

Survival Swimming Guide

Survival Swimming in Every Commonwealth Nation



COMMONWEALTH
DROWNING
PREVENTION



COMMONWEALTH
DROWNING
PREVENTION

Survival Swimming Guide

Survival Swimming in Every Commonwealth Nation

Published by The Royal Life Saving Society Commonwealth.

Royal Life Saving Society, Commonwealth Headquarters
River House, High Street, Broom, Warwickshire, United Kingdom, B50 4HN

Tel: +44 (0)1789 774229 www.rlsscommonwealth.org

February 2016

Copyright, 2016 by The Royal Life Saving Society Commonwealth. The Society encourages the reproduction and use of this guide to promote and support survival swimming training throughout the Commonwealth.

The Royal Life Saving Society is a volunteer humanitarian organization and registered charity dedicated to the prevention of drowning in the Commonwealth.

Established in England in 1891 as The Swimmer's Life Saving Society, we became the Royal Life Saving Society in 1904. The Society has independent and self-governing Member Branches active in 27 Commonwealth nations. HM Queen Elizabeth II is the Patron of the Royal Life Saving Society and HRH Prince Michael of Kent GCVO is the Commonwealth President.

The Society is managed by the Commonwealth Management Committee made up of elected member branch Presidents or their nominees representing the Society's three regional areas: Asia Pacific; Canada/Caribbean; and Africa/Europe.

The Society works with its affiliates, partners and volunteers to reduce drowning through:

- Public Awareness and Education
- Lifesaving and Lifeguard Training
- Survival Swimming and Swim Instruction
- Risk Management
- Lifesaving Sport
- Research into the causes and prevention of drowning
- Advocacy for sound drowning prevention standards

Table of Contents

The RLSS: working to end drowning in the Commonwealth.....	2
What is survival swimming?.....	3
Why survival swimming.....	3
What are survival swimming skills?.....	4
Purpose, Learning Outcomes, Must Sees	4
Safety first	5
Skill Item 1 – Roll into Deep Water	6
Roll – practice activities	7
Skill Item 2 – Tread Water	8
Tread Water – practice activities.....	9
Skill Item 3 – Swim	10
Swim – practice activities.....	11
Teaching concepts.....	12
Teaching for success	12
Teaching using progressions.....	14
Planning your sessions.....	17
Evaluation.....	18
Case histories: Commonwealth nations offering survival swimming.....	19
Bangladesh	19
India	20
Canada	21
St. Lucia.....	23
Taking Action – 7 keys to success to introduce survival swimming	24
Frequently asked questions	25
Sample Survival Swimming Certificate	



125 YEARS OF
COMMONWEALTH
DROWNING
PREVENTION

The Royal Life Saving Society

– *Working to end drowning in the Commonwealth*

Drowning is one of the biggest causes of preventable death in the world today, accounting for 372,000 fatalities every year – over 90 per cent of them in low and middle income countries, and over half of them young people under the age of 25.

Drowning is among the 10 leading causes of death for young people in every region of the world, with children under 5 years disproportionately affected. Drowning kills two thirds of the number of those who die from malnutrition and over half the number of those killed by malaria.

These statistics, from the World Health Organization's 2014 [Global Report on Drowning](#), show the scale of the problem – especially in poorer countries where people are in daily contact with water for work, transport and agriculture.

Prevention is essential, because when someone starts to drown, the outcome is often fatal. Survival usually depends on the speed of removal from the water and how quickly proper resuscitation can take place. So embedding basic swimming and lifesaving education, skills and leadership can make a real difference to communities around the world.

The Royal Life Saving Society supports the [ten actions to prevent drowning](#) outlined in the WHO report.

As an accredited organisation with the Commonwealth Secretariat, and with active Member Branches in 27 Commonwealth nations, the Royal Life Saving Society is well placed to take a lead and partnership role in drowning prevention efforts across the Commonwealth.

The Society aims to develop community-based drowning prevention strategies and lifesaving education programmes, and to advise Governments, NGOs and individuals on the development of water skills to help reduce the terrible toll of death by drowning around the world.

What is survival swimming?

The Royal Life Saving Society has set an ambitious and important drowning prevention goal during its 125th anniversary year: *“The implementation of Survival Swimming in every Commonwealth nation during 2016, at least to fledgling status”*.

For nations where survival swimming is in place, the challenge is to scale it up so that it is available to everyone, and to assist nations for whom survival swimming is not yet a reality.

Survival swimming (the skills to survive an unexpected fall into deep water) is a life skill that every child should have. The goal is that, one day, every person in the Commonwealth will have access to survival swimming.

Why survival swimming?

