COMMONWEALTH
DROWNING
PREVENTION

RLSS SURVIVAL SWIMMING GUIDE

A guide to Survival Swimming for use by RLSS
Commonwealth members in low resource settings.

The Royal Life Saving Society is an accredited organisation with the Commonwealth Secretariat and a 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, which has independent and self-governing members across the Commonwealth, is managed by the Board of Trustees comprised of elected Trustees from each of the Society's three regional areas: Asia Pacific; Canada/Caribbean; and Africa/Europe.

HM King Charles III is the Patron of the Royal Life Saving Society and HRH Prince Michael of Kent GCVO is the Commonwealth President.

The Society works with its members, affiliates, partners and volunteers to reduce drowning through: Public Awareness and Education; Lifesaving and Lifeguard Training; Survival Swimming Instruction; Risk Management; Lifesaving Sport; Research into the causes and prevention of drowning; and Advocacy for sound drowning prevention standards.

The Society aims to develop community-based drowning prevention strategies and interventions, 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.

Contents

The Royal Life Saving Society

Working to prevent drowning in the Commonwealth

Drowning is one of the biggest causes of preventable death in the world today, accounting for 300,000 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 29.

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 *Global Status Report on Drowning* 2024, (1) 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 result in death, morbidity and no morbidity. 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 (RLSS) supports the actions to prevent drowning outlined in the WHO report.

As an accredited organisation with the Commonwealth Secretariat, and with active Member Organisations in 32 Commonwealth nations, the RLSS is well placed to take a lead and partnership role in downing prevention efforts across the Commonwealth.

The RLSS 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 RLSS has a crucial objective of preventing drowning by promoting survival swimming in Commonwealth nations. For countries where survival swimming is already implemented, the challenge is to expand its reach so that it becomes accessible to everyone.

The RLSS also aims to help countries where survival swimming is not yet prevalent. The ability to survive an unforeseen fall or entry into deep water by using survival swimming skills is a life skill that every child should possess. The ultimate goal is to make survival swimming accessible to all Commonwealth citizens.

Why survival swimming

In its 2014 *Global Report on Drowning – Preventing a Leading Killer*, (2) and the 2017 Preventing Drowning: an Implementation Guide, (3) the World Health Organization (WHO) identified 10 Actions to Prevent Drowning. The importance of teaching survival swimming and water safety 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 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 Commonwealth countries including Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, India and others.

Subsequent to the release of the 2017 the WHO Preventing Drowning: an implementation guide, (3) the WHO provided another guide in 2022, titled Preventing Drowning, (4) which provided a focus on how to implement the effective measures to prevent drowning, provision of day-care, basic swimming and water safety skills (aka survival swimming), and safe rescue and resuscitation training.

The International Life Saving Federation has acknowledged that a basic level of water safety awareness combined with a basic level of swimming skills is sufficient to prevent most drowning episodes. (5) Unfortunately, not everyone can learn to swim, even in developed countries, and the world's non-swimmers are at high risk of drowning, especially young children who live, work, and play near water.

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 or entry into water – an important first step to being safe around water.

What are survival swimming skills

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

1. Water safety knowledge
2. Rotation & entry into deep water
3. Survival floating
4. Treading water
5. Swim
6. Rescue Skills
7. Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation

Water safety education is an important component of survival swimming, including self-rescue skills and cardio-pulmonary resuscitation (CPR) are important components in survival swimming programmes. (4)

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. For example, 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. Whereas getting out of the water is an important survival skill in most environments. Additional self-rescue skills may be appropriate in survival swimming programmes as well as age-appropriate CPR skills being included in the programme.

Purpose, Learning Outcomes, Must Sees

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

Content for each skill item is presented in the following way:
- Purpose
- Learning Outcome
- Must See
- Notes

Purpose indicates what participants are expected to do, and specify why the item is included in the program ("To ensure participants have the skill and endurance to swim to safety.").

Learning Outcome indicates the learners ability to achieve the desired outcome from applying the skills and knowledge gained through the learning activity.

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.

Safety first

The safety of participants is paramount. Risk management is a significant issue that must be addressed by anyone offering survival swimming courses. 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.

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

Water Safety Knowledge - Skill 1

Awareness and insight into aquatic dangers

Notes

Purpose

Demonstrate knowledge of aquatic environments, potential hazards and water safety principles, and measures to prevent injury in, on, and around the water.

Learning Outcome

Demonstrate knowledge of aquatic environments, potential hazards and water safety principles, and measures to prevent injury in, on, and around the water.

Foundation knowledge for learners

1. Aquatic environments may include oceans, lakes, rivers, pools, bathtub, etc. with hands, tuck chin to chest with elbows close to body.

