

## Teaching in the Water Safely

STA recognises that many swimming teachers prefer to deliver their lessons from within the water, particularly when teaching younger learners, adults or learners with a disability. To help and support our swimming teachers and members, the STA Swimming Teaching Qualifications and swimming resource manual cover teaching in the water and offer guidelines on how to deliver these lessons safely.

STA is the only organisation to offer qualifications that cover how to teach in the water. This means that our swimming teachers are adequately qualified and insured.

### Good Practice Guidelines

A swimming teacher in the water has an extremely limited view of the water and the learners, which means that there must be suitable and sufficient cover on the poolside to watch the class. This should be determined by the individual pool's risk assessment.

STA recommends a maximum swimming teacher to learner ratio of 1 to 6. However, this recommendation must coincide with a risk assessment where the pool size, depth, shape and learners' ages, ability and needs are taken into consideration. It may well be that the ratio has to be reduced to ensure safety and effective teaching, eg. when teaching learners with a disability or nervous adults. For larger groups, the ideal situation may be a swimming teacher on the poolside with an assistant swimming teacher in the water.

When swimming lessons are in progress, there must always be at least one person on the poolside who is competent to respond. This can be the teacher, providing s/he possesses appropriate lifesaving competencies – these can include rescue skills, CPR, and relevant aspects of the PSOP. This can be achieved by holding a current STA lifesaving or lifeguard qualification.

No swimming teacher should teach in the water for more than two consecutive hours. After two hours, a rest period of at least 30 minutes must be taken to allow for recovery. A teacher should not teach more than two two-hour blocks per day in the water.

If you intend to be in the water to teach, you should inform parents/guardians and gain consent from them and the learners. Explain the benefits this has for the learner and show the methods of manual support that will be used during lessons.

It is also important to consider when and where you, the swimming teacher, will get changed. STA suggests that if there is only an open-plan facility, the teacher should wait until all learners and parents/guardians have left the changing rooms first. It is not appropriate for the swimming teacher to undress alongside their learners. It is also important to note the swimming teachers are not responsible for supervising the changing room - this is the responsibility of parents/guardians or school teachers.

### Appropriate Attire

When working in the water, the swimming teacher should wear appropriate clothing that makes them easy to identify and marks them as a professional. This includes:

- A swimming costume or swimming shorts. A bikini is not appropriate
- A wetsuit-style top and shorts is preferred over the swimwear or a suitable polo or t-shirt. The t-shirt should be plain and not display inappropriate pictures or words. A uniform top provided by the swim school could also be worn.

In addition:

- Make-up should not be worn
- Long hair should be tied up
- All jewellery must be removed to protect the learner and teacher
- Tattoos should be covered.

Wearing a t-shirt is a personal safety item, acting as a barrier between the swimming teacher and learner. If a learner clings to the swimming teacher, the t-shirt helps protect a teacher's modesty. It also enables the swimming teacher to be easily identifiable in the water.

As a swimming teacher you should be prepared to get wet, get splashed without flinching and put your face in or under the water. It is important for learners to be shown that it is safe to get wet and to go under water.

### **Manual Support**

Having a swimming teacher or assistant in the water allows learners to feel supported when they attempt a new skill for the first time. This support not only builds confidence but it also reassures the learner when they try out the required movement.

It is important that learners are not forced to undertake an activity. A swimming teacher is there to provide encouragement and reassurance, NOT to force or pull a learner into an activity they are nervous to try.

Due to their proximity to learners, swimming teachers can be more vulnerable to accusations of abuse if they are teaching in the water. This is primarily because it is difficult to see where teachers' hands are. Swimming teachers should try to keep hands in sight and above the water surface when possible and it is of paramount importance for a witness or observer to be present on poolside whenever in-pool teaching takes place.

Neither swimming teachers nor assistant swimming teachers should be left on their own with a learner or group of learners.

Whenever possible, swimming teachers should support learners by holding teaching aids, supporting under the head or holding learners' hands. Learners should not be supported under the tummy or under the bottom and they should not be pulled by the arms. A teacher should get permission from a learner prior to supporting and the learner should be informed where and how support will be given. Learners must never be grabbed.

*Please note: In the event of an emergency rescue, it may be necessary to pick up a learner quickly, without gaining permission.*

## **Recommended Manual Support Positions**



**Supporting the learner by the hands.**



**Supporting the learner holding the woggle.**



**Supporting the learner holding the head.**



**Supporting the learner under the floats.**

## Water Currents

When supporting an individual learner to move through the water, a swimming teacher can create a current or vortex. This propels the learner along and no swimming takes place.

Instead, when supporting from the front, the swimming teacher should move slowly or support from a side position to ensure the learner moves independently. The learner should move through the water due to the propulsion being created rather than the swimming teacher moving them.

## Teaching Positions in the Water

The maximum depth of water in which a teacher can operate safely is when the water is approximately at the mid-chest line. If the swimming teacher is in the water, s/he must be able to stand and walk freely – and not be forced by the depth of water – into a floating position. When teaching in the water, the swimming teacher must maintain visibility of the whole class at all times.

Swimming teachers should remain standing up when teaching in the water because they are easier to see. It also creates an open teaching position where their hands can be seen.