In its *Global Report on Drowning – Preventing a Leading Killer*, http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/global_report_drowning/en/, the World Health Organization identified 10 Actions to Prevent Drowning. The importance of teaching survival swimming lessons to school-aged children was one of them.

This evidence was cited in their report: Bangladesh has developed and successfully implemented a survival swimming programme for 80,000 children in rural areas. In controlled environments, the children, aged 4-12 years, learned basic swimming and safe rescue skills, specifically: rescue techniques, how to tread water for 30 seconds, and swim 25 metres.

Arming children with these life-saving skills can have a lifelong immunization-like effect against drowning.

In a perfect world, everyone would take lessons to learn to swim. Unfortunately, and for a variety of reasons, the vast majority of people never have this opportunity. Even in developed countries, a sizable portion of the population never learns to swim. Meanwhile, the world’s non-swimmers who live, work and play in, on and around the water – especially young children – are at high risk of drowning.

Survival swimming, which has proven to be an effective drowning prevention strategy, has been implemented in many countries including Bangladesh, Canada, India and others. (See *Case histories*, page 19.)

The implementation of survival swimming in every Commonwealth nation is not meant to replace traditional swimming lessons, but rather to teach the basic fundamental skills necessary to survive an unexpected fall into water – an important first step to being safe around water. The focus is on survival and getting to safety. The skills do not include “style points”.

Aiming to have everyone learn to swim remains a worthy goal. But survival swimming skills can be acquired in more places, by more people in less time and at lower cost than traditional swimming lessons.

What are survival swimming skills?

While programmes differ by nation, survival swimming generally consists of learning the minimum skills need to survive an unexpected fall into deep water:

- Roll into deep water and surface with head above water.
- Any action to keep head above water for a period of time, including treading water, for 30 to 90 seconds.
- Swimming in a controlled direction in any manner for 10–50 metres.

Water safety education is an important component of survival swimming, and self-rescue skills and cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) are included in some survival swimming programmes.

Different nations have different water environments. The size and types of bodies of water can vary dramatically from seas and oceans and large, deep inland lakes to narrow, shallow rivers and creeks. Water conditions also vary including temperature, currents, and waves. Because of this, survival swimming skills should reflect each country's water environment.

Nations in which large, deep lakes and oceans pose the highest drowning risks might consider adopting more challenging requirements, i.e., longer times to keep head above water (e.g., 60 sec.), and a longer swim (e.g., 50 m).

Nations in which narrow, shallow rivers and creeks with warmer water pose the highest drowning risks might find shorter treading water (e.g., 30 sec.) and swim (e.g., 25 m) requirements are appropriate.

Each nation is encouraged to adopt the appropriate survival swimming skills and standards for their needs and circumstances. A roll entry may be an appropriate disorienting entry skill in a swimming pool, but it may not be safe or practical in natural bodies of water. Getting out of the water may be an important survival skill that is appropriate. Additional self-rescue skills may be appropriate in survival swimming programmes. Age-appropriate CPR training might be included.

Purpose, Learning Outcomes, Must Sees

The following pages are designed to help instructors plan, teach, and evaluate three survival swimming skills. This model can be adapted for the skills that may be offered in any nation's survival swimming programme.

Content for each skill item is presented in the following way:

- Item description
- Purpose
- Learning outcome
- Must See
- Notes

Item descriptions indicate what participants are expected to do ("roll into deep water.").

Purpose statements specify why the item is included in the programme (“To ensure participants have the skill and endurance to swim to safety.”).

Must See criteria define the evaluation standard at which participants must perform the item. The instructor uses the “Must Sees” as a checklist for success. If a candidate demonstrates the necessary knowledge and skill to achieve the item’s stated purpose, he or she is probably performing at or above the required standard.

Notes present explanations or limitations of the performance of an item. Suggestions to the instructor are also offered here. Space is provided for instructors to write in their own additional notes.

Safety first

The safety of participants is paramount. Risk management is a big and important issue that must be addressed by anyone offering survival swimming training. All survival swimming instruction programmes should have and follow a safety plan that, at a minimum, addresses safety issues arising from:

Learning environment. Ideally, the learning environment is free from hazards and minimizes risks to the safety of participants. A safety assessment should include: water depth(s), water visibility, water quality, condition of the bottom. Moving water (tides, waves, currents) poses greater challenges than stillwater.

Instructor-to-participant ratio: Many – if not most – participants will be non-swimmers or swimmers with minimal skill. Numbers of instructors and participants are a factor in safety planning. Safety conscious ratios of in-water instructors to learners needs to be specified and needs to be venue specific. For example, ponds with no visibility need smaller ratios as will tidal or moving water environments. Younger children need lower ratios than older children, etc.

Safety supervision: Survival swimming programme providers will have to decide whether the instructor alone can or should be responsible for the safety of participants. Additional lifeguard supervision is always of benefit, but may not always be possible.

