



Autism
Society
Inland Empire



Play & Grow

SWIMMING &
WATER SAFETY





Safety isn't extra – it's essential.



Welcome
to the
“Play & Grow”
Collection!

Welcome to the Swimming and Water Safety Toolkit for Children with Autism.

Drowning is one of the leading causes of accidental death for young children, and children with Autism are at significantly higher risk—often due to wandering, a natural attraction to water, and differences in danger awareness. At the same time, we know that water can be a place of joy, learning, confidence, and connection for many families.

Because drowning can happen quickly and quietly, families deserve compassionate, practical guidance that supports both safety and quality of life. This Swimming and Water Safety Toolkit was created to walk alongside parents and caregivers with autism-informed strategies that protect children while honoring who they are.

Inside, you'll find tools focused on prevention and preparedness, including constant supervision, environmental supports, safety-focused swim skills, visual supports, and emergency readiness. No single approach can prevent drowning on its own—real safety is built by layering strategies together, with care, consistency, and love.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to our generous funders, the City of Jurupa Valley and First 5 Riverside County, for making this resource possible. Their commitment to children, families, and inclusive communities helps ensure that water safety education is accessible, supportive, and grounded in real family experiences.

Together, we can reduce risk, build skills, and create safer water experiences—so every child has the opportunity to enjoy water with confidence, care, and dignity.



Autism Society Inland Empire Options Policy

This toolkit was developed to allow families and professionals to find resources related to Autism in the Inland Empire.

All information provided or published by the Autism Society Inland Empire is for information purposes only. Specific treatment, therapy, or services should be provided to an individual only at the direction of the individual's doctor, caregiver, or other qualified professional. References to any treatment or therapy option, program, service, or treatment provider are not an endorsement by the Autism Society Inland Empire. References to treatments, therapies, programs, services, and providers are not intended to be comprehensive statements. You should investigate alternatives that may be more appropriate for a specific individual. Autism Society Inland Empire assumes no responsibility for using any information published or provided. Autism Society Inland Empire provides information, but it does not constitute medical or legal information. Referrals provided are suggestions to organizations that might help, but do not constitute a recommendation. Autism Society Inland Empire cannot be held responsible for consequences that arise from individual dealings with a professional or organization. The inclusion of any organization does not imply endorsement, and omission does not imply disapproval. Autism Society Inland Empire may add or remove organizations from this list at its discretion.

This toolkit was updated in Spring 2026. If you have a resource that you would like to see included, please email us at info@ieautism.org.



Why Water Safety Matters



Drowning is the leading cause of death for children under the age of five, and for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, the risk is dramatically higher. Children with Autism are nearly 160 times more likely to die from drowning than those in the general population—making water safety not just important, but urgent and life-saving. Compounding this risk, nearly 70% of childhood drownings occur during non-swim times, when a child is not expected to be in or near the water.



For families raising a child with Autism, water can hold deep meaning. It can be a place of joy, calm, laughter, and connection. At the same time, it carries real and serious risks that cannot be ignored. Many children with Autism are naturally drawn to water and may not fully recognize danger, making water safety and swimming skills more than just lessons—they are truly life-saving.

Learning swimming skills—combined with layered safety strategies such as close supervision and environmental safeguards—can significantly reduce risk and help save lives.





Ideas for Water Safety

No single strategy prevents drowning. The strongest protection comes from layering:

- Constant Supervision
- Environmental Supports
- Swim Skills
- Emergency Preparedness
- Visual Supports





1. Constant Supervision

Supervision is the most critical safety factor.

Drowning can happen quickly and silently, often without splashing or calls for help. That's why active, focused adult supervision is the single most important way to keep children safe around water—even when other safety measures are in place. Phones away, eyes on, and close enough to reach your child if needed.

For children with Autism, constant supervision is especially essential. Many children are naturally drawn to water, may wander without warning, or act impulsively without recognizing danger. A momentary distraction can be enough to cause a serious incident. Designating one specific adult as the "water watcher" at all times helps ensure your child is never assumed to be someone else's responsibility.

No matter how strong a swimmer your child becomes, supervision is always necessary. Swim skills, barriers, and visual supports all help—but vigilant, uninterrupted supervision saves lives.

