



TEACHING ACTIVITIES, DRILLS AND GAMES

Games

General

Stroke Fun

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Class Formation: Circle

Equipment: Whistle

Additional Safety Considerations: Watch to be certain that participants do not collide with one another, the wall or another obstruction.

Description: All participants start at the same starting point. The finish line is about 25 yards away. The group starts by treading water. One whistle blast means “swim the elementary backstroke”; two short blasts means “to change direction”; and three short blasts means “tread water.” This game is lots of fun, especially if the players end where they started instead of at the finish line. This also can be adapted for more advanced swimmers by substituting more difficult skills for treading water and the elementary backstroke.

Sharks and Minnows

Skill Level: Preschool Aquatics Levels 1–3; Learn-to-Swim Levels 1–6

Class Formation: Two lines

Equipment: None

Description: Teams are called “sharks” and “minnows.” Teams line up on their side of a designated centerline. Each team’s “safety zone” is on the opposite side of the pool. The instructor calls either “sharks” or “minnows.” The team whose name is called chases the other team to tag them. Those tagged must join the team that tagged them. The team with more players at the end of the game wins. Give teams equal opportunities to chase. Vary this game by having participants travel in a way that is appropriate to their level. For younger children or beginning swimmers, have them walk through the shallow end. For higher level swimmers, have them swim specific strokes.

Kickboard Relay

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Class Formation: Two lines

Equipment: Kickboards

Description: Half of each team is at opposite sides of the swimming area. On the signal, the first player from each team kicks across the swimming area and hands the kickboard to his or her partner, who proceeds to kick back to the next team member, and so on. The team that finishes first wins. *Variations:* Designate different kicks and distances.



Aquatic Steeplechase

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 3–6

Class Formation: Line

Equipment: Kickboards

Description: Designate six station locations. A player starts at Station 1 and swims a designated stroke to Station 2. At Station 2, the player performs a skill such as treading water and does the sidestroke to Station 3. At Station 3, the player does a surface dive through a Hula-hoop, then proceeds to Station 4 doing the front crawl. At Station 4, the player receives a kickboard and does a designated kick to Station 5. From Station 5, the player does a different stroke to finish at Station 6. The next player starts at Station 1 when the previous player reaches Station 3. *Variations:* Vary the skills and number of stations depending on space, time and skill level.

Straw Hat Race

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Class Formation: Two lines

Equipment: Straw hats

Description: Teams line up at the deep end of the swimming area, the first player in each team wearing a hat. On the signal, they jump into the water and completely submerge. Leveling off, they recover their hats (without using hands), swim to a designated point and return. The hat is handed off to the next team member who repeats the stunt. The team that finishes first wins.

Mermaid Croquet

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Class Formation: Two lines

Equipment: None

Description: Start by dividing players into three teams. Two teams line up at one end, while members of the third team position themselves as croquet wickets and tread water. First player on each of the teams swims across surface diving under each “wicket.” Players must surface between wickets. The player reaches the end, touches the wall, swims back to the start and tags the next player on the team. The first team to finish is the winner. Alternate by playing with the third team.

Tommy Over the Water

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Class Formation: Circle

Equipment: None

Description: Players tread water in a circle. One player is “Tommy,” who is in the center of the circle. The other players chant:



*“Tommy over the water,
Tommy over the sea;
Tommy caught the blackbird,
But he can’t catch me!”*

“Tommy” tries to tag a player before the player submerges. If “Tommy” is successful, the player tagged becomes “Tommy” for the next round.

Button-Unbutton Relay

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 5 and 6

Class Formation: Two lines

Equipment: Two sets of clothing with buttons and sneakers (optional)

Description: Divide players so half of each team is on the deck at opposite sides of the swimming area. On the signal, the first player on each team puts on his or her set of clothes (making sure all buttons are buttoned). The player jumps in, swims to the other side, gets out of the water, then takes off the shirt and pants. The next player on each team then puts on the clothes, jumps in and swims to the starting point. The relay continues until the last person has taken off the clothes. *Variations:* Use kicks or arm strokes only to reach the other side. Add a pair of sneakers to the clothing used. Have players dress and undress in the water.

Ball Games

Hot Ball

Skill Level: Preschool Aquatics Levels 1–3, Learn-to-Swim Levels 1–4

Class Formation: Circle

Equipment: Beach ball

Additional Safety Considerations: Shallow (standing) water activity; do not play this game if participants are unable to stand in the water without support.

Description: Have participants stand in a circle in shallow water. Using one beach ball, have participants pass the ball as quickly as they can from person to person. The object is to touch the ball for as short of a period of time as possible.

Catch and Tread

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 5 and 6

Class Formation: Circle

Equipment: Beach balls

Description: Have participants tread water in a circle. Toss in a beach ball, and then have participants toss the ball to each other around the circle. Throw in additional balls, one at a time, until each person has a ball. Once everyone has a ball, have them throw, then catch all the balls at the same time.