Regardless, survival swimming instructors must exercise direct supervision over participants at all times – this means they are never left unattended. Instructors must also exercise good judgement about when to introduce learners to deep water. Teaching a skill in deep water that learners have not previously mastered in shallow water may not only be counterproductive, it may be unsafe.

Instructors: Providers will also have to determine who can teach the programme. Ideally, the instructor is a qualified swim instructor or coach who has the skill, teaching and organizational knowledge and experience required.

Use of buoyant aids like lifejackets or PFDs: The examples on the following pages make reference to lifejackets and PFDs (personal floatation devices). These or similar buoyant aids can be useful in teaching non-swimmers – both from a teaching/learning perspective and in light of safety considerations.

Roll into deep water

Skill 1

Perform a roll into deep water.

Purpose

To ensure participants can orient themselves in deep water.

Learning Outcome

As a result of learning this skill, participants will be able to get their heads above the surface after an unexpected fall into deep water.

Notes

Teach the basics: Swimmers don PFDs and then:

1. Crouch at the water's edge, knees bent.
2. Cover back of head with hands, tuck chin to chest with elbows close to body.
3. Take a deep breath and hold.
4. Roll out into the water away from the point of entry.
5. Surface, lift head to take a breath, return to water's edge.

Common problems

- **Lifting head** – keep chin tucked to chest.
- **Water up nose** – gently exhale through the nose during roll.

Must See

- Entry (simulated fall) into water without assistance
- Feet must not enter water first

Roll – practice activities

ACTIVITY #1 Feet-first entries

Have participants show you their favourite way to enter feet first into the pool:

Non-swimmers: wearing PFD.

Weak swimmers: with or without PFD.

Swimmers: without PFD.

ACTIVITY #2 Log rolls

Participants attempt a “log roll” from the edge of the pool:

Non-swimmers: wearing PFD.

Weak swimmers: with or without PFD.

Swimmers: without PFD.

ACTIVITY #3 Side rolls or forward rolls

Explain that many people who drown don't plan to enter the water. Then demonstrate how they may tumble in. Have each participant attempt it also.

Non-swimmers: wearing PFD.

Weak swimmers: with or without PFD.

Swimmers: without PFD.

ACTIVITY #4 How many different entries can you do?

Participants explore different ways to enter deep water.

Non-swimmers: wearing PFD, demonstrate 2 different ways to enter the water.

Weak swimmers: with or without PFD, demonstrate 4 different ways to enter the water.

Swimmers: without PFD, demonstrate 6 different ways to enter the water.

Tread water

Demonstrate the ability to support nose and mouth above water for 30–60 sec.

Notes

Teach the basics: Swimmers don PFDs and then:

1. Enter chest-deep (or deeper) water.
2. Sweep hands and arms at a slight back angle, back and forth just below the surface.
3. Use any kick or combination of kicks.
4. Put the two skills together. Keeping lungs as full as possible maximizes buoyancy.

Common problems

- **Trouble maintaining body position** – alter head position (back or forward), modify position of the arm action.
- **Sinking** – check swimmer is sculling (using a pushing and pulling actions of the hand); increase sculling speed; alter arm position (broader or narrower); use a more propulsive and harder kick.

Purpose

To ensure participants can gain control of their breathing and find safety.

Learning Outcome

As a result of learning this skill, participants will be able to keep their mouths above the surface so that they can breathe while in deep water.

Must See

- Nose and mouth above surface for 30 seconds or better

Tread water – practice activities

ACTIVITY #1 How long can you tread water?

Set a maximum time appropriate for participants' swim abilities. Ask each participant to set a personal-best time goal.

Non-swimmers: wear lifejacket or use buoyant aid for 1–2 min.

Weak swimmers: with or without lifejacket/PFD for 2–3 min.

Swimmers: without PFD for 3–5 min.

ACTIVITY #2 How high can you tread water?

Participants try to get their shoulders above the surface and see how long they can maintain this position.

Non-swimmers: wearing PFD.

Weak swimmers: with or without PFD.

Swimmers: without PFD.

ACTIVITY #3 Sculling drills

Participants attempt sculling in different positions:

- On back, knees tucked to chest, spin in a circle
- On back, holding a ball between their feet
- On back, traveling forward and backward

Non-swimmers: wearing PFD.

Weak swimmers: with or without PFD.

Swimmers: without PFD.

ACTIVITY #4 Obstacle course

Using the skills above, participants perform an obstacle course or relay race.

Non-swimmers: wearing PFD.

Weak swimmers: with or without PFD.

Swimmers: without PFD.

Swim

Move through water 25–50 metres.