2. Environmental Supports

These are safety barriers that protect before a child reaches the water.

Environmental supports create strong physical barriers that help keep children safe when supervision is momentarily interrupted. These supports are especially important for children with Autism, who may wander or be drawn to water without understanding the danger. Environmental safeguards work before a child ever reaches the water, adding a critical layer of protection in everyday life.

Simple but effective supports include pool fencing with self-latching, self-closing gates, which prevent unsupervised access to backyard pools. Door and gate alarms can alert caregivers immediately if a child exits the house or unexpectedly enters a pool area.



High-visibility colors help spot a child in seconds.




Visibility plays a powerful role in water safety. Choosing bright, high-visibility swimsuits—like neon orange, yellow, or pink—helps caregivers spot a child faster in the water, even in busy pools or low-visibility conditions. While no single layer of protection is enough on its own, pairing vivid swimwear with other safety practices strengthens overall protection during those moments when constant supervision is naturally challenged.

Why Swimsuit Color Is Important

Drowning is often silent and hard to notice, especially in busy pools or open water. Bright, high-contrast swimsuit colors make a child much easier to see quickly if they slip under the water or move away from supervision.

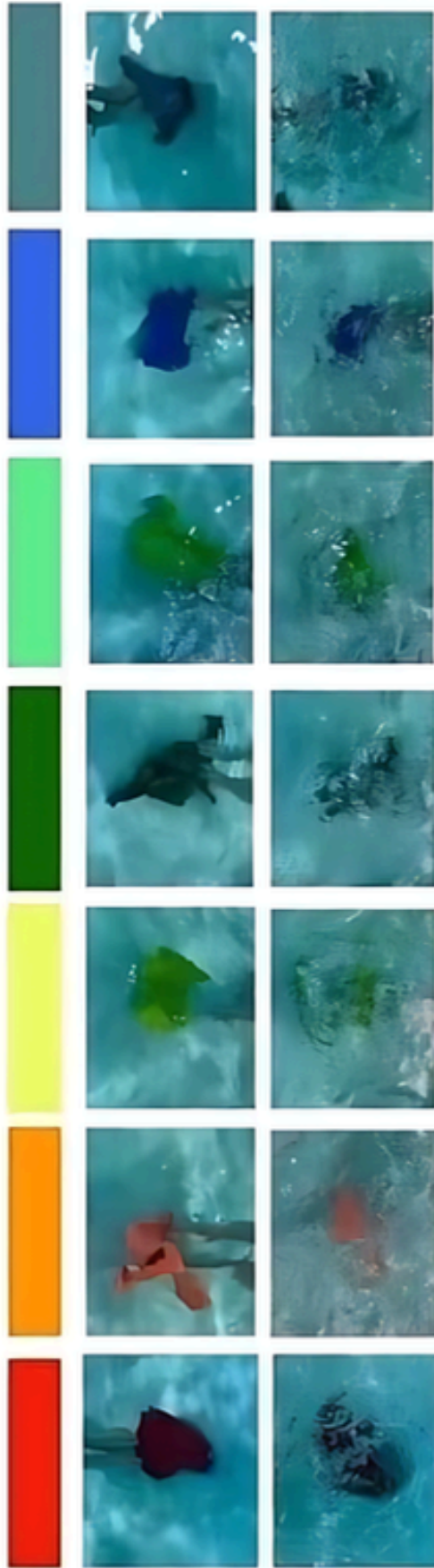
Research and water-safety testing have shown that:

- Bright, neon colors (such as neon orange, yellow, pink, or green) remain visible underwater, even in pools, lakes, or murky conditions.
- Light colors (white, light blue, pastel shades) and dark colors (navy, black, gray) can blend into the water, pool floor, or shadows, making a child harder to spot.
- Patterned suits with high contrast are more visible than solid colors that match the water.



