



# Menlo Swim School

Confidence • Achievement • Technique

## Welcome to the Menlo Swim School!

*The Menlo Swim School is a year-round school that provides professional, goal-oriented swim lessons for all ages and levels, working to develop life-long competency and a life-long love of swimming.*

We want you to get the most out of your lessons, so we've created this handout to tell you about our philosophy, answer your questions, and explain the approach we use to move students ahead while having fun and developing confidence.

## Our Teaching Philosophy

### FEAR AND CONFIDENCE

1. Fear is often a challenge for new or young swimmers. We employ a number of techniques to help children handle high-stress situations. With layered submersion, we work on calming and relaxing a child who freezes up. We focus on helping students understand what happens to their bodies when they're scared and teach them to think—to remember how to find the wall.
2. We take fear seriously and feel that confronting fear is an important life lesson. Along with practical exercises for getting students into the water, we teach that fear makes you safer and that it's good to respect the water. A child that had no fear is at great risk, so we use our safe environment to teach students what their limits are and about what it feels like to be in trouble.
3. Fear can be instilled by parents. We tell our children they're not allowed in the pool, may go in only with us, or must wear floats. After years of warning, they're handed over to an instructor that they don't know and are in the water by themselves. Even if your child is comfortable in the water this may be scary. Allow your child to express his opinion but don't give in. Explain that it will not be scary forever and that it's time to be brave. Bring them to every class. If you are consistent and follow up with the helpful homework tips in this pamphlet you will see a dramatic improvement in behavior within 6 to 8 classes. Your child will soon after learn to swim.

### ACHIEVEMENT AND DISCIPLINE

1. The first discipline we work on is water safety, teaching young students to always look to an adult when near the water. Overconfidence is dangerous, especially if a child doesn't know his skill limits. We feel a child must be disciplined about choosing when, where, and whether to swim, and should learn to depend on adult presence for guidance.
2. The second discipline we teach is basic class etiquette. Often, students think pool time is play time. We don't think so, and want you to get the most out of every 30-minute lesson. Following instructions, paying attention, and respecting others in class is extremely important in our school and is, of course, a life-long discipline.
3. We are very much interested in setting goals and in measurable achievement. We create challenges that are within reach—realistic goals for each student individually tailored to skills, maturity, experience, and coordination.

### SWIMMING TECHNIQUE

1. Hands-on teaching helps students get a feel for the water. We use touch to develop trust along with memorable exercises such as finding your "fast button" which means tucking your chin down on an imaginary spot on the sternum that will make you go fast.
2. We build coordination with layered drills that teach a student to move one part of the body at a time and then to put those movements together.
3. We teach stroke efficiency—maximum distance with minimum movement.
4. Our stroke training focuses on the most basic parts of each stroke because as a child grows, the subtleties of movement will change. Solid stroke fundamentals will lay a foundation for advancement no matter how a body changes. With this base, an experienced coach will easily be able to tweak each stroke according to a child's physiology.



# Class levels versus age and experience

Kids develop differently, and in swimming, these differences can be pronounced. We find that placing a student in the proper class requires understanding the mixture of maturity and skills—we don't assign levels just based age or swimming experience.

For example, your child may be able to swim some butterfly, but if they're too young to follow instructions or don't have the physical maturity to swim for an appropriate length, they won't be placed in the butterfly class.

Or, your older child may be getting in the water for the first time, but they have the discipline and coordination to learn quickly so they will move through the beginning levels in one or two classes.

<p>HIGH</p> <p>↑</p> <p>Physical coordination, discipline, maturity</p> <p>↓</p> <p>LOW</p>	AGE 10-12	LEVEL 3	FREE BACK	FREE BACK	FREE BACK	BREAST FLY	BREAST FLY	
	AGE 7-10	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	FREE BACK	FREE BACK	BREAST FLY	BREAST FLY	
	AGE 5-7	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	FREE BACK	FREE BACK	BREAST FLY	
	AGE 3-5	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	FREE BACK	FREE BACK	
		LOW	← Skills and experience, fearlessness, safe confidence →					HIGH

## Observations at each class level

### Level 1

- Either have true fear or don't like the water but are not afraid.
- Somewhat fearful—like the water as long as the head doesn't go in.
- Love the water and are dangerously over-confident.
- After fear is conquered, can expect to move quickly to swimming.

### Level 2

- Fearful of distance although not of water.
- Don't understand how to exhale and inhale.
- Tire easily and may sometimes cry.
- Without fear, may not stay on wall, need to learn class discipline.

### Level 3

- Getting used to being asked to control body position.
- Begin to see coordination challenges with layering exercises.
- Increased confidence can result in decreased patience with drills.

### Freestyle

- Most intensive level, student spend more time here than at any other.
- Coordination problems with constructing effective stroke.
- Adding layer upon layer is hard—putting arms and legs together difficult.
- Begin to think too much, lose ability to relax.

### Backstroke

- Level often quickly passed as basic work from freestyle translates easily.
- Challenge with comfort level on the back.

### Breaststroke

- This is the second-hardest level with difficult stroke elements.
- Relaxation a problem due to concentration on new movements.