Notes

Teach the basics:

Swimmers don PFDs and then:

1. Enter waist-deep water.
2. Manoeuvre into a horizontal body position (front or back, head in or out of water).
3. Propel themselves forward using any method. Arms may recover above or below the surface.
4. Any kick is acceptable.

Common problems

- **Body position** – change head position (lift up or down).
- **Arm mechanics** – proper arm recovery and pull.
- **Kick mechanics** – e.g., pointed toes – flutter kick, flexed foot – whip kick.

Purpose

To ensure participants have the skill and endurance to swim to safety.

Learning Outcome

As a result of learning this skill, participants will be able to move from deep water to a point of safety.

Must See

- Continuous swim (may include treading water)
- Distance completed

Swim – practice activities

ACTIVITY #1 What is your favourite way to swim?

Participants show you their favourite way to move through the water.

Non-swimmers: wearing PFD.

Weak swimmers: with or without PFD.

Swimmers: without PFD.

ACTIVITY #2 Which way is easiest?

Participants attempt to move through the water in different ways. Ask them which way was easiest?

Non-swimmers: wearing PFD.

Weak swimmers: with or without a PFD.

Swimmers: without PFD.

ACTIVITY #3 Workouts

Use short distance drills, such as:

- Legs-only using different kicks such as flutter, whip, etc.
- Arms-only using different methods such as recover over water, recover underwater, etc.
- Full stroke.

Non-swimmers: wearing PFD.

Weak swimmers: with or without a PFD.

Swimmers: without PFD.

ACTIVITY #4 Timed swim

Time participants in each session and have them keep track of their progress.

Non-swimmers: wearing PFD.

Weak swimmers: with or without PFD.

Swimmers: without PFD.

Teaching concepts

Teaching for Success

Survival mode versus learning mode The survival swimming skills are the foundation for being able to be comfortable in the water, but anxiety can have a negative effect on the learner's readiness to learn.

When attempting an aquatic skill for the first time, learners may feel their very survival is in jeopardy (e.g., "will I be able to breathe?"). If so they may be said to be in "survival mode" – they cannot think about how to do the skill when they are focused only on getting the next breath.

When considering your teaching approach, ask yourself if the learner will be operating in "survival mode" or "learning mode". To be in learning mode, they should feel that they are in control of their situation; that they can take a breath whenever they want; and that they can stop at any time.

Using floatation aids as teaching tools

When learning to swim, the learner must be able to solve three problems:

Orientation: How do I orient myself and control my body as it moves?

Support: How do I support myself to get a breath when I want or need it?

Propulsion: How do I control my movement through the water to get to my destination?

A teaching approach that initially focuses the learner on one problem at a time will reduce learner anxiety, speed up the learning process, and increase the chances of success. Using floatation aids as teaching tools provide support to the learner so that they:

1. Can breathe whenever they need to.
2. Get good quality practice, because they can:
 - Focus on learning the new movement
 - Follow feedback
 - Rest when they need to

Floatation aids include: lifejackets, PFDs, kickboards, floatation belts, bleach bottles or noodles.

Teaching concepts *(continued)*

Going lifejacket or Personal Floatation Device free If students are concerned about being able to perform the skill without assistance, the use of lifejacket or personal floatation devices (PFD) or other buoyant aids will help support their bodies while they determine how best to use their legs. When the student is ready, he or she can attempt the skills without a buoyant support, but this decision should be the learner's not the teacher's.

To help the student recognize that they are ready to try a skill without support an instructor can:

- Give lots of positive and encouraging feedback.
- If the student appears afraid, offer encouraging support.
- Assist the student rather than having them do it on their own.
- Use progressions – have the student attempt the water skills in shallower water.

We recommend that all students attempt the swim without a PFD at some point.

Easing students' fear Students who are afraid of water need time to get “the feel of it” – learning to trust how their body responds to water's buoyancy. For some, learning to walk through water, use of controlled breathing skills and then progressing to front and back floats and standing up after these floats are major accomplishments.

Always start fearful students with lifejackets on, keep the tasks simple and within their comfort level. Stay close, always within arms' reach.

Do not force participants to do any skill they don't want to. Each student will work at his/her own pace. Fearful students need to have a sense of control of how quickly new skills are introduced. Introducing a new skill that seems “risky” to the student requires patience and well thought out progressions. When skills are introduced properly, the student will find that the task was not as difficult as first imagined.

Teaching concepts *(continued)*

Participants with disabilities An individual who has a disability can easily participate in survival swimming. The unique teaching approach in using floatation aids creates two opportunities. The learner can easily participate within a group and the floatation aid provides any extra buoyancy that they may require.

The flexible nature of the evaluation criteria (*any method that allows the learner to get to safety is acceptable*) makes it easy to accommodate the student's special needs.