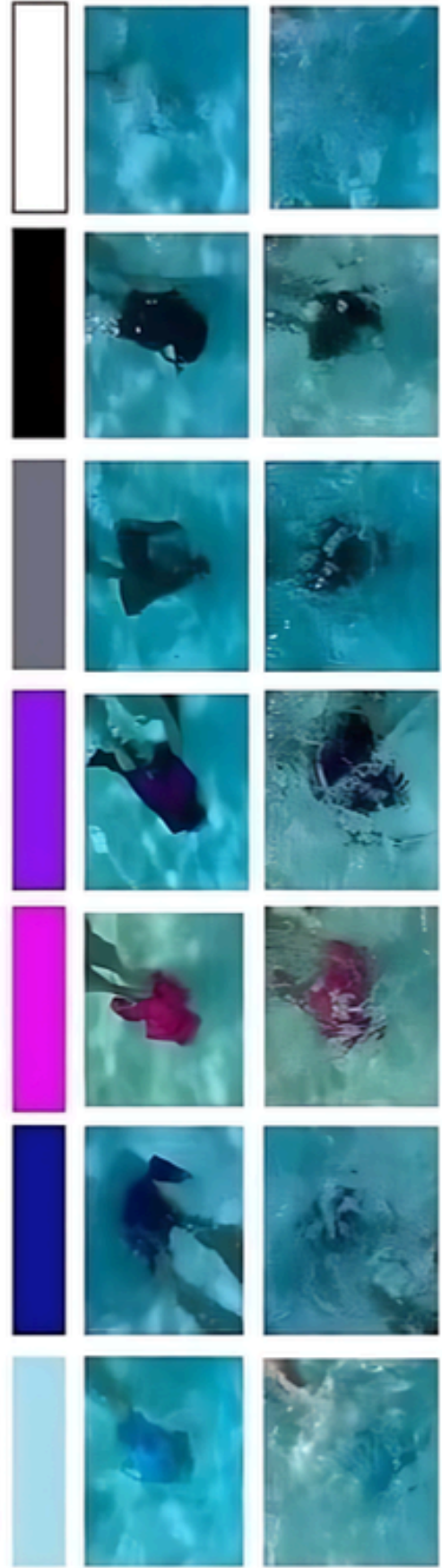
Apply the same strategy to every accessory—cover-ups, hats, floaties, and rash guard. Bright gear stands out fast when every second counts.

Visibility matters.



ALIVE
SOLUTIONS

SWIM SUIT COLOR TEST RESULTS



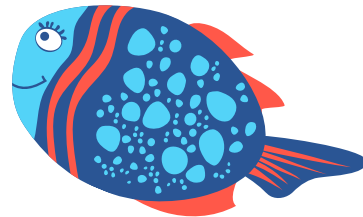


3. Swim Skills

Swim skills can reduce risk, but they do not guarantee safety, which is why supervision is always necessary. The goal of swim lessons is safety first, not perfection. Skills like safely entering and exiting the water, floating, holding breath, finding the pool wall, and moving toward an exit are far more important than learning formal swim strokes right away. Even strong swimmers can drown without close supervision.

Progress may be gradual—and that's okay. Celebrate small successes and allow your child to move at their own pace while building confidence and comfort in the water. When choosing a swim program, look for instructors who have experience working with children with Autism and who are willing to be flexible. Small-group or one-on-one lessons, patient teaching styles, and the use of visuals or repetition can make a big difference. Don't hesitate to ask questions about class size, instructor training, and how lessons are adapted to meet sensory and communication needs.

Swim Lessons for Children with Autism- Riverside County



Aquatic Zone

1138 E. 6th St., #103, Corona, CA

(951) 739-4300

info@theaquaticzone.com

Adaptive aquatics instructors have experience teaching children of all ages with various special needs, possess the necessary skills, teach in 30-minute classes, and maintain a 1:1 student-teacher ratio.

Big Kahuna Swim Academy

(909) 273- 9680

info@bigkahunaswim.com

Offers private, one-on-one swim lessons in heated pools (Norco or Riverside) and mobile swim Lessons (comes to your pool). Priority is water safety and drowning prevention. Ensures that each student has learned and mastered the 8 Basic Water Safety Skills.

British Swim School - Moreno Valley, Riverside, and Temecula

(844) 576-2796

info@britishswimschool.com

Offers indoor, year-round lessons to individuals of all ages (3 months to adult) with special abilities. They take traditional methods and adapt them into a specially designed program to work with swimmers of any ability, helping them feel comfortable and safer in the water.