### Butterfly

- This level is a lot of fun—students typically like learning butterfly.
- Often younger kids find butterfly easier than do older swimmers.

### Instructor training

Do you know how many hours your instructor has trained with the Menlo Swim School? No matter what an instructor's prior experience, we spend 40 hours with each one.

That's 10 classroom hours plus 30 in-water hours. In-water hours are split between 10 hours shadowing lead instructors, 10 hours teaching with in-water supervision, and 10 hours solo teaching with on-deck observation and evaluation.

### Deck supervisor

Our deck supervisor helps you get your kids into the pool on time, answers your questions, and provides internal evaluation for our instructors.

We encourage you to talk to the deck supervisor. We welcome your input, so please don't hesitate to ask questions and make comments. The deck supervisor is there to take your feedback so that your instructor can focus on your child.

# Challenges and homework

If you're a parent with a child in the school, you can be of great help by reinforcing the learning at home, preparing for class, and helping your child to look forward to lessons. Here are the challenges we find that kids face in the beginner levels with suggestions for homework. In the more advanced levels, here are exercises your child can do on their own for strength and body awareness.

<b>Level 1: Swim</b>	
Very fearful, doesn't want to go to class	Talk about swim classes often and tell your child what is expected. Read books about swimming and practice making balloon faces at home. DO NOT promise your child that he will not have to perform certain skills in class.
Fearful, cries in class	Explain to your child that she needs to talk in class, that crying will not help. Set a ground rule that if she cries you will leave the pool deck and come back when class is over. Enforce the rule by simply saying good-bye if requested to step out. Don't make a big deal of it. The more you react, the more your child will cry.
Doesn't like putting head in water	In the bathtub, practice making balloon faces and popping them. Once your child becomes comfortable keeping the mouth closed, try touching the lips to the water. Positively reward each step as he puts his face deeper into the water. Do not force submersions when playing in the water. In class, we face challenges together. At play, we should have fun.
Very over-confident but doesn't know how to swim	This can be the most dangerous as children without fear will jump into water without thinking. In this case, it is most important to set ground rules. Rules in class are important but rules at home are more important. Children with no fear need to know that they are not allowed to go near a body of water without adult supervision. And they are never to make decisions regarding swimming by themselves. In class, we show them that they're not able to do everything on their own.
Afraid of back float	Floating on the back can be scarier than submersion. The child is vulnerable on his back and water in the ears can be very uncomfortable. At home you can simulate back floats by filling up the bathtub so when the child lays back the water line is a bit over the ears but does not go over the face.
<b>Level 2: Breath Control</b>	
Holding the breath	Breath-holding contests work well. You can play in the bathtub, the car (or any time you need some quiet!). Practicing holding the breath will help your child develop strong lungs, good for swimming and other sports. Building lung capacity is beneficial.
Understanding exhale and inhale	This is often difficult for younger children. Popping the balloon face lets us hear the exhale, then filling it back up and closing the balloon face shows us that they are inhaling. Practice in the bathtub with you child's head in the water. When she runs out of air, bring her head out and pop the balloon face, exhaling fully. Then fill the balloon back up and put her head back in the water. Sometimes children try to breathe in with air still in the lungs. Practice making sure all air is exhaled before inhaling.
<b>Level 3: Body Positioning</b>	
Long digs	Stand in front of a mirror, stretching one arm to the ceiling and the other to the floor. The top arm should hug the ear and the bottom touch the thigh. Stretch for 10 seconds, trying to touch both the ceiling and floor. Then switch the arms as if they're paint brushes painting the mirror. Try not to move the body and keep the arms long at all times.
<b>Freestyle</b>	
Freestyle arms	Stand in front of a mirror and start with stretched arms as you would for Long Digs. Stretch long for 5 seconds then in a windmill-like motion move the top arm forward and bottom arm back, switch and stretch for 5 more seconds. Keep the movement slow and controlled, and keep the body quiet.
Side breathing	Stand next to a mirror with the mirror to the freestyle breathing side. Stretch the arms as you would for long digs, arm closest to the mirror stretched to the floor. Looking straight forward with head tilted slightly down, turn the head so the chin comes to the shoulder and the back of the head hugs the arm. Use the mirror to check body alignment, keep long and quiet. The objective is to improve flexibility in the shoulders and neck, and position the arm extended up directly behind the head without twisting.
<b>Backstroke</b>	
Backstroke arms	Practice the freestyle drill but with a reverse windmill, moving top arm back and bottom arm forward without twisting the body.
Backstroke legs	Lay on your back on a bed with legs hanging off, with the edge of the bed at mid-thigh, arms at your sides. This is difficult and young kids may need some help. Lift legs to horizontal, pointing toes, and stretching the body long. Kick up and down with very small kicks, tiny and fast. Hold in your stomach and squeeze your bottom. This drill develops core muscles and kicking position.
<b>Breaststroke</b>	
Breaststroke arms	Lay on your tummy on a bed with shoulders and arms hanging off, with the edge of the bed at your armpits. This simulates the line that your arms should not pass during a breaststroke pull. The point of breaststroke arms is not to pull you forward but to assist raising the head for breathing. Ask an instructor to demonstrate a correct pull, then practice on the bed.
Breaststroke legs	Most kids have difficulty with feet in the breaststroke kick. This exercise increases ankle flexibility and will help with every stroke. Sit on the floor with legs extended straight in front of you, knees together, toes pointed. Slowly flex the feet, pulling toes back toward your shins. Still flexed, turn the feet out keeping heels together so that toes are out toward the sides. Then, slowly roll the feet forward to a pointed position, then rotate your foot back up to starting position. The objective is to rotate your ankles slowly and fully by making circles with your feet.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q:** How will my child get over being afraid to put his head in the water?