Teaching using progressions

Progressions should always be used regardless of swimming ability. Listed below are some suggested progressions.

-
- Entry**
1. Try somersaults in shallow water.
 2. Try simple jumps into deep water for orientation and surfacing.
 3.
 - a. Practice somersault rolls on a mat on the deck.
 - b. Try somersault rolls from a floating mat in deep water.
 - c. Try somersault rolls entry onto mat into deep water.
 4. Try somersault roll entry without mat into deep water.

-
- Tread water**
1. Practice arm and feet action separately.
 2. Stand in shallow water and sweep hands and arms back and forth like spreading jam on a large piece of bread.
 3. Angle hands and forearms slightly and use broad flat sculling action.
 4. Use PFDs for support while learning how to scull.
 5. For kicking action – position learners in deeper water so they can clear the bottom during the kicks.
 6. Practice arms and legs together to increase endurance.
 7. When swimmers can support themselves at the surface experiment with scissor and eggbeater kicks.

Teaching concepts *(continued)*

Swim Enter waist-deep water.

1. Encourage participants to put their face in water, practicing breath control.
2. Move to submerging the face and/or body and opening eyes underwater.

Participants put on PFDs (if required) and then:

1. Attempt floats on front and/or back.
2. Practice glides with kicking (front or back) using any form of kick.
3. Attempt propulsion using arms (in any fashion, on front or back, head in or out of water).
4. Add breathing using a regular pattern (if possible).
5. When ready, encourage students to try without a PFD.
6. Have all participants attempt a distance without a PFD (in shallow water at the very least).

Safety considerations

Area required for the activity

- ✓ Is the water depth adequate?
- ✓ Is there adequate space for each student?
- ✓ Is there a buffer area between participants and other classes or hazards (e.g., drop offs, lane ropes, diving boards)?

Ability of the students

- ✓ Do participants have the appropriate lead up skills?
- ✓ Do participants understand the activity to be performed?
- ✓ Is the activity appropriate for the physical ability of participants?
- ✓ Is the activity flexible to accommodate differences in levels of experience and skill?
- ✓ Does the activity allow observation of each person at all times?

Teaching concepts *(continued)*

Safety notes *Entry*

- Encourage participants to roll out and away from the point of entry.
- Plan safety routines that keep participants from accidentally landing on someone.
- Back rolls should not be taught or practiced.

Tread water

- Always practice a new skill in shallow water or in PFDs before moving to deeper water.
- Plan safety routines that keep participants from bumping into each other.
- Always let participants decide when they want to remove the lifejacket or PFD to attempt the skill without it.

Swim

- Practice new skills in shallow water or in PFDs before moving to deeper water.
- Weak or non-swimmers will need time to explore swimming skills and using their lifejacket or PFD before attempting to swim in deeper water.
- Plan safety routines that keep participants from bumping into each other.
- Always let participants decide when they want to remove the lifejacket or PFD in deep water to attempt the swim without it.

-
- Top safety rules**
1. Outline the safety rules before beginning the activity.
 2. Set boundaries.
 3. Never turn your back on the class. Keep participants in front of you and supervise them at all times.
 4. Perform regular head counts.
 5. Ensure swimmers enter shallow water feet-first every time.
 6. Have a buoyant aid available at all times.
 7. Use a signal system (e.g., whistle) that all children understand (e.g., 1 blast = “Attention: look at me.” 2 blasts = “Everyone leave the water immediately.”)
 8. Stay focused and don’t get distracted when children are in the water.

Planning your sessions

Groups with diverse skills Each lesson should include practice activities for each of the survival swimming skills.

When planning for your class, follow these steps:

1. Always screen your participants to determine their individual abilities
2. Always demonstrate the skill
3. Provide plenty of practice for each skill
4. Allow for each participant to practice skills at his or her own pace.

Teaching groups with diverse skills After participants have been screened and more than one instructor is available, divide participants by the number of instructors available. Groups can be divided in the following ways:

- By pool space – shallow group / mid group / Deep end group
- By ability – beginner / intermediate / advanced
- By skill – stations are set up, each station focuses on a skill and participants move from station to station

Evaluation

Evaluating the survival swimming standard The purpose of survival swimming instruction is to equip participants with the minimum skills they need to survive. This is not a learn-to-swim programme.

Any method that allows the learner to achieve the “survival” standard (determined by each nation) is acceptable. There is no single “right” solution. A key component of the teaching strategy is a problem-solving approach to help learners find an effective solution appropriate for them.

Do participants receive anything at the completion of the programme? An optional certificate is available for everyone who participates in the survival swimming (sample attached). The certificate provides a variety of options from which instructors can choose the recognition appropriate for each participant’s achievement:

- ✓ Can roll into deep water.
- ✓ Can tread water for ____ seconds.
- ✓ Can swim ____ metres.
- ✓ Has achieved the survival swimming standard.

