



Games with Aims

Games are an excellent way to teach water orientation, physical skills, and water safety. Recently acquired skills become automatic while swimmers are involved in games. As a Water Safety Instructor, you should include a broad range of games as an important and regular part of your lessons.

Games are more enjoyable when the activities suit the ages, interests, and abilities of the swimmers, as well as the facility. You should vary games by changing the rules, the equipment, and the challenges. Don't use competitive games too often—particularly with beginning swimmers.

Use purposeful games in every session.

What Are Games?

Games are about having fun and getting rewards. Individuals, partners, and groups can be involved in games.

Traditionally in teaching, games were considered frills: something that could be left out if there was not enough time. They were included as tapering off activities, or as rewards for good behaviour. Games are now recognized as an effective teaching method to introduce and develop swimming and water safety skills.

Why Games?

Games Reduce Anxiety

The first time swimmers participate in a new activity, they are often anxious or nervous. They may be fearful of the water, or uncertain of their own ability. Too much anxiety interferes with learning. Swimmers who are overly concerned with their fear can't concentrate as well on the new skill to be learned.

One way to reduce this anxiety is to create a situation in which swimmers are concentrating on something else. If they are involved in a game, they may forget the source of their anxiety for a moment. You can include games in Red Cross Swim programs to overcome swimmers' initial fear of the water. At more advanced levels, you can use games to help swimmers overcome their concern over difficult skills.

Games Lead to Mastery

When swimmers attempt a skill, they concentrate on the new activity until, after many trials, they can perform it. However, swimmers haven't mastered a newly learned skill until it becomes automatic—until they can do it without thinking specifically about it. Games provide a setting that allows swimmers to perform skills without really thinking about them. If the game includes the new skill to be learned, that skill will tend to become more automatic.

Games Are Natural

Many educators believe that “play is the work of the child.” The job of children is to learn, and when they are playing, they are in the best environment to do that job.

As people grow older, they can probably benefit from more direct instruction. That doesn't mean direct instruction is best for children. Remember that children are younger and learn differently. Placing children in a play environment for a large portion of their water safety and learn-to-swim class is an excellent way to help them feel at home in the water and learn the basic water orientation skills.

Play is the work of the child.

Games Teach Water Safety

Swimming ability does not always equal water safety. As swimmers gain skills and confidence in the water, they may take greater risks more often and become less safe. Memorizing water safety rules may have little effect on the attitudes or behaviour of capable swimmers.

One of the best ways to help swimmers become safer is to give them a wide range of aquatic experiences. Games give swimmers a chance to experience almost anything that could happen to them in the water. Swimmers will have choked and coughed as a result of being disoriented or splashed during a game. That means they'll be better prepared to survive a real emergency.

In addition, games provide “teachable moments”: real-life situations that illustrate the reasons for water safety. For example, as children play a tag game, they may venture toward deeper water. You can stop the activity and point out how quickly a person can end up in deep water and in a dangerous situation when not paying attention to the environment.

Games serve many purposes.

Games Increase Participation

It is important to make sure that each swimmer is actively involved. Often older or better swimmers can dominate a game. Try changing the rules or restrictions to reduce their advantage. For example, in a water polo game, allowing players to hold the ball with two hands could reduce the advantage of the experienced water polo players. If teams are necessary, make sure there are an equal number of strong and weak players on each side.

Many games involve eliminating swimmers. For example, the traditional version of Musical Kickboards (similar to Musical Chairs) eliminates players who can't find an unoccupied kickboard. Eliminating people means they can't learn through participation. Instead, you could change the rules so that a player who doesn't find a kickboard misses one turn, or pays a penalty such as swimming two widths of the pool before rejoining the activity.

Keep everyone involved as much as possible.

Games Meet Individual Needs

Because there is a wide range of abilities in a class, you may need to teach some swimmers skills that other swimmers have already mastered. Use games to keep the rest of the class actively learning while you're busy.

What Rules?

The major purpose of rules in aquatic games is make sure the players stay safe. Your job is to look out for any dangerous or potentially frightening situations. Make sure your swimmers know that when you blow your whistle, everyone stops.

Make sure that games are played in a safe area with safe equipment. Wherever possible, activities should be performed a safe distance from the edge of

the pool or other obstructions. In the excitement of the game, players can often overlook dangers. This gives you an excellent opportunity to teach and review basic water safety.

Whenever possible, introduce rules gradually. You can begin a game with just a few basic rules, and add more or change them as you need to. Explain the reason for these rules briefly. In general, a minimum number of rules means fewer interruptions, greater participation, and more enjoyment.

During the game, your job is to act as the supervisor and referee.

Don't end your game with an incident or injury. Injuries spoil fun. By stressing safety during games, you can make sure swimmers develop a “safety first” attitude toward aquatic activities.