**A:** With techniques such as the balloon face, your child is given something to concentrate on other than fear. Putting his head in the water is an important part of every class. In early childhood (6 mos – 5 yrs) a child's head carries a large percentage of the body weight. He cannot swim for an extended period of time with his head out of the water. If he's away from the wall in a stressful situation, he must learn to calmly put his head down and swim to safety. In class we take baby steps to achieve this goal and consistency is most important so coming to class even if your child is scared is critical. And working at home will help. Regular submersion will get even the most fearful children through this stage.

**Q:** What is "balloon face" or "popping balloon face"?

**A:** The balloon face is a refocusing technique, used in the earliest training. The child fills her lungs with air, puffing out cheeks with mouth closed. Then, after holding her breath under water, she brings her head up, and pops the balloon face by release air with pssssshhhh sound. The face shape and sound helps the child concentrate on something other than crying.

**Q:** What if my child is crying?

**A:** Children cry for different reasons: fear, separation, tantrum. We look for the reason and deal with crying according to its source. With fear, we acknowledge it and tell the child we know he's scared, we're here to help, and we'll do the scary thing together. With separation anxiety, parents may be asked to leave the pool deck so the child can concentrate on and learn to trust the instructor. With tantrums, we tell the child that the behavior is unacceptable and we continue with the lesson. We ignore the behavior but not the child, including her in the lesson fully as we continue, not allowing quitting.

**Q:** Can we take a bathroom break?

**A:** Each class is only 30 minutes. Of course, if your child needs to go they should go, but often, when the class become challenging, kids will ask for a bathroom break. Please ask your child if he can hold it until after class. Taking a child out of class disrupts the flow and the children will lose focus. Take your child to the bathroom before class so they can come to their class prepared and ready to learn.

**Q:** My child is getting water up her nose, what should we do?

**A:** Humming while swimming is the best way to constantly blow small bubbles out of your nose. Telling her to blow air out of her nose may not work, as she may not understand how to do it or how to control the airflow. Telling her to hum softly will also create sound that will give her constant and direct feedback.

**Q:** Will my child get ear infections from swimming?

**A:** Typically, ear infections arise from dirt and moisture in the ear that cause bacterial growth. This most commonly happens from submerging in bathwater. Our pools are kept clean and the pH is tested regularly. If you experience any ear irritation, ask your doctor if swimming is the problem and what you can do to prevent it. There are ear-plugs that can be used for prevention and after-swimming drops (may not be recommended for young children).

**Q:** Will my child get sick from swimming when it's cold?

**A:** Getting sick from being cold and wet is a myth. Kids typically catch colds from their friends when they play together, sneeze on each other, and don't wash their hands after coughing or using the bathroom. In class, children swim in chlorinated, treated water that doesn't support transfer of bacteria and germs. Furthermore, your child is exercising, which strengthens the immune system—swimming year-round will make your child healthier and more disease-resistant.

**Q:** Is my child too cold in the water?

**A:** Although our water is warm at 85–86 degrees, some children get a bit chilly and wetsuits can provide extra comfort. Learning how to swim in colder conditions is an important part of swimming class. The body reacts differently in the water when it is cold. It is important that kids learn how to control their breathing and heart rate on colder days. In the summer, children sometimes play in the water all day, but because it's warm outside they don't realize that they're cold or shivering. When the body shivers it uses a tremendous amount of energy and when this happens, children get tired easily and won't swim correctly or maintain correct body position. This is how children get into trouble—they underestimate their strength and find themselves away from the wall unable to swim to safety. It is better that they learn how to swim when they're cold in a safe class environment rather than become cold for the first time in a backyard pool.

**Q:** Do we swim when it's raining?

**A:** Yes, we swim rain or shine. We only close the pool if there is lightning nearby.

**Q:** What are layered drills?

**A:** We practice how to move one body part at a time then combine the exercises together. For example, the students learn arm, leg and head motions separately, then layer them together combining the movements to create a stroke.

**Q:** What is layered submersion?

**A:** Three hands-on exercises help the child become comfortable and confident in the water. First, a child is drawn backwards underneath the water, minimizing the feeling of water flow on the face. Second, he's drawn beneath the water facing the instructor with complete eye contact. Third, he's drawn through the water with the instructor at his side, facing and moving to the wall. After layering on these steps, the instructor begins to decrease physical contact—this is swimming.



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