establish formal touch points that extend into the lesson-delivery time frame. Be sure to set aside time for staff and volunteers to ask questions and share concerns. Also have a plan in place to engage with students and their families to prepare them for the change, help them find their place in the new curriculum, and discuss the benefits of the upgraded approach.

NEED HELP?

YMCA of the USA Support

For additional help with aquatic program implementation, connect with a moderator in the Aquatics community on Link or email aquatics@ymca.net.

Training Partner YMCA Support

In support of the Y's mission in the area of staff development, Y-USA has implemented a training system to encourage a culture of learning and to develop the next generation of cause-driven leaders. The training system strives to be accessible and affordable to all YMCA associations. The Training Partner YMCA (TPY) concept is an important element in achieving these goals. TPYs deliver high-quality training and professional development support to Y staff across the country. TPYs are strategically located throughout each of the Y's four geographic regions and are the primary source of program and leadership competency course training for their designated area. To learn more about the TPY system and regional training events available, visit the Training Partners community on Link.