

# The 411

## SwimJim Parent's Survival Guide



## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this pamphlet is to give parents of 1st time swimmers or children going through developmental hurdles the “411” (information) they have been looking for. Whether your child is new to the water, or has experience swimming, it is important that you, as a parent, understand your child’s level of development. Your approach to swim lessons can make a difference in his/her relationship with the water. Remember although swimming has many benefits, our primary goal at SwimJim is teaching water safety; your child’s safety. We’ve tried to be as comprehensive as possible and give you straightforward answers to questions asked regularly. By better understanding the learning process, you can help your child have fun and learn how to be safer in the water.

We are pleased you have chosen SwimJim for your families aquatic education. If there is anything we can do to further your knowledge or assist you in any way please don’t hesitate to let us know.

## YOUR CHILD’S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WATER

Learning to swim is a skill individually achieved. Comparing your child to others in the class is counter-productive, as each child is completely unique and will develop at his or her own pace. Our teachers are experienced at teaching children with a variety of personalities and understand that different approaches work for different children.

Below are some examples of the various personalities children may have in the water. This list is by no means comprehensive. Children may exhibit characteristics from each of these categories and similarly, they may change from one category to another as they develop.

**Enthusiastic** – Eager, ready to learn, can’t wait to have a turn, active in class, unafraid, independent; usually masters skills ahead of peers. The enthusiastic child views the water as marvelously exciting.

**Guarded** – Cautious, watchful, shy, not willing to take first turn, may not want to separate from parent. A guarded child is suspicious of the water; needs lots of TLC and positive reinforcement. Guarded children have their own learning schedule and can’t be forced. They have to decide they want to attempt new skills. Once the barriers have been worked through, the guarded child can easily turn into an enthusiastic swimmer.

**Classic** – Somewhere in between the enthusiastic child and the guarded child is the classic child; easy going, willing to participate. They may be unwilling to separate from their parent at first, but warm up to new situations quickly. They need positive reinforcement before moving on to new skills.

## NEW STUDENTS/CRYING

As children begin their journey into aquatic education, please remember that the water is a new and unusual environment. When a child is first introduced to a pool or begins taking classes without his or her parent, s/he may be wary and mistrustful of the water. Your child has also just been introduced to a stranger (the instructor) and left in that stranger's care. Crying is a natural reaction on the part of children when they are placed in unfamiliar circumstances. Parents should not feel embarrassed or uncomfortable because of it. The seemingly well adjusted child in your child's class probably fussed at some point also. It is important for parents to know any reaction your child may have is NORMAL. Our instructors are trained to help children through this adjustment period. During bouts of crying, parents and teachers should constantly use positive reinforcement to make the child feel safe and comfortable in the water. When children cry it is recommended parents stay out of sight, take a deep breath, read a book or have a cup of coffee. If your child looks up at you and sees distress on your face they will react accordingly. If you aren't in sight, your child will have a better opportunity to bond with the instructor and get interested in class activities.

It is important that **children stay in the pool for the duration of their lessons**. In doing so, swimmers will begin to build a continuous routine that they can become familiar and begin developing a bond with their instructor. No child will be forced to perform exercises that they don't want to do, but taking them out of the pool disrupts the flow of their development and reinforces their fears. By keeping children in the pool until the end of the lesson, even if they don't perform any of the lesson's activities, they are slowly learning that this is a safe place for them to be. Before you know it, they will be comfortable in the aquatic environment and can begin learning important skills that can increase their level of safety in the water.

### 4 to 6 LESSON EXPECTATION

We have a 4 to 6 lesson expectation for new swimmers as well as children beginning classes without the parent in the water. Typically children will calm down and settle into the routine of swim class within 4 to 6 lessons.

## WATER SAFETY AND SWIMJIM METHODOLOGY

As your child progresses in his/her development with SwimJim, there are several basic skills that will be taught and continually reinforced in order to help them develop water safety habits and learn to swim. It is important that you, as a parent understand these tasks so you can reinforce them outside of swim lessons.

### GRAB THE WALL

Early in our curriculum we teach the children to hold onto the wall while waiting turns or when approaching the sides of the pool. This is an important safety habit that may help to save your child's life. In a water emergency the natural instinct upon entering the water is to move toward the center of the pool or to grab the closest person.



