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CAIRNS

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MAGAZINE

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**MINI
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Cover photo: Barends Photography

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KIDS Activities

Story thanks to
Christine Dellit

swimming

There's a lot more to swimming than splashing around in the backyard pool but how do you know when your child is competent enough to stop swimming lessons?

The question of when and how children should learn to swim is under constant scrutiny given the tragic level of childhood drowning. And, despite the overwhelming evidence of the benefits of starting swim lessons under five years of age (recently confirmed by a Griffith University study), many parents still do not choose to commit to learn to swim lessons for their children.

If you didn't start swimming lessons early don't worry, but do it now! If your child is fearful of the water they can still flourish in a swim school that recognises each child's differences and shows patience and praise.

For those parents who discontinue lessons because their child can 'sort of' do strokes and 'they're not going to be an Olympic swimmer' consider the following:

- [1] Swimming is the only 'sport' that also provides a life saving skill
- [2] It can provide an entry to many other aquatic activities
- [3] Like any other skill it must be practiced to be retained
- [4] Children do not have skill retention until about 7 years of age

[5] Swimming is a skill that can then be retained for life

[6] Just because a child can 'swim' in their backyard pool does not mean they are safe or are actually able to swim effectively

[7] Swimming is a wonderful cross training sport for all other sports

The most common stage that parents drop their children out of swimming lessons is when they believe their child can safely swim in a backyard pool. I believe this puts the child at a higher risk, as you believe they are safe when in fact they are not.

The key benchmark of swimming competence according to the swimming industry is when children can swim a kilometer of freestyle with good technique and can tread water proficiently for at least 15 minutes.

Children will only achieve this level of competence and good stroke technique from 'learn to swim' professionals, preferably in a small group situation. If you are relying on the school to teach your child to swim, be aware that school programs are carried out for a short time and are not geared to instruct your child individually.

TRANSITIONING TO SWIM CLUBS

The biggest mistake that parents can make is to transition a child into a swim club too soon. I would advise keeping your child at a swim school that focuses on fun, technique and fitness over small distances to ensure correct technique is retained before progressing to a swim club. If they have an undeveloped or poor technique, swimming long distances with large groups causes fatigue and a breakdown in technique. These children will need constant stroke correction to avoid their poor technique becoming a learnt skill that is impossible to correct.

Swimming clubs and other aquatic sports and activities provide a fantastic opportunity for fun, friendship, fitness and/or competition but ensure your child has a solid background, obtained from a technique focused learn to swim school, before they join.

Christine Dellit has been involved with swimming for over 40 years. Her family own and operate Essential Skills Swim School, Bentley Park and Little Snappers Swim School, Smithfield.