DropZone Water Park - AquaAbility Adaptive Swim Program

2165 Trumble Rd., Perris, CA

(951) 988-3950

The program specializes in adaptive swim lessons designed for children and adults with Autism, Down syndrome, Cerebral Palsy, cognitive disabilities, and other special needs. Inclusive and adaptive. Ages 3-15 for group classes. For those over 16, private lessons are available.

Swim Lessons for Children with Autism- Riverside County



French Valley Swim Academy

36560 Penfield Lane, Winchester, CA
(951) 764-2292

Teaches swimming at any age, any ability, year-round in a saltwater pool. Instructors have received special training/classes working with children with Autism.

Life Saver Aquatics

39614 Tamarisk St., Murrieta, CA
(951) 460-0024

Specialized program designed to accommodate individuals with disabilities or special needs (Ages 0-6). Focuses on creating a safe, supportive environment with patience and specialized techniques. First 5 Riverside County swimming lessons scholarship available for qualified families with children 5 years or younger.

Phoenix Swim Academy

28460 Marcalope Lane, Menifee, CA - (951) 467-2354
19901 Yorba Linda Blvd., A1, Yorba Linda, CA - (714) 621-5454
swimmenifee@phoenixswimacademy.com

Offers swim lessons for swimmers of all ages and abilities; serves children and adults with Autism, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, and other developmental conditions. Instructors receive individualized, hands-on training in adaptive aquatics. Our indoor pool is open year-round—Inland Regional Center vendor.

Riverside City Parks & Recreation Swim Lessons

(951) 826-2000
Aquatics@RiversideCA.gov

The City of Riverside Aquatics program provides a fun and safe environment while developing swimmers' abilities based on individual needs. This class is for children and young adults with special needs. To apply for adaptive swimming lessons, please visit RivReg.org.

Schurkman Lil Sharks - Jared Schurkman

(951) 751-4391
schurkmanjared@gmail.com

Mobile swim teacher for all ages with 16 years of experience, including children with developmental disabilities.

Swim Lessons for Children with Autism- Riverside County

SoCal Water Babies

9168 Santa Barbara Dr., Riverside, CA

(951) 251-5210

Trained and certified to teach all levels of swim, including Swim Float Swim, Infant Self Rescue, and Survival Float Swimming Lessons in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. Ages 0-5. Works with children on the spectrum. Offers the First Five Riverside County scholarship.

Temecula Adaptive Swim Lessons

Margarita Recreational Center - 29119 Margarita Rd., Temecula, CA

(951) 308-6396

swim@TemeculaCA.gov

Adaptive swim lessons for participants ages 3 - 15. Focuses on basic water skills, water adjustment, helps participants gain confidence, and improves kicking and stroking ability. First Five Riverside County scholarships available for swim lessons; ages 6 months through 5 years. Scholarship can be used for Adaptive Swim Lessons (special needs) for ages 5 and under.

The Cove Water Park

4310 Camino Real, Riverside, CA

(951) 360-1974

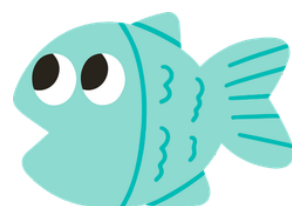
Designed for all ages and levels, private swimming classes allow swimmers to develop good habits in, on and near water, become comfortable in the water, learn and refine new strokes and become a stronger, and safer swimmer.

Waterworks Aquatics

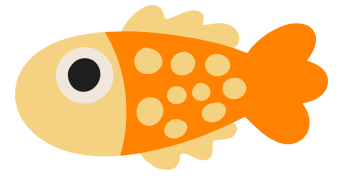
3437 Arlington Ave., Riverside, CA

(949) 450-0777

The adaptive swim lesson program is designed specifically for children with special needs. Offers flexible scheduling; start and stop lessons at any time. Located inside LA Fitness.



Swim Lessons for Children with Autism- San Bernardino County



Aqua-Tots Swim Schools

8750 Base Line Rd., Rancho Cucamonga, CA
(909) 259-0500
rcinfo@aqua-tots.com

Special Needs Aquatic Program (S.N.A.P.) is designed to create lessons tailored to each child's special needs and abilities. This class may serve children diagnosed with behavioral, developmental, learning, medical, or mental challenges.