Neither is a safe option. If a child falls or jumps into a pool when there isn't someone to rescue them, they need to know where to go for safety. By teaching children to navigate to the wall and grab hold, we are creating water safety habits and giving children a safer option in case they do find themselves alone in a pool. This is a great habit to practice with your child outside of class.

### FLOATING (rollover to a back float)

Back floating is the base of the SwimJim program. This is not only a technique important for skill development, but an essential water safety habit. Back floating can be a difficult skill for children to learn. It takes trust, patience and relaxation; traits young children may not possess. Once children do become skilled in back floating, it becomes a water safety habit they can rely on if they tire or panic. Any time outside of class you can spend helping your child learn to float will help them become a safer and better swimmer.

### BREATH CONTROL

Breath control is also an important skill that SwimJim curriculum stresses. On a basic level, that means teaching your child to put their face in the water without "drinking" or "swallowing" it. Infants have a natural reflex that aids them from swallowing water. We begin to developing breath control with activities such as Row Your Boat, Humpty Dumpty and diving for rings. Older children who are unfamiliar with the aquatic environment tend to have more difficulty with breath control. They may swallow water and cough. Because of this we may restrict submersions to only a few per lesson initially. In addition, children should be submerged completely (mouth, nose and eyes). If their eyes are out of the water they may not know they have been submerged and will drink water or gasp for a breath not knowing when they are above the water. Swimmers who are able to blow bubbles when submerged, can begin to develop the proper breath control patterns used in swimming. Playing games and getting their chin, nose and foreheads wet, can aid in the comfort of facial submersions. Once faces are wet, add blowing bubbles or humming in the water to the game. Doing this in the bathtub or home pool will further develop their skills and reinforce what they are learning in class.



Remember, children should not eat or drink anything heavy (especially dairy products, carbonated drinks and spicy food) just before swim class; especially when they are in the early phases of breath control development. A little swallowed water can lead to a lot of vomit. We don't want children to associate swimming with an upset stomach. We know many of you run very tight schedules and children are eating on the run between activities. Since crackers, chips and cookies can be choking hazards please make sure all crumbs are washed down before your child enters the pool.

### PLATEAUS and REGRESSION

As your child learns to swim, you may notice periods of time when his or her progression slows down or seems to come to a halt.



These plateaus are completely natural in the learning process. It is important to reinforce any and all minor progressions your child makes and to remember not to compare them to other children. Each child will learn at his or her own pace and with regular weekly attendance they will move past the plateau and continue to progress. Be positive and remember learning is a bell shaped curve, with peaks, plateaus and valleys. Progress isn't always a steady climb upward.

Regression is also part of the learning process. If a child is conquering developmental tasks away from the pool, i.e. walking, talking, potty training, new skills at school, etc. or is facing emotional challenges i.e. new school, new house, new sibling or perhaps discord at home, swimming may temporarily take a back seat. Children may also regress after time away from swimming due to taking a break or an extended illness. Please be assured the regression is temporary. Children are remarkable come back artists!

## PROGRESS

Let your child progress at a pace that is right for them. Just as children learn to walk and talk at different rates, they learn to swim at different rates. Please don't try to advance your child to the next level before they are developmentally and emotionally ready. Learning to swim takes time and your child will progress when s/he is physically and emotionally prepared. We'll let you know when it's time for a class level change.



Remember children learn better when they follow a routine. Continuity in swimming classes can be the key to overcoming plateaus. Likewise, being late and missing classes can create an erratic schedule that may slow your child's progress. By attending classes regularly, children will learn more efficiently.

## LANGUAGE or "PSYCHOLOGY 101"

At SwimJim, we focus not only on children's physical development but on their emotional growth as well. We strive to use language that has positive connotations instead of negative ones. Below are some ideas for changing the way you talk to your child about the water. We hope you can use some of these ideas to help us create a positive environment as your child learns to swim.

**QUESTIONS-** For the most part, we try to avoid asking children questions requiring yes and no answers. Asking a child if they want to float is setting yourself up for a "NO" answer. Instead, present them with a choice that they can understand. "Should we float for 10 seconds or 20 seconds? Similarly, asking a child if s/he wants to swim doesn't work because children are unable to understand the intricacies involved in such a task. Make an effort to replace questions with statements or choices that are easier for children to comprehend.