Floating Beach Balls

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 3–6

Class Formation: Stagger, line, circle

Equipment: Beach balls

Additional Safety Considerations: Position participants so they do not collide.

Description: Have each participant back float while balancing a beach ball on the stomach for as long as possible. After participants are no longer able to balance the beach balls while floating, starting at the same time and moving in the same direction, have participants add sculling.

Group Juggling

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Class Formation: Circle

Equipment: Beach balls

Description: Have participants tread water in a circle. Have participants volley a beach ball, counting how many consecutive times they can hit the ball and keep it up in the air. To make it more challenging, add more beach balls.

Hot Potato

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Class Formation: Circle

Equipment: Inflatable balls

Description: Have participants tread water in a circle. Throw a ball to one participant in the circle, and then the participants pass it to each other. Participants may not use the wall or touch the bottom of the pool. A point is scored for each pass completed without dropping the ball. If the ball is dropped, start counting over again.

Mike's Ball Game

Skill Level: Preschool Aquatics Levels 1–3; Learn-to-Swim Levels 1 and 2

Equipment: Inflatable balls

Description: Use different colors of balls with designated number of points depending on the color of the ball. Put balls at a designated distance in front of participants. Participants swim a designated stroke to get the ball then throw it back to the wall. A point is scored for each ball that is thrown back to the wall in a designated amount of time.



Popcorn

Skill Level: Parent and Child Aquatics Levels 1 and 2

Equipment: Beach ball

Description: Parents and children get in a circle. Everyone chants the phrase:

“Popcorn, popcorn, put it in the pan.

Heat it up and shake it up, bam, bam, bam.”

Pass a beach ball around the circle while chanting.

Push-Pop

Skill Level: Parent and Child Aquatics Levels 1 and 2, Preschool Aquatics Levels 1–3, Learn-to-Swim Levels 1 and 2

Equipment: Ball

Description: Show how to push a ball under water and then let it pop up. Let a participant do it. Ask participants to pretend to be a ball, go under the water and then pop up.

Red Ball, Green Ball

Skill Level: Preschool Aquatics Levels 1–3, Learn-to-Swim Levels 1–3

Equipment: Different colored jump-pit balls

Description: Establish two lines at opposite ends of the playing area. One line is the goal line; the other is the starting line. Participants begin at the starting line. The instructor starts the game by holding up a green ball and shouting, “Green ball!” Once “Green ball” is called, participants advance toward the goal line. After a few moments, the instructor holds up a different colored ball and calls the color. When the instructor holds up a red ball and calls, “Red ball,” all participants must stop moving. Any participant caught in motion must return to the starting line. Players can continue moving if any color other than “Red light” is called. The first player to reach the goal wins. *Variation:* Vary the game by making up other skills to do with other colors of balls.

Story Game

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Equipment: Ball

Description: While treading water, pass a ball around. Whoever is holding the ball must add one sentence to a story while holding the ball above his or her head.

Turbo Toss

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Equipment: Ball

Description: While treading water, the participant has to say the color of an animal before tossing the ball to another person.



Keep Away

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Equipment: Ball

Description: Divide players into two teams. One team has possession of the ball and tries to keep it among its players while the other team tries to capture the ball and pass it among its players. The ball must be kept moving among the players tossing it to one other. Players are not allowed to grab another player to take possession.

Water Polo Crawl

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Equipment: Beach balls

Description: Participant swims front crawl approach stroke with his or her nose pushing the ball. This can be done as a relay or as part of an obstacle course.

Diving Ring Games

Safety Note: Do not let participants hyperventilate or have breath-holding contests. Limit participants to a single inhalation whenever you ask them to hold their breath or submerge. When setting up games that include underwater swimming, set safety limits to ensure that participants can accomplish the skill in a safe manner.

Challenge Course

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 5 and 6

Equipment: Circle noodle, Hula-hoop, diving rings

Description: Participants surface dive through the circle noodle or Hula-hoop and swim 3–5 body lengths to retrieve the diving rings.

Dolphin Dives

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 5 and 6

Equipment: Diving rings

Description: Toss a diving ring about 2 feet in front of a participant. The participant dolphin dives to get the ring and comes up to do another dolphin dive for the next diving ring.

Ring Relay

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Equipment: Diving rings

Description: Place enough rings for each swimmer at the far side of the pool. Each swimmer swims a designated stroke to the ring, does a surface dive, retrieves the ring and returns to the starting place swimming a designated stroke.



Safety Quiz Game

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 1–3

Equipment: Diving rings

Description: Ask participants questions about safety rules or strokes, or ask them to show a certain action in the water (e.g., blowing bubbles). When they do this, they receive a ring. Once everyone has a ring, have them drop the rings and let them sink. Next, have participants submerge and retrieve their rings.