City of Rialto Adaptive Swim Lessons

Tom Sawyer Swimming Pool - 152 E. San Bernardino Avenue, Rialto, CA
(909) 820-2633

Specialized lessons are designed to support individuals of all abilities by providing personalized instruction in a safe, supportive, and encouraging environment. Adaptive Swim Lessons focus on building water safety, confidence, and swimming skills while accommodating a variety of physical, cognitive, and sensory needs. Register in person.

Cogua Aquatics

14523 Ramona Ave., Chino, CA
(909) 227-1845
coguaaquatics@gmail.com

A welcoming space where swimmers of all abilities can thrive. Adaptive-certified instructors tailor lessons for Autism, ADHD, Cerebral Palsy, and more; for all ages.

British Swim School - Fontana

(844) 576-2796
info@britishswimschool.com

Offers indoor, year-round lessons to individuals of all ages (3 months to adult) with special abilities. They take traditional methods and adapt them into a specially designed program to work with swimmers of any ability, helping them feel comfortable and safer in the water.

Swim Lessons for Children with Autism- San Bernardino County

Fontana Park Aquatic Center - Aquability

Fontana Park Aquatic Center: 15610 Summit Ave., Fontana, CA
(909) 854-5111

Special Needs swimming lessons for ages 4 years and older. Students enrolled will range in age and ability, with varying intellectual and physical disabilities. Students will be assessed and grouped by ability during the first meeting.

Passion For Splashin' (Los Angeles County, but considered Inland Empire)

Claremont, CA
(909) 957-5385

passionforsplashin@gmail.com

Lynnea provides private swimming lessons for students of all ages and abilities, has over two decades of teaching experience, and is also a mom of a child with Autism.

Premier Swim Academy

7827 Haven Ave., Rancho Cucamonga, CA - (909) 509-5700
1673 Maple Hill Road, Diamond Bar, CA - (909) 200-3676

The sensory Swim Parent and Me program is designed to provide students with adaptive learning needs a space to explore the water and learn crucial safety skills.

Sunsational Swim School

(909) 285-2294

Our experienced instructors teach one-on-one lessons for children with Autism, ADHD, sensory challenges, physical disabilities, and more. Our goal is to help special needs students build water confidence, improve fitness, and learn essential water-safety skills.

Waterworks Aquatics

14485 Pipeline Ave., Chino, CA
(949) 450-0777

The adaptive swim lesson program is designed specifically for children with special needs. Offers flexible scheduling; start and stop lessons at any time. Located inside LA Fitness.



Swim Lessons for Children with Autism- San Bernardino County

YMCA of the East Valley

500 East Citrus Avenue, Redlands, CA

YMCA@ymcaeastvalley.org

(909) 798-9622

Adaptive aquatic class is a parent-child class for children with special needs, ages 5-18. The goal of this class is to make your child comfortable in the water, teach them how to stay safe, and help them become an independent swimmer.