What Games?

There is probably no limit to the number and variety of games that can be played in and around the water. It is up to you to collect games that meet the needs of your class. Consider the following factors when you're selecting, adapting, or designing games.

Games with a Purpose

Often an Instructor has a specific purpose for using a particular game: to develop endurance, to practise skills, to orient swimmers to the water, or simply to enjoy being in the water. It is important to understand the purpose of the game. For example, a race isn't a good choice if you want your swimmers to practise sidestroke, since racing would eliminate the glide. Instead, you could challenge your swimmers to see how few strokes they can use to cross the pool.

Develop games that serve an instructional purpose.

Games for an Ability Level

Choose games based on the swimming ability of your class. For example, games for beginners should usually be played in shallow water and shouldn't require a lot of swimming ability. Water orientation games should not be frightening. Traumatic experiences caused by inappropriate games will interfere with a swimmer's progress.

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Games for an Age Level

The types of games that are suitable for one age group may not be suitable for another, but you can often adapt games to suit different age levels and abilities. Remember that younger children tend to enjoy individual or group activities and tend to be more interested in imaginative play.

Cooperative Games

Cooperative games encourage swimmers to work together, rather than compete against each other. A winner is not declared. Many games that are competitive can be changed into cooperative games. For example, you can make water polo cooperative by challenging the players to see how many consecutive passes they can make without dropping the ball.

Competitive Games

In competitive games, a winner is declared. Rules tell players what they can and cannot do. Although competitive games are popular, they are not as useful in instructional programs because the larger and more skilled swimmers tend to dominate.

Competitive games are best for 10- to 15-year-olds. For this age group, establish a few competitive games as routines. Once your class is familiar with a game, you can save a great deal of time by referring to it by name. For example, all you need to say is: “Let’s play a game of Needle in a Haystack.”

In an instructional program, limited use should be made of competitive games.

Games That Are Invented, Adapted, or Modified

Games don’t have to be complicated to be effective. Simple challenges can become great games:

“Show me your farthest...”

“Show me your most...”

“Show me your funniest...”

“Show me your feet...”

Swimmers can invent games. Challenge swimmers to use a newly acquired skill (such as side-stroke) to develop a game. Challenge a group to develop games that use specific equipment (such as three hoops and a ball). Adjust the equipment and the rules of land games to develop a water game (such

as Water Baseball, Water Basketball, Underwater Hockey, Ring Around the Rosie).

The games you choose may depend on the facility. Make sure that games can be played safely in the facility without interfering with other classes. By adding or changing a few rules, you can make most games safe in most situations. Working with the class to improve the safety in the game can be an excellent example and an effective way to teach water safety.

You can also modify games that originally appear too difficult or too easy for your class. For example, you could have swimmers:

- wear PFDs/lifejackets;
- play in shallow water;
- play while sitting in inner tubes;
- play while holding a partner’s hand;
- wear fins; or,
- close their eyes or wear a blindfold.

You can also:

- change the rules (for example: allow swimmers to stand and touch the water polo ball with both hands);
 - add additional balls;
 - make goals larger (or smaller); or
 - use equipment for weaker players.

You can modify games to fit the circumstances, to emphasize skill development, to increase participation, or to add variety. For example:

- Six Pass—In this version of water polo, a team must make six consecutive passes successfully in order to score a point.
- Partner Water Polo—Players select partners. Partners must hold each other’s hand while playing water polo.

Games are really just ideas. Once you understand the idea of a certain game, you can adapt the game to suit the interests and ability levels of your class. For example, in “Halo,” several rings, 15cm in diameter, are placed on the surface of the water. Swimmers try to get the ring on their head without touching it with their hands. In shallow water this is an excellent game for beginners who have just learned to control their breath and open their eyes underwater.

This game can be adapted for better swimmers by playing in it deeper water. Accomplished swimmers can attempt the task with their hands behind their back or held out of the water at all times. You can add further challenge by having the swimmers jump or dive and get the ring on their head as they surface. The ring, balanced on the head, can be used as a part of a relay race, either in shallow or deep water. It's easy to adapt a single activity into all kinds of related games. One of the creative challenges of being an Instructor is to find these adaptations and develop new games or variations of old games.

Adapt games to suit the ability and interests of your class.

Games You Collect

Learn games from other Instructors. Ask for suggestions and share your ideas. Using a variety of games—races, tags, competitive and cooperative games—gives your swimmers a well-rounded experience.

Keep a list of games that you find useful.

Games from Books

Although there are a few books specifically about aquatic games, books about land games are also useful. Just change the ideas to meet the needs of your class.

What Type of Games?