2. Potential hazards may include currents, waves, undertow, deep water, sandbars, pollution, fall from safety, capsized craft, etc.

3. Water safety principles or measures may include avoid or eliminate hazards, learn to swim, carry buoyant aids, wear a lifejacket etc.Surface, lift head to take a breath, return to water's edge.

4. Should be demonstrated through practical activities, if not possible, oral questioning may be used.

Must See

- Have drawings or pictures of different aquatic environments including hazards as described in the Notes section. In groups or individually have candidates work through each diagram to identify the safety hazards represented and present the safety principles or measures they would use to prevent aquatic injuries in that setting.

- Using the example test available or make your own, allow candidates to orally or through writing demonstrate their knowledge of aquatic environments, safety principles, and measures used to prevent aquatic injuries.

Rotation & entry into deep water - Skill 2

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 (when available) and then:

5. Crouch at the water's edge, knees bent.

6. Cover back of head with hands, tuck chin to chest with elbows close to body.

7. Take a deep breath and hold.

8. Roll out into the water away from the point of entry.

9. 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

COMMONWEALTH
DROWNING
PREVENTION

Entries/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.

Survival floating - Skill 3

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

Purpose

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

Notes

Teach the basics: Swimmers can don PFDs or use flotation aids and then:

1. Enter chest-deep (or deeper) water.
2. Extend hands and arms at right angles to the body, just below the surface.
3. Extend the legs and spread them out to form a V.
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 floating (head must be neutral, not looking at feet); provide some initial support on back to help preparation..

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

Floating – practice activities

ACTIVITY #1   **How long can you float in the 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 flotation aid for 30 sec.

> Weak swimmers: with or without lifejacket/PFD or flotation aid for 1 min.

> Swimmers: without PFD for 2 min.

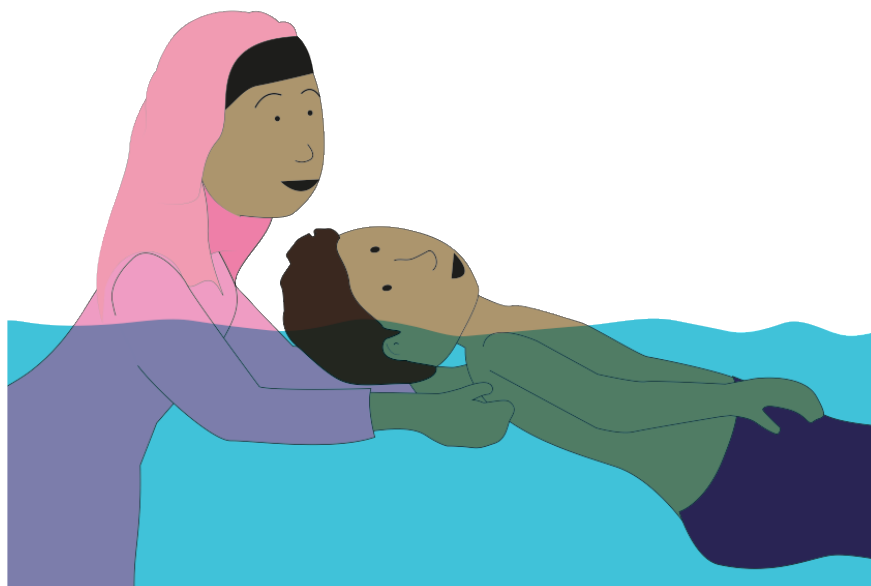**ACTIVITY #2**   **Sculling drills**

While floating participants attempt sculling in different directions:

- On back, toes pointed, move forward, toes first
- On back, toes pointed, move backwards, head first

Non-swimmers: wearing or using flotation aid/PFD.

Weak swimmers: with or without flotation aid/PFD.

Swimmers: without flotation aid/PFD.

COMMONWEALTH DROWNING PREVENTION

Treading water - Skill 4

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

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

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.

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.
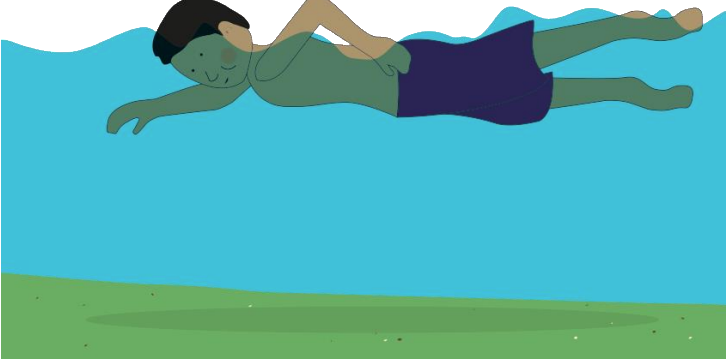
Non-swimmers: wearing PFD.

