

Teaching in the water and the handling of children

The Amateur Swimming Association staff are frequently asked by swimming teachers "Can I teach in the water?" and "Is it alright to handle pupils?"

The national guidance document "**Safe Supervision for the teaching and coaching of swimming**" states:

"In the situation where the teacher has responsibility for groups comprising more than two pupils the recommended teaching position is from the side of the pool as this provides the best position to oversee the whole group in terms of safety and to provide appropriate feedback on the performance of each person in the group. This does not preclude a teacher being in the water to assist pupils either on a 1:1 or 1:2 basis or as an assistant to the class teacher. In fact for groups of more than two pupils a fully qualified teacher on the poolside supported by an assistant in the water may be ideal.

It is recognised, however, that in some circumstances the teacher will have assessed the risk and may feel it is more appropriate to teach from within the water. This practice should only be considered after carrying out a risk assessment giving careful consideration to all the potential factors.

Factors to take into account include pool depth, age, size and ability of pupils and the use of flotation aids. At all times the teacher must be able to clearly see all pupils and be close enough to provide physical support should this be required. In this way it may be practicable to supervise between two to six pupils depending on the previously mentioned safety factors, ratios greater than this should not be considered unless additional helpers are available in the water.

If the qualified teacher is teaching in the water an additional observer should be on the poolside to enhance the swimming teacher's span of supervision that teaching in the water inevitably diminishes."

Clearly there may be a greater need to teach in the water with younger pupils under five years of age. Children of that age range, although they probably attend nursery school, do not have a fully developed 'class' mentality and may find it difficult to function in a larger class where the swimming teacher gives instructions from the poolside also the teaching of special needs and less able pupils from in the water is common practice. Many pool providers deliver adult and child sessions or parent and child sessions to this age group to ensure visual, verbal and physical prompts can be provided to the younger child to keep them focused.

Obviously one of the benefits of teaching in the water with younger groups is the reassurance this provides to young nervous children.

Another more controversial benefit is that it allows the swimming teacher to provide physical support to the beginner and physically manipulate the pupils' limbs in the correct movements for the stroke being taught.

However this intervention is fraught with difficulties and the swimming teacher is placing him or herself at risk especially if a parent/carer or swimmer is not comfortable with the physical contact and chooses to complain. It is important that the swimming teacher demonstrates exemplary behaviour and good practice at all times in order to protect themselves from false allegations

For this reason and understandably many teachers refuse to handle children in swimming lessons and this decision should be respected and not penalised by swimming pool operators.

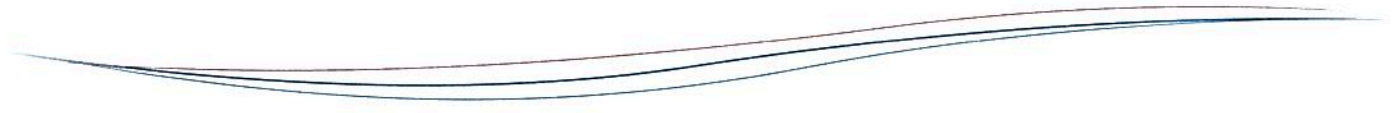
Nevertheless there is considerable evidence that the majority of pool operators provide pre-school swimming lessons where they expect the swimming teacher to be in the water with the children AND to handle them to assist the teaching process and it is clearly what the parents in most cases want!

For these reasons swimming teachers that are required to undertake swimming lessons in this manner need to observe certain protocols and the ASA suggest that these should be:

- Ensure there is a system included within the Pool Operating Procedure whereby the parent or guardian of the pupil gives permission for the teacher to handle the children for the purposes of supporting them in the water or manipulating limbs to convey correct stroke techniques.
- The swimming teacher should always wear a distinctive top so that they are easily identified in the water.
- Ensure that any handling of pupils is done within clear sight of parents and others in spectator areas.
- Always explain to the pupil that you are now going to hold him/her and why.
- Swimming teachers must never support pupils in such a way that their hands cannot be seen by the spectators (i.e. beneath the water).
- Never support a pupil by handling the swimmer's torso.
- Only support swimmers by holding their hands, head or feet

Additionally teachers and coaches should NEVER teach or coach a swimmer alone without other adults being present.

It is recognised that on occasions small children who are nervous may cling to the swimming teacher but this is an action that is instigated by the pupil not the swimming teacher, nevertheless these circumstances must be dealt with by the swimming teacher with utmost care.



The Amateur Swimming Association believes that competent swimming teachers should be friendly, tactile and approachable and by following these simple guidelines a swimming teacher can satisfy the customer's needs without placing themselves at undue risk.

Amateur Swimming Association Awards that are linked to this issue and assist in best practice are:

ASA Awards

Alpha Step Awards for nervous swimmers and/or swimmers with additional needs

Swim-A –Song awards

Duckling Awards

There are Amateur Swimming Association Continuing Professional Development workshops and seminars that are linked to this issue and assist in achieving best practice:

- Adult and Child
- Hands on Support in the water for Swimmers with additional needs
- Teaching Swimming to Disabled Swimmers
- Teaching Swimming to Teenage non swimmers
- ASA/ SCuk safeguarding and protecting children in sport

Readers are advised that the guidance or advice given in this information sheet is not inclusive and any decisions on swimming pool design should first be discussed with a member of the ASA's Facilities Team. Contact details: facilities@swimming.org or telephone: 01509 640258.