Many swimming teachers kneel or squat when teaching so their shoulders are under the water but this is not a good or safe teaching position because it means learners, parents/ guardians and lifesavers are unable to spot the swimming teacher in an emergency.

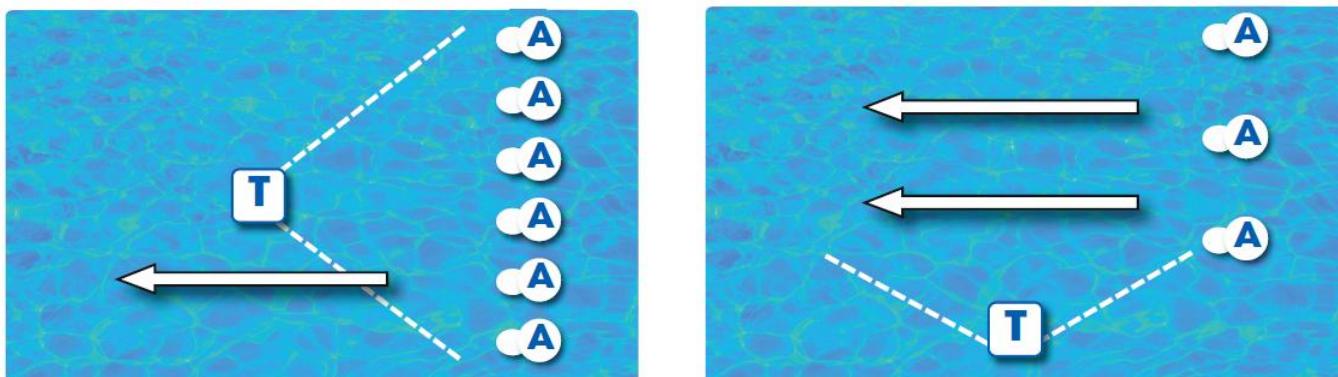
If a swimming teacher is under the water, their hands and body are harder to see. This results in actions being more difficult to spot, which can leave a swimming teacher open to abuse accusations.

Swimming teachers should avoid demonstrating strokes because it limits their view of the learners and makes providing commentary impossible.

It is much better and more motivating for learners to observe a correct demonstration from a fellow learner while the teacher oversees the group and provides commentary.

Teachers should stand at the front when learners are in a line to explain corrections or to demonstrate an action or teaching practice to learners.

However, once learners start swimming towards the swimming teacher, the teacher should walk backwards or move to a side-on position to ensure that all learners are in view.



When teaching in the water, swimming teachers have the opportunity to work with learners on a one-to-one basis, to practise a particular skill or to provide manual support. However, it is important to remember the five other learners in the group.

It is easier to split the group into two sets of three or three sets of two. Use different coloured woggles and give each a name such as dolphins or sharks.

While the first set of learners is swimming, the teacher should watch, encourage and correct them before setting off the next set.

If learners have to wait in turn to swim with the teacher, they will get bored, which could result in disruption. Instead, tell the learners what you want them to do, show them and then let them try.

## **When is Teaching in the Water Required?**

Being able to support a learner manually and offering close support can give learners confidence. However, a swimming teacher should undertake a risk assessment, look at the class ability, number of learners and situation to decide if they really need to teach in the water.

Many teachers deliver from within the water through habit, perhaps because the learners required this at some point during the course.

However, teachers should take the time to look at their learners and decide if getting into the water with them is really necessary.

Being able to observe the learners from poolside can give a swimming teacher a clearer picture of how they are performing. It also gives learners the opportunity to try a skill without help, which develops greater independence in the water.

When working with a small group of learners who have a disability, being in the water is often a good approach to take because the teacher can create a calm learning environment.

A swimming teacher can support a learner and allow them to feel the movement and buoyancy of the water. Games, activities and songs can be used when the swimming teacher moves from learner to learner, which involves them, supports them and encourages them.

Once learners are confident and able to swim unaided, the swimming teacher should allow the learners space on their own in the water to develop their skills independently. For example, a group of improver learners who are swimming front crawl, back crawl and breaststroke without aids or support does not need a swimming teacher to be in the water. It is more beneficial to their development to have a swimming teacher on the poolside, analysing their stroke, encouraging them and correcting technique. From poolside a swimming teacher has a better view and can watch a learner from more angles. They can also watch more learners at the same time.

Equally, young learners who can stand and are developing confidence in moving across the pool when they are half way through their 10-week course would rarely require support from within the water.

Benefits	Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develops confidence in learners</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Limited view of the learners</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Swimming teachers can give manual support</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Often hinders learners' chance to have a go if help is automatically given</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Able to demonstrate skills in the water</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Swimming teacher is open to abuse accusations</li></ul>

A swimming teacher should understand the benefits and the drawbacks about teaching in the water and make an informed decision as to what is best for the learners and for themselves.

Because every class, pool and situation is different, swimming teachers should use the STA good practice guidelines to ensure they protect themselves and their learners.

### **In summary:**

- Ensure a lifesaver is on duty and is appropriately qualified
- Maximum teaching ratio of 1:6, dependent on risk assessment
- Must wear appropriate attire
- Manual support positions must be explained and permission gained before it is given
- Use approved methods of manual support
- Maximum mid-chest depth water
- Swimming teachers should stand up when teaching to maintain an open position
- Hands should stay above the water surface
- Think: do you really need to get in?