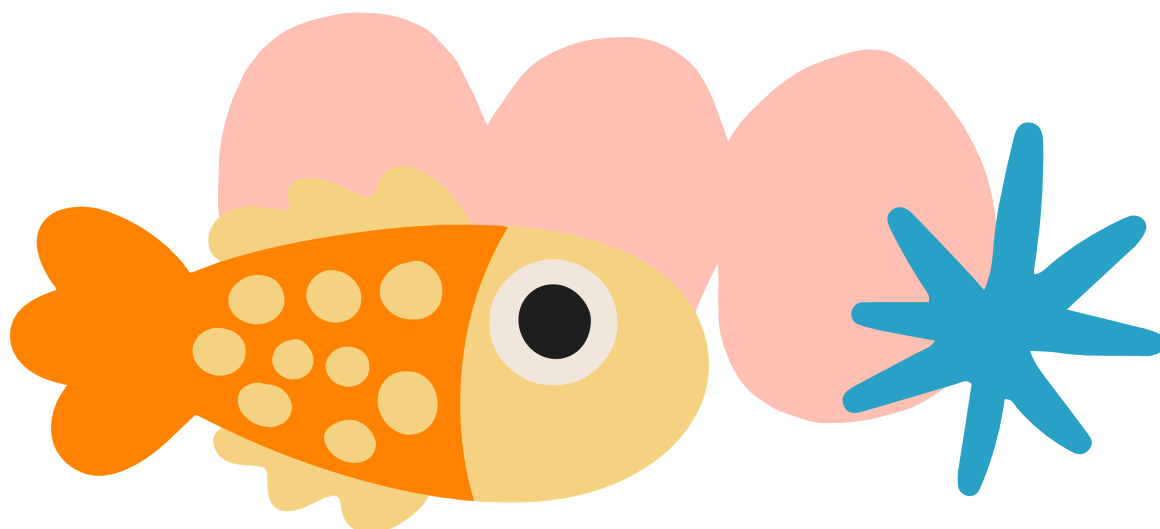
Yucaipa Aquatics-Adaptive Swim Lessons

12385 7th Street, Yucaipa, CA

aquatics@yucaipa.gov

(909) 790-7460

Students will span a wide range of ages and abilities, including various intellectual and physical disabilities. Swim tests will be conducted during the first class, and students will be grouped by ability.



Swim Lessons for Children with Autism-Coachella & High Desert

Desert Recreation District - Adaptive Aquatics

Pawley Pool Family Aquatic Complex: 46350 Jackson St., Indio, CA
(760) 342-5665

A fun 8-week, two-hour swim session designed specifically for individuals with a disability or special need, ages six and older. The session consists of 45 minutes to 1 hour of swimming lessons followed by an open swim. Scholarships are available through Operation Splash.

Desert Swim Academy

73751 Magnesia Falls Drive, Palm Desert, CA
(760) 835-3305

Offers private swimming lessons. Offers flexible teaching techniques to help your loved one enjoy the lesson. Loves bringing swimming into the lives of children with special needs, starting at 4 months and up.

Miss Selenia's Happy Place

15194 Pendleton Street, Hesperia, CA
(760) 713-6503

missseleniashappyplace@gmail.com

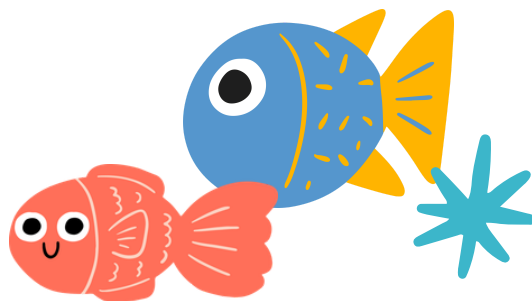
Private and small group swimming lessons for individuals of all ages and abilities—High Desert area.

Victorville Park and Recreation- Special Needs Swimming Lessons

Doris Davies Park: 16305 Hughes Rd., Victorville, CA
(760) 245-5551

VictorvilleRec@VictorvilleCA.gov

Participants ages three and older are in the water with a lifeguard present for instruction and guidance. Group class focuses on water orientation and safety.





Possible Financial Resources for Swim Lessons

First Five Riverside County

First Five Riverside County scholarship funding supports 3–4 sessions per week for four consecutive weeks of survival float lessons for children ages 0–3, and 3–4 weeks of swim–float–swim lessons for children ages 4–5, offered at low or no cost. These scholarship-funded lessons are available at different locations throughout Riverside County. Limited scholarships are available and must be approved before scheduling lessons.

Minimum Qualifications:

- The student must be five years old or younger.
- Student must live in Riverside County – Verification Required.
- Student must meet low-income guidelines – Verification Required.
- The student must submit an intake form before beginning lessons.

Students will be scheduled on a first-come/first-served basis. Once funding has been exhausted, individuals will be added to an interest list for next year.

These lessons would be great for siblings or children who learn best in fully inclusive group settings.