Ultimate Ring Around the Rosie

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 3 and 4

Equipment: Diving rings

Description: Participants tread water in a circle with eyes closed, bouncing up and down singing “Ring Around the Rosie” while the instructor places rings on the bottom of the pool in shallow water. On the phrase, “They all fall down,” have participants submerge to get the rings.

Hula-Hoop Games

Catch the Crook

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Equipment: Hula-hoops

Description: Participants play tag. The person that is it is the cop and the others are crooks. When caught they go to jail (Hula-hoop). When three are in the Hula-hoop, they may call “jailbreak” and escape free.

H-O-O-P-S

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 3–6

Equipment: Hula-hoops

Description: This game is similar to the basketball game “horse” but is spelling H-O-O-P-S. The instructor challenges each participant to perform a trick or skill using a Hula-hoop. If a participant cannot perform the trick or skill, they get a letter.

Hula Bobs

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Equipment: Hula-hoops

Description: Participants perform deep-water bobs with their hands holding on to the Hula-hoop.

Hula Dives

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Equipment: Hula-hoops

Description: Line Hula-hoops up across the pool. Participants do consecutive dolphin dives up and down through the hoops.



Hula Float

Skill Level: Preschool Aquatics Levels 1–3, Learn-to-Swim Levels 1 and 2

Equipment: Hula-hoops

Description: When learning to float, the instructor moves a Hula-hoop so participants' bodies pass through the hoop. The swimmer must float for the full time while their body is passing through the hoop.

Hula Huddle

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Level 3

Equipment: Hula-hoops, life jackets

Description: Participants learning the safety skill, the huddle position, hold onto the Hula-hoop to bring them into a small circle.

Hula Race

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Equipment: Hula-hoops

Description: Two swimmers inside a Hula-hoop must swim across the pool. They may not hold it in their hands or push it with their hands.

Hula Relay

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Equipment: Hula-hoops

Description: Participants swim a designated stroke across the pool (width or length), climb out of the pool, Hula-hoop until the hoop goes around them 5 times and then jump in again and swim the designated stroke back to the wall again.

Hula Tread

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 3–6

Equipment: Hula-hoops

Description: Have participants hold onto the hoop while treading water. Participants should not let go until a designated time is up.

London Bridge

Skill Level: Parent and Child Aquatics Levels 1 and 2, Preschool Aquatics Levels 1–3, Learn-to-Swim Levels 1 and 2

Equipment: Hula-hoops

Description: Use the Hula-hoop to catch participants as they swim under London Bridge. Participants can escape the “fall” of London Bridge by swimming through the hoop.



Maximum Croquet

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 2–6

Equipment: One diving ring for each person and three Hula-hoops

Description: Anchor the Hula-hoops in the water at different depths. Each swimmer retrieves a diving ring from the bottom and throws it toward and through the hoop. Each time they are successful at throwing a ring through a hoop, the next person on the team gets a turn. The first team to throw all their rings through each of the hoops wins. Adjust the level of the game by placing the Hula-hoops in water depths appropriate for the skill level of the participants.

Volley Hoop

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Levels 4–6

Equipment: Hula-hoop, beach ball

Description: Divide the class in two groups. While treading water, swimmers try to volley the ball through the hoop to the opposite side of the class.

Noodle Games

Big Bad Wolf Race

Skill Level: Parent and Child Aquatics Levels 1 and 2, Preschool Aquatics Levels 1–3, Learn-to-Swim Levels 1 and 2

Equipment: Foam noodles, Ping-Pong balls

Description: While traveling on a foam noodle, participants “huff and puff” to blow the Ping-Pong ball to the designated place.

Cowboys–Cowgirls

Skill Level: Parent and Child Aquatics Levels 1 and 2, Preschool Aquatics Levels 1–3, Learn-to-Swim Levels 1 and 2

Equipment: Foam noodles and floating toys

Description: Throw toys into the pool. Have participants “ride” their foam noodles like horses and round up the toys.

Noodle Traffic

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Level 3

Equipment: Foam noodles

Description: Play Red Ball, Green Ball while participants are traveling on foam noodles. (See description for Red Ball, Green Ball game, page 5.)

Ring Relay

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Level 3

Equipment: Two foam noodles, two diving rings

Description: Two teams go the width of the pool on foam noodles, one from each team on each side of the pool and one in the middle. Relay the diving ring from one side to the middle to the other side, back to the middle and back to where it started.



Spaghetti and Meatballs

Skill Level: Learn-to-Swim Level 3

Equipment: Foam noodles

Description: First explain the heat escape lessening posture (HELP) position, and then toss foam noodles into the water to be the “spaghetti.” Have participants move into the HELP position and be “meatballs.”