In addition, space is provided to add additional skills.

Regardless of the achievement level indicated on the certificate, the Royal Life Saving Society encourages **all** children to learn to swim beyond the minimum survival swimming standard.

Case histories: Commonwealth nations offering survival swimming

Bangladesh

The Prevention of Child Injury through Social-intervention and Education (PRECISE) was implemented in Bangladesh between 2006 and 2010. The PRECISE programme covered over three quarters of a million people in villages in rural Bangladesh. Two specific components of the programme targeted drowning.

Research showed that drowning for young children commonly occurred while playing with friends of the same age in a large pond or other body of water in the community. These children (4–10 years of age) received training in the SwimSafe programme which taught water safety, safe rescue and survival swimming to children from rural areas, in the village pond which had been converted into a safe training site. Children in urban areas were taught in permanent and portable pools.

The graduation criteria were identified as 25 metres of swimming; treading for 30 seconds and acquiring skills of rescue.

As of spring 2012, about 300,000 children had graduated from SwimSafe. Fatal drowning rates in children who participated in the Swim Safe intervention were 93% lower than non-participating children in the control group.

Funding and partners

During the development of the Swim Safe programme in 2005, The Alliance for Safe Children (TASC) provided funding. With the financial support from the TASC, the Centre for Injury Prevention Bangladesh (CIPRB) in cooperation with RLSS Australia developed the swimming teaching manual and established 5 venues for teaching. Moreover, with that funding, the programme was piloted and later evaluated for its feasibility and acceptability in the community.

The pilot project evaluation confirmed that SwimSafe was feasible and acceptable to the children and their parents. In late 2006, SwimSafe was incorporated into the PRECISE project – a community-based intervention study for the prevention of child injuries including drowning. This research project was funded by UNICEF- Bangladesh from 2006-2010.

After the completion of PRECISE, SwimSafe continued as an independent programme with UNICEF funding. Since 2012, Plan Bangladesh and TASC have funded the programme.

Key challenges and lessons learned

1. The difficulty in keeping the bamboo structures in place. Often the bamboo structures were stolen.

2. Swimming teaching cannot be continued throughout the year. During the summer, the ponds dry up and during the winter the water is too cold for the children.
3. Due to a gradual increase in commercial fish farming, many of the ponds cannot be used as a swimming venue.
4. In the urban areas, due to lack of ponds and limited number of swimming pools, a vast majority of the urban children could not be incorporated into the SwimSafe programme.

The findings of the programme are very promising. It can be concluded that teaching swimming institutionally in programmes like the SwimSafe programme is feasible and can prevent drowning even in a low-income country setting. It is felt, that to make the programme sustainable, it is important to incorporate swimming teaching through school-based programmes, to involve the community in the process, and to utilize local resources.

Video reference: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8IDyRQjTH0Q>

Contact information: Centre for Injury and Research - Bangladesh (CIPRB) www.ciprb.org; Dr. Aminur Rahman – aminur@ciprb.org

India

India has a programme called Swim N Survive in various parts of the country. The programme is based on learning from programmes in Australia and Canada. It is designed to provide students between 5 and 14 years of age with the skills:

- to survive an unexpected fall into deep water
- to keep them safe around water, and
- to recognize danger areas around water

The children learn how to:

- Roll into deep water
- Support themselves at the surface (treading water)
- Swim to safety
- Retrieve an object from the water
- Rescue

Swim N Survive is most commonly delivered in a public pool facility, school pool or private swim school. It is also delivered in portable pools. Generally the teaching space is divided into lanes and/or sections appropriate to the requirements of the ability level being taught.

The programme has been adapted at times to be delivered in locations such as a lake or river for special programmes. Different parts of India have additional levels in their Swim N Survive programme. The programme is operational in three states (Tamil Nadu, and Bengal). The target states for expansion are Odisha, Goa, and Gujarat.

Funding and partners

RLSS (I) charges for services or courses when possible and re-invests that money to provide services for free to those who cannot afford to pay.

RLSS (I) intends to build links with prominent swimming clubs, highlighting the pathways for Swim N Survive participants into these clubs. In addition, they will engage with both the ministries of education, youth services and sport, advocating for the adoption of Swim N Survive as part of the school curriculum.

Directorate of Sports and Youth Affairs, Government of Kerala, Speedo International, International Inspiration (UK Sport), Australian Sports Commission and schools are partners.