For additional information, please visit the following sites:

First Five Riverside County - Water Safety and Scholarship Information

Partnering Agencies:

City of Banning – Inclusive. No Adaptive Classes

City of Desert Hot Springs – Inclusive. Group Swimming Lessons

City of Palm Springs – Inclusive. No Adaptive Classes

City of Temecula – Adaptive swimming lessons

Corona-Norco Family YMCA – Inclusive. No Adaptive Classes

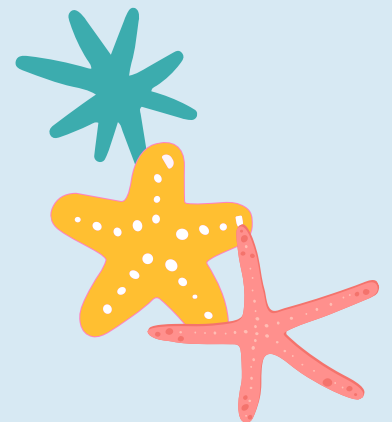
Desert Recreation District – Inclusive. Group swimming lessons

Family YMCA of the Desert – Inclusive. Group swimming lessons

Lifesaver Aquatics – Adaptive swimming lessons

Jurupa Area Recreation and Park District – Inclusive. No adaptive classes

SoCal Water Babies – Supports swimmers with special needs

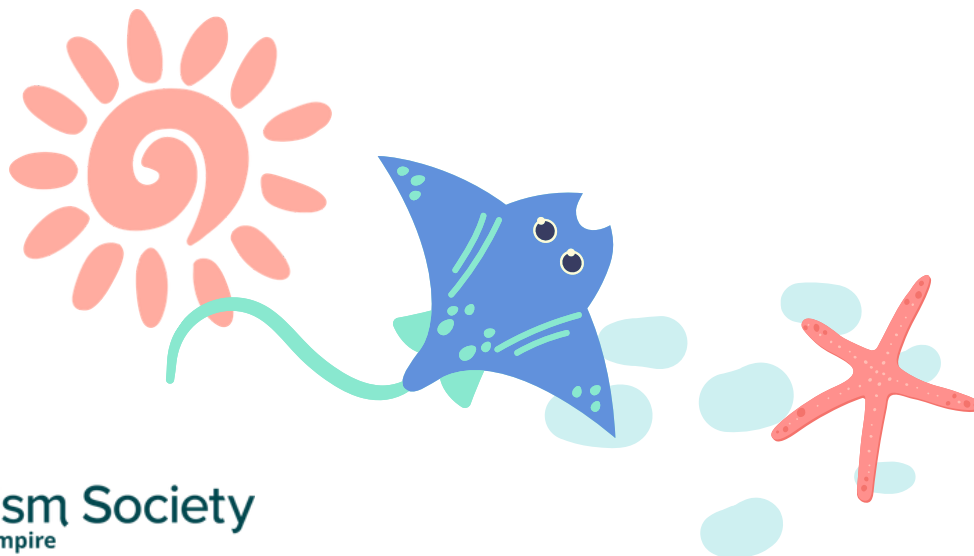


Social Recreation Services - Inland Regional Center

Inland Regional Center may pay for social recreation services, including both group and private adaptive swimming lessons, to accommodate various needs and preferences.

- 1. Obtain Authorization.** Contact your service coordinator at least 30 days before registering your loved one. Provide a detailed request that includes the purpose of the swimming lesson and how it aligns with your Individual's IPP. Provide your service coordinator with the business name, address, website, and monthly cost for the activity.
- 2. Program manager approval.** The service coordinator must submit information and receive approval from the program manager.
- 3. After IRC approves the goal and services, and added to your Individualized Service Plan (ISP), families can choose two methods of payment:**
 - The family pays for the services up front, and then reimbursed by the Fiscal Management Services (FMS) for the service.
 - The business submits invoices directly to the FMS. Families may select a provider currently vendored through Inland Regional Center for this service.

Please e-mail your Regional Center service coordinator to request this service.





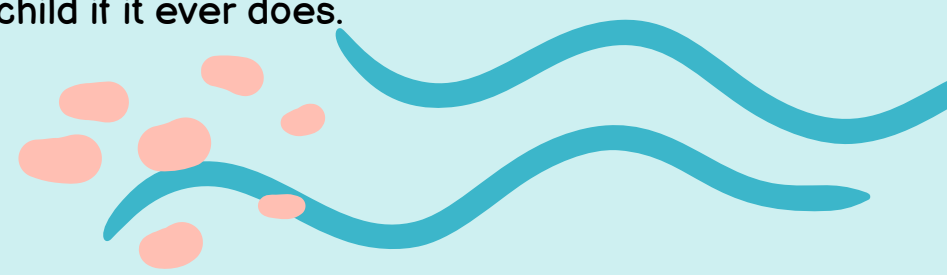
4. Emergency Preparedness

Being ready can save precious time - and lives.