Games may be categorized under certain headings; however, a game from one heading can be adjusted to fit under other headings. For example, you could use a certain activity as an individual challenge or turn it into a competition between partners or as a race among teams.

Games for Individuals

Many aquatic activities make good challenges for individuals: to improve, get faster, or become more efficient. These “individual games” are very effective in the instructional program because you can easily adapt them to a wide range of swimmers.

Example: Jump

Suspend balloons or other soft objects out of reach above the surface of the water. In shallow water, swimmers attempt to jump and hit the balloon with

their hand. In deep water, players may start either by treading water or by jumping in from the side.

Partner Games

Partner games usually result in a high level of participation. For many activities, you should make sure partners are matched in ability and size. If the class has an odd number of swimmers, you may need to become a partner.

Example: Team Tug (also Push Challenge)

Two players or teams pull on opposite sides of a rope (or push on opposite sides of a kickboard). This can be played in shallow or deep water. Winners may be declared when a player reaches the pool edge or crosses a line.

Group Games

Many Instructors use group games as a major part of their regular teaching. For example, if you want swimmers to walk in chest-deep water, you can create a “game” by leading your class on an imaginary picnic.

Example: Follow the Leader

The Instructor or a swimmer (not always the best one) performs a series of activities, skills, stunts, or strokes. Others follow in a line, performing the same activities in the same order.

Tag Games

Tag is a particular type of group game. In tag games, one player is “IT.” IT tries to tag another player, who then becomes IT. You can increase the level of participation by making more than one player IT or by having the people tagged form a chain to catch others. There are several varieties of tag.

Safety is a concern because swimmers can get very excited. Adjust the rules to make sure everyone plays safely. For example, tell swimmers they must remain in the water. Tag is not a good game for timid beginners. A swimmer who cannot move easily in waist-deep water could remain IT for a long time.

Example: Eiffel Tower

Players who are tagged must stand still with their legs apart and their hands together above their heads,

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resembling the Eiffel Tower. Eiffel Towers are “freed” if another swimmer swims between their legs.

Team Games

Team games usually take more time to organize and often result in less participation than other types of games. Many team games that are commonly used on land can be easily adapted for the water.

To divide the class quickly into two teams, have the group “buddy up” in partners. Then direct each partner to join one of the two teams.

Example: **Keep Away**

Divide swimmers into two teams. One team takes the ball and tries to keep it away from the other team.

Races

The goal of a race is to determine which swimmer (or group of swimmers) can do a particular activity as quickly as possible.

You can organize races between individuals or between teams. Everyone can race at once, or you can organize relays, where each swimmer of each team has a turn. Try to keep teams equal in ability. To increase participation, keep teams small, or have everyone race at the same time.

Since speed is the major criteria for races, don't include races early in a learning progression when swimmers are learning a new skill. At this point, they need to concentrate on the specific action involved. Speeding up the action too early in the progression may hurt the natural learning process.

Types of races:

1. **Individual:** Swimmers compete against the clock to determine how quickly they can complete a task, such as swimming a length, completing an obstacle course, performing a specific skill, or repeating a skill a specific number of times.
Example: How quickly can Eve swim one length of the pool? Can Eve swim more quickly the next time?
2. **Partners:** Partners compete against each other to determine who can complete a task in the shortest possible time.

Example: Which partner can be the first to complete one length of back crawl while balancing a block on his or her forehead?

3. **Group:** Several swimmers perform a task at the same time. The first person to complete the task is declared the winner.
Example: A group races across the pool. The first person to reach the far side is the winner.
Example: A group rushes to recover an object from the bottom of the pool. The first person to recover the object is the winner.
4. **Team:** A group of swimmers works together to complete a task. The first team to complete the task is declared the winner.
Example: Teams compete to paddle canoes with their hands to the other end of the pool.
5. **Round-Trip Relay:** One member of each team races to a given point and then back to the starting point. When the first team member returns, the next one goes. The first team to have all members complete the distance wins.
6. **Shuttle Relay Race:** The members of each team are divided into two groups, one group at each end of the course. When you give the signal to start, one swimmer from each team races to the other end of the pool. When the team member arrives, a team member at that end races to the first end. This continues until each swimmer has completed one length.
Add variety to relays by using different strokes or skills.
7. **Staggered Relay:** Swimmers are positioned in the water an equal distance apart. When you give the signal to start, the first swimmer races to touch the second. When touched, the second swimmer races to touch the third. Then the third swimmer races to touch the fourth, and so on until the final swimmer finishes the total race.
8. **Baton Relay:** You can add variety by having swimmers carry (or wear) an object, which is passed from one swimmer to the next. The object could be a tennis ball, orange, necklace, hat, towel, pair of pyjamas, or anything else you can think of.