Key challenges and lessons learned

1. Swim N Survive is an introductory aquatic programme. A child is put through it at the behest of his/her parents or mentor. The effectiveness of the programme increases with continued practice. Children are encouraged to continue to improve their style and stamina. At this stage, the role of the trainer or coach is important as he or she can hold childrens' interest for further growth and motivate them to build on their Swim N Survive training.
2. Children view a champion swimmer as a role model.
3. The challenge is to get other states involved. An aggressive campaign to take Swim N Survive to selected cities in every state is a priority to expand the programme and to measure its impact on annual drowning figures among children. This will take time and effort.

Video reference: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bhVC7_4nOBs

Contact Information: RLSS (I) www.lifesavingindia.org; Rear Admiral PD Sharma – purush@lifesavingindia.org.

Canada

Canada's Swim to Survive programme is offered in all provinces. The greatest concentration is in Ontario – Canada's most populous province.

In the late 1990's the Lifesaving Society Canada conducted a review of all learn-to-swim and lifesaving programmes (Lifesaving Society, Canadian Red Cross, YMCA, private companies) to identify the minimum skills required to survive an unexpected fall into deep water. From that review, three skills were identified – **Roll** into deep water, **Tread** water for 1 minute and to **Swim** 50 metres.

The combination of these skills comprised the **Canadian Swim-to-Survive Standard** – a minimum national standard of swimming skill for all children, based on drowning research evidence. The standard was developed into a programme in 2005 and was introduced as a school programme in 2006. It was positioned as a survival swimming programme with three skills, taught in three lessons, in three

hours. In addition, three water safety lesson plans were developed for teachers to deliver in the classroom, and materials for parents were created and subsequently translated into 26 languages.

Since the launch of the programme it has been expanded into all provinces in Canada in various forms (school grant programme, summer programme, camp programme and after school programme).

It is difficult to measure the drowning prevention effectiveness of the programme in the short term, as the highest drowning rate in Canada is with adult men. The true measure of the effectiveness will be evident in the longer term.

Funding and partners

The programme involves partners at the local level (community partners such as school councils, and service clubs) as well as government (local schools, school boards) and the biggest funder is the provincial Ministry of Education. The founding sponsor is a private foundation – the Stephanie Gaetz KEEPSAFE Foundation.

Key challenges and lessons learned

1. Funding is the key challenge to this programme. Without government support this programme would not be possible. Initially, it was difficult to engage school boards/schools to work together with municipalities to apply for funding. Once the partnership was established, the implementation of the programme became much easier.
2. A community champion is essential. Each community requires one person to take the lead and initiate the implementation of the programme. Without that person the programme will not take place.
3. Transportation is a challenge. Most schools do not have pools and many are quite a distance from a pool. Transportation costs are very high and continue to rise. Engaging transportation companies to support and possibly sponsor some of the transportation costs would benefit the programme.
4. Attaining appropriate pool time is a challenge. The hours are very limited during school time due to many factors. Therefore, to serve so many children both schools and pools are required to be creative in their approach.

Video reference: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBiS0os4m9Y>

Contact information: Lifesaving Society Ontario www.lifesavingsociety.com;
Barbara Byers barbarab@lifeguarding.com.

Saint Lucia

A Swim to Survive programme – based on the Canadian programme – was launched in Saint Lucia in 2012. The programme is for 7-year-olds to adults who learn the following skills:

- Roll into deep water.
- Tread water for 1 minute.
- Put on a lifejacket or PFD in the water.
- Swim minimum of 50 metres to safety.
- Climb out of water and onto a platform.

The programme has been offered both at pools and in open water. Since there has been no consistent or reliable funding for the programme, it is integrated into learn-to-swim and swim coaching activities. Swim clubs offer the programme during their regular after school weekday sessions. Independent instructors may offer the programme after school and on weekends.

Funding and partners

Until the end of 2015, no grant funding or partnerships had been secured. Candidates pay for their own tuition and most cannot afford regular swim classes.

Key challenges and lessons learned

1. The success of this programme is totally reliant on the commitment of the instructors. There is an urgent need to train more instructors to teach Swim to Survive.
2. Drowning prevention and swimming lessons are yet to be recognized as national priorities. While parents would like their children to learn to swim, most are unable to swim and parents find the cost of swimming classes to be prohibitive.
3. There are also no national swimming facilities. Access to suitable swimming pools is also limited. The pool fees can be very high.
4. The cost of transportation is another challenge.

Partnership with the Lifesaving Society Ontario

The Lifesaving Society Ontario has offered organizational assistance and funding to support the programme. The plan is to reach 400 students by the end of 2016. Saint Lucia Life Saving Association has committed to:

- identify aquatic facilities that would be willing to support the programme by donating facility time and possibly swim instructors
- identify schools within a close proximity to each facility in order to reduce transportation costs

- create a budget. Once facility, staff and schools have been identified, look at sourcing additional funding sponsors on the island to assist in the sustainability of the programme
- reach out to the Life Saving Association for assistance in implementing the programme

Contact Information: Saint Lucia Life Saving Association; Germain M. Anthony President – gmaxbox@gmail.com; sluwatersafety@gmail.com.