Even with strong supervision and safety supports, emergencies can still happen. Being prepared helps caregivers respond quickly and calmly if a child falls into water. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to learn CPR and basic water-rescue skills, and to keep emergency numbers easily accessible.

Share your safety plan with anyone who cares for your child—babysitters, family members, respite providers—and make sure they know what to do and whom to call in an emergency.

Preparation doesn't mean expecting something to go wrong; it means being ready to protect your child if it ever does.



5. Visual Supports for Water Safety



Helpful Tools—but not safety measures on their own.

Visual supports such as visual rules, social stories, and schedules can be very effective in helping children with Autism understand expectations around water and build safer habits over time. They can reduce anxiety, improve cooperation, and support learning by clearly showing what to do, when to do it, and why it matters.

Visual supports work best when used before going near water and reviewed regularly. Posting simple water rules, reading social stories ahead of swim time, and using consistent visuals can help reinforce safety messages and increase understanding.

However, visual supports do not prevent drowning on their own. In the moment, a child may still act impulsively, become overwhelmed, or move quickly toward water despite knowing the rules. For this reason, visual supports should always be paired with constant supervision and physical safety measures like fencing, alarms, and barriers.

Think of visual supports as an important teaching tool—not a substitute for hands-on safety. When combined with supervision and environmental supports, they strengthen overall water safety and help children learn skills that support independence over time.



Being in the water can be fun.



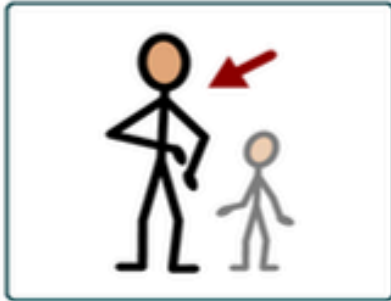
But being near water can be dangerous if I don't follow the water safety rules.



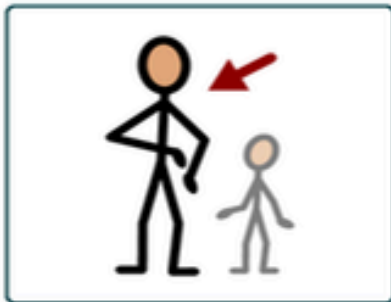
To stay safe and have fun in the water, I will learn the water safety rules.



When I am in or near the water, these are the safety rules I will follow.



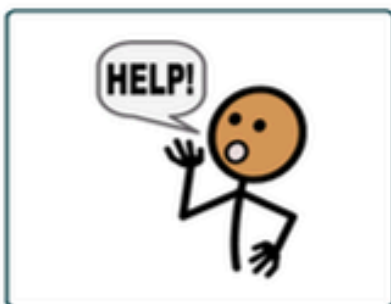
I will stay close to a helper when I am in or near the water.



A helper can be an adult like a parent, a teacher, or a caregiver.



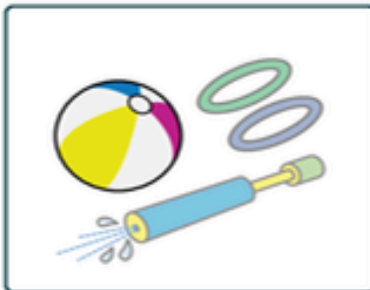
I will follow directions.



I will ask for help.



I will ask my helper before I go into the water.



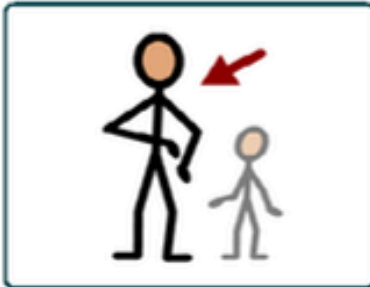
I will ask for help if