Weak swimmers: with or without PFD.

Swimmers: without PFD.

Swim - Skill 5

Move through water 25–50 metres.

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

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.

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 floating/sculling/treading water)

- Distance completed

Swim – practice activities

| | ACTIVITY #1 | **What is your favourite way to swim?** |

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.

Rescue skills - Skill 6

Demonstrate the ability to be rescued and to rescue someone with a reach or throw rescue.

Notes

Teach the basics: Swimmers clothed (e.g. shorts and T-shirt) or in swim wear

1. Enter waist-deep water

2. Manoeuvre into a vertical body position in the water

3. Demonstrate signalling for help by raising one arm and waving side to side

4. Take firm hold of rescue aid to be pulled to a point of safety

5. Reach and throw a rescue aid to a person in difficulty and pull or guide them to a point of safety

Common problems

- **Letting go of aid** – practice to ensure strong grip is maintained

- **Aid needs to be in within reach** – practice throwing and reaching

- **Rescuer needs to have a safe position**
  e.g., feet apart, laying down to avoid slipping

Purpose

To ensure participants have the skill and endurance to be rescued or to undertake a basic rescue.

Learning Outcome

As a result of learning this skill, participants will be able to be rescued from water or to assist other participants to a point of safety.

Must See

- Take hold of a rigid item, towel or a rope to be pulled to safety

- Using a rigid item be pulled by another participant to a point of safety (up to 5 metres)

- Throw a flotation aid to a person (up to 5 metres from safety) and instruct them to kick to a point of safety

- Distance completed

Reach Rescue

Wade Rescue   Rope Throw Rescue

COMMONWEALTH DROWNING PREVENTION

Rescue skills – practice activities

ACTIVITY #1   **What is some suitable rescue aids?**

Participants identify suitable rescue aids that can support a person in difficulty in the water.

Rigid - Sticks, poles, pool noodles, buckets.

Non-rigid - towels, clothing, rope.

ACTIVITY #2   **Which rescue aid is best for what situation?**

Participants practice rescuing and being rescued using a range of aids that they might encounter in and around the water. Ask them which aid they found easy to use?

Rigid or Non-rigid?

ACTIVITY #3   **Workouts**

Use practice drills, such as:

- Having the people sculling through the water to simulate current carrying them away from rescuer.

- People being rescued being clothed or in swim wear.

- Vary the length from safety when using different rescue aids.

Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)

Perform Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR)

Notes

Teach the basics: First responders assess the situation and then:

1. Respond to an emergency situation.
2. Perform CPR procedures.
3. Communicate details of the incident.
4. Review the incident and outcomes.

Common problems

- **Chest not rising** -insufficient head tilt to open the airway.

- **Air escaping** – need to seal mouth and nose to prevent air escaping.

- **External Cardiac Compression –** hand position, rate & depth of compression.

Purpose

To ensure participants have the skill and knowledge to perform cardio pulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

Learning Outcome

As a result of learning this skill, participants will be able to provide CPR in a range of situations, including community aquatic.

Must See

- Recognition and assessment an emergency situation, ensuring the safety for self, bystanders and the casualty.

- Identify the need for CPR and seek medical assistance.

- Provide a CPR in accordance with the DRSABCD procedure.

- Maintain and monitor the casualty and review the incident and response as required.

CPR Skills Practice – Activity Details

ACTIVITY #1

- Recognise and assess an emergency situation.
- Ensure safety for self, bystanders and casualty.
- Assess the casualty and recognise the need for cardiopulmonary   resuscitation (CPR).
- Seek assistance from emergency services.

ACTIVITY #2

- Perform CPR in accordance with the ARC guidelines.
- Display respectful behaviour towards casualty.
- Operate an automated external defibrillator (AED) according to manufacturers' instructions (where available).

ACTIVITY #3

- Accurately convey incident details to emergency services.
- Report details of incident in line with appropriate workplace or site procedures.
- Maintain privacy and confidentiality of information in line with statutory or organisational policies.

ACTIVITY #4

- Recognise the possible psychological impacts on self and other rescuers and seek help when required.
- Contribute to a review of the first aid response as required.

NOTES

The teaching of CPR skills even for young children can be a fundamental skill that will have lasting benefits as the competencies can be learnt and practiced with relative ease from a young age.

There are documented cases of children successfully administering CPR to siblings as well as older family members. So the old adage that you "are never too young to learn" seems appropriate when we consider the opportunity to include CPR in a survival swimming programme.

