

OLDER CHILDREN TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENT SWIMMING



Ready, Steady... STOP!

When is the best time for a child to “graduate” from parent/child class to an independent swimming arrangement? Age will vary depending on individual readiness, however making this transition before the child is emotionally and developmentally ready can have less than ideal results. Children can become stressed, suffer loss of self-esteem and often regress in their swimming ability. Several important points should be considered before a final decision to move your child into independent swimming lessons.

Our 5 year study into the “Transition to Independence” has shown children who continue to swim with their parents, even until 5 years of age, *show advanced skill development, emotional maturity, continued enthusiasm and a general sense of well being in the water.* Children 2 - 4 years of age in lessons without their parents, demonstrated weaker skill development, degrees of separation anxiety, lack of emotional readiness and general loss of joy about swimming.

Parents making decisions to transition their child to independent swimming lessons need to be supported in their choice *and* also be informed of potential challenges / problems that can arise. Readiness to participate in an independent class situation should be based on each child’s emotional and physical maturity, not on their age. There will always be children ready to go “solo” much younger than others, and for some, they may not be ready even at school age (5yrs +). There are still many benefits for children when their parents are able to stay in the water with them. Please consider the following;

When is your child ready? Make your assessment with the following questions in mind:

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents have a unique understanding or “intuition” of their child’s body language and emotional needs, therefore important bonding continues. • When parents are in the water with their child, there is one on one supervision and individual attention to their needs. Safety is prioritised. • One on one interaction means listening and participation in all the activities can be encouraged throughout the lesson. More can be achieved and children are kept moving & stimulated. • Keeping children moving and stimulated generates body heat and keeps them warmer, especially in cooler temperature water. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It may take time for the new child/teacher relationship to build trust. Individual emotional needs may not be understood. If teachers are not the same each week, there is more disruption to building a bond of trust. • Teachers must supervise all children at all times; a challenge given the innate nature of children to be active and want to jump around. • Given young children have a short attention span, keeping them focused and on task can be a challenge. Less can be achieved when waiting for their turn and there is a risk of boredom. • Less participation (waiting for a turn), can make some children too cold and uncomfortable in the water to progress with skills and enjoy the lesson.

- Can your child swim confidently without support?: this means without you *or* a floatation device
- Is there adequate physical development, fitness and stamina to sustain independent swimming?
- Can they recover for their own breath **unaided**?
- Does your child have a solid foundation from which to build upon and has mastered various skill progressions such as gliding and torpedoes?
- Is your child emotionally ready to listen to instruction, sit still and wait for their turn?
- Is your child enthusiastic to be independent from you and do they want to demonstrate this?
- Are you, the parent also really ready for this transition?
- Is play, an essential learning tool, included in the new program you are considering?
- Take a copy of our article “Where to after Waterbabies” to help you make an informed choice.

Even when children have achieved these steps, most still continue to progress when swimming together with their parent for as long as possible. It is an opportunity for ongoing quality time together.

WITH YOU

With patience, love and trust,
All the plateau's we've come through
I can swim by myself now
All thanks to you

My head's out of the water
And I can take a breath
So, now I'm going back under
To explore into the depths

Let me swim alone
But let me see and know you're there
From our bath we know at home
To all water, everywhere

You know, it's fun to swim with you
I feel loved and safe and close
I won't stay little for very long
And I want to swim with you the most



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Oceanic Waterbabies