The **BOTTOM** of the pool can be very ominous. It can be thought of as a never ending deep, dark place. The word bottom is an abstract term and difficult to comprehend for younger children. We choose to use the word **FLOOR**. By replacing "bottom" with the word "floor" we are using a term children understand. They know what a floor is and it's not scary. For SwimJim the word "floor" is a more positive choice.

**FALL or SINK** - We don't want the children to do either in our pool (or any other body of water)! By avoiding words such as fall or sink that can imply danger or a loss of control, we try to keep the pool a positive place. We teach floating and swimming on "**top**" of the water. Of course our instructors are always there to help the children.

**DEEP WATER** gets a really bad rap. For young children all water is deep. They may not have the concept of what deep really is but the tone of an adult's voice when they are referring to deep water can let the child know it's BAD. We refer to water as either white (shallow) or blue (deeper). Once again, we teach floating and swimming on "**top**" of the water.

**ALL THE WAY OVER THERE** can be a very long way! When we tell a child they will be swimming across or the length of the pool, experience has taught us not to use the term "all the way over there". Most children think that's too far! The "other side" does not reflect the idea of immense space and is therefore a better choice of words.

**THAT'S NOT SO BAD IS IT?** When does a parent use that expression? Probably after a negative experience, i.e. getting a shot, falling down, taking bad tasting medicine, etc. Learning to swim is a good thing! Questions such as these reinforce children's fears about the water. Replace a question like this with a positive statement. That was wonderful! What a great job! I love the way you blew bubbles, etc.



**THE "D" WORD - DROWN** is a very negative word for children because they don't truly understand the concept behind it. Just by the tone of voice used with the word they know that it is something bad and the water is dangerous. While the water can be dangerous, the adult emphasis on the word "drown" can frighten children to the point that they become terrified of swimming. Some children think that just putting their face in the water is drowning. The SwimJim staff avoids using this word when around children. You can help to make swimming a more positive experience for your child by reinforcing our choice; using the power of positive language.

## SUPPORT

Learning how to swim is a life long skill. Take the time to be supportive of every effort made by your child by giving positive feedback. Accentuate the positive, ignore the negative. By reinforcing at home either by verbally discussing tasks or by letting your children show you what they can do, you can make swimming a positive activity. Let us do the teaching. Let swim lessons be a place to learn. Home should be the place to play, experiment and show off.



## GET OFF TO A GOOD START

A good way to relieve 1<sup>st</sup> lesson stress is to educate your child prior to attending his/her 1<sup>st</sup> lesson. Important topics to discuss are: how special it is to take swim lessons, what they will be able to do after they learn to swim, what to pack in the swim bag, the name of their instructor, how their instructor will help them, the water will be warm, they will have a safe place to stand during lessons, etc. But most importantly; **YOU WILL WAIT FOR THEM!** Please don't make promises an instructor may not be able to follow through on.

Be on time for swim lessons. Give your child time to relax, observe other classes and become familiar with the surroundings before class. Stay calm. Children can sense a parent's anxiety.

Once your child has become familiar with the swim school environment it is recommended that waiting students participate in calm activities just prior to lesson time. When children run and rough house before getting into the pool, our instructors often have a difficult time getting children to be responsive and focus on class activities. Reading a book or coloring are great pre-lesson activities. It is also a good opportunity to spend quality time with you.



**SMILES** are contagious! When you are watching your child in swim class, are you smiling? If not, try it. Children innately want to please. Children are so connected with their parents feelings that if they see their parents smiling and gesturing thumbs up they will feel more secure in what they are doing and go about learning with positive feelings.

## COMMUNICATION

This pamphlet is by no means trying to tell you how to parent, however, over many years of experience we have found the information just presented to be helpful guidelines. In addition, please feel free to communicate with your child's swimming instructor. We are in this together and by sharing information, we can help your child reach his or her potential as a swimmer. Due to the rigorous class schedules our teachers maintain, we request that you keep poolside discussions to a minimum. If you would like to speak with your child's instructor, please leave a message with our deck supervisor before, during or after lessons. Your instructor will call you at your convenience to discuss your child's progress.

Thanks for taking the time to read this pamphlet. If you have any suggestions on how we can better share information with you, please contact SwimJim or your instructor at **New York (212) 749-7335** or e-mail [info@swimjim.com](mailto:info@swimjim.com) & **Texas (713) 784-1777** or e-mail [infotx@swimjim.com](mailto:infotx@swimjim.com).



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