Taking Action – 7 keys to success to introduce survival swimming

1. Find a community champion.

Each community needs one person – or a group of people – to take the lead, find partners and initiate the survival swimming programme. The champion might be a lifesaving association, a swimming teacher or coach, a school, a nurse, a public health advocate or a group of committed parents.

2. Start small and grow.

A pilot programme will allow you to get all partners involved so that they feel it is “their” programme. With a pilot programme you can learn from the experience, identify gaps or opportunities for improvement and, most importantly, share the success with others for funding and new partners.

3. Recruit and train enough instructors.

Ideally, the instructors who teach survival swimming programme are already swimming teachers or coaches. Ensure they understand the goal of a survival swimming programme with a focus on survival, not swimming stroke development.

4. Make sure the water environment is safe and that the swimmers are supervised.

The instructional setting does not need to be a public pool. It can be open water, a beach setting, portable pools, hotel or club pools. Ensure adequate safety supervision of participants at all times and exercise good judgement when introducing participants to deep water.

5. Be creative and resourceful with transportation.

Contact local bus companies and partners to fund/donate some of the transportation costs and schedule the lessons so that the bus is full and is utilized for an entire day.

6. Partners, partners, partners.

Partnerships are the key to success in every community that has introduced survival swimming. Partners provide expertise, resources, and funding to grow the programme. Most of all partnerships instill a commitment to the programme and belief that it is theirs to grow. Potential partners can include, but are not limited to, government (national, regional and local), transportation companies, community pools, clubs or hotels, charitable organizations, the media and corporate partners.

7. Offer and accept assistance!

If you are a nation with an established survival swimming programme, offer to help another commonwealth country that has no experience. If you have no experience with survival swimming and are keen to get started, contact a commonwealth country that has an established programme for pointers and for assistance.

Frequently asked questions

Why is any method of performing the survival swimming skills accepted?

We aim to provide students with a swim solution that allows them to acquire these minimum survival skills in the shortest time possible. Once they achieve the standard, teaching can focus on helping them become more efficient.

Doesn't using PFDs send the wrong message about safety supervision?

PFDs are not a substitute for the direct supervision of non-swimmers – by instructors or parents. The PFD is a useful teaching tool that supports the learner at the surface and allows them to keep hands and feet free to experiment with methods for propulsion and support.

Should I be teaching water safety during survival swimming sessions?

Yes. Teachers should introduce appropriate water safety messages wherever possible.

Where can I find more teaching information?

Consult one or more of the many swimming manuals available from national swimming or lifesaving organisations.

Why were these skills chosen?

In its position statement* on survival swimming, the International Life Saving Federation identified basic aquatic survival skill as: the ability to swim no less than 25 m, floatation for 1 minute, and performance of basic rescue techniques.

The 25 m distance was based on evidence from large case-control studies on child drowning in Bangladesh and Thailand and a Delphi process that included an investigation of patterns of drowning, anthropological assessment of swimming abilities of older children, consultation with self-appointed village swim instructors, the review of international guidelines including those from Australia and Canada.

**Position statement on Survival swimming. (International Life Saving Federation. Position Statement: Swimming and Water Safety Education. International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education 2007;1(4):373-377).*

The content of survival swimming programmes may differ, but they all have the same objective: to prepare participants to survive an unexpected fall into water over their heads.

Why are there a range of times and swim distances?

Survival swimming training should take into account the different water environments of different nations. In some, the drowning risk is highest in warm, still water. In others, the drownings occur more frequently in colder, rougher water. It's best that the host nation establish the most appropriate standards for the survival swimming skills.

How do I get started?

Review the *Case histories* (page 19) from other nations and their videos. Contact them for more information. Start small with a pilot project.

Who gets the survival swimming certificate?

The sample recognition certificate can be given to all participants in a survival swimming programme regardless of their skill level.

The certificate is a fillable PDF which lets you add the participant's name, location and date, and instructor's name. You can check off the appropriate achievement for each individual. Space is provided for you to add two additional survival swimming skills if appropriate.

Modify the certificate to suit your circumstances and needs.



COMMONWEALTH
DROWNING
PREVENTION

RLSS Commonwealth Survival Swimming



Participant

- can roll into deep water**
- can tread water for _____ seconds**
- can swim _____ metres**
- achieved the Survival Swimming Standard**
- _____
- _____

Location & Date

Instructor



125 YEARS OF
COMMONWEALTH
DROWNING
PREVENTION