Specific training information and programme is available in the RLSS Commonwealth CPR Manual and will not be replicated as part of this resource.

View videos at https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=0qyvlP_HDs8

https://edition.cnn.com/videos/us/2019/07/02/7-year-old-saves-older-sister-from-drowning-seizure-pkg-vpx.wjax-wfox

https://www.elitereaders.com/5-year-old-boy-saves-brother-from-choking/

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.

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 (pool noodle) 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.

It is 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.

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.

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)*

COMMONWEALTH DROWNING PREVENTION

| **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/enter into deep water.
- ✓ Can float for _____ seconds
- ✓ Can tread water for _____ seconds.
- ✓ Can swim _____ metres.
- ✓ Can be rescued and rescue another person
- ✓ 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.

Survival Swimming Resources: Commonwealth and Associated Organisations

1. Royal Lifesaving Society Commonwealth - Teacher of Survival Swimming and Water Safety – toolkit to assist aquatic teachers offer a comprehensive programme of survival swimming.
2. RLSS Commonwealth CPR Manual – provides the necessary skills and knowledge for people to administer resuscitation to an unconscious non-breathing person.
3. RLNI Aquatic Survival Programme - This guide contains simple, but important information for organisations who wish to use the programme. It accompanies the Aquatic Survival manuals.
4. RNLI Aquatic Survival Programme Implementation Guide - This guide contains simple, but important information for organisations who wish to use the programme. It accompanies the Aquatic Survival manuals.
5. RNLI Aquatic Survival Self Survive and Rescue Manual - This manual contains simple but important guidance for organisations who wish to use the programme for unexpected falls into water.
6. RNLI/WHO/RLSS Site Identification and Auditing Toolkit - This toolkit is designed to help work through the key areas to consider when identifying a site that is potentially suitable for swimming lessons at the start of the programme, with daily checklists and a supervisor audit.
7. RNLI/WHO/RLSS Informed Consent and Medical Screening Toolkit – This toolkit has been developed to assist practitioners to implement informed consent procedures for swimming and water safety lessons in low-middle income settings.
8. RNLI/WHO/RLSS Emergency Action Plan Toolkit – This toolkit is to assist practitioners to develop Emergency Action Plans for basic swimming and water safety skills lessons in low resource settings.
9. RNLI/WHO/RLSS Age Appropriate Rescue Training Toolkit - This toolkit is designed to help practitioners train community members of different ages and abilities in water safety and safe rescue by providing guidance on appropriate training content for different stages of physical and mental development.
10. RNLI/WHO/RLSS Rescue and Resuscitation Refresher Training Toolkit - This toolkit aims to provide useful tools to support with the successful provision of refresher training in low-resource settings.
11. RNLI/WHO/RLSS Disease Transmission and Resuscitation Toolkit - This toolkit provides guidance for trainers on how to reduce the risk and fear of diseasetransmission during training, in order to increase trainees' confidence in providing resuscitation and their likelihood to perform mouth-to-mouth ventilation.
12. RNLI/WHO/RLSS Toolkit for Developing a Monitoring and Data Collection Framework - This toolkit provides guidance on establishing a monitoring system, including guidance on how to collect, analyse and use data and on how to evaluate a community-based rescue and resuscitation training programme.

Taking Action – 8 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. **Monitor and evaluate.** Maintain records for all survival swimming programmes, including dates, locations, participants (instructors and students) and their respective achievements.

7. **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 instil 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.

8. **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.

Resource reference: [Aquatic Survival: Self-Survival and Rescue](#)

URL Information: *https://rnli.org/what-we-do/international/international-resources*

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 (where available) 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 25m, flotation for 1 minute, and performance of basic rescue techniques.

The 25m 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.

Bibliography

1. World Health Organisation. Global status report on drowning prevention 2024 [Internet]. WHO; 2024. Available from: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240103962

2. World Health Organization. Global report on drowning: preventing a leading killer [Internet]. Switzerland; 2014 p. 59. Available from: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/global-report-on-drowning-preventing-a-leading-killer

3. World Health Organisation. Preventing drowning: an implementation guide [Internet]. 2017. Available from: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241511933

4. World Health Organisation. Preventing Drowning [Internet]. World Health Organization; 2022. Available from: https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240046726

5. International Life Saving Federation. Basic Swimming, Water Safety and Safe Rescue Skills [Internet]. International Life Saving Federation; 2018. Available from: https://www.ilsf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/LPS-15-Basic-Swimming-Water-Safety-and-Safe-Rescue-Skills-June-8-2018_.pdf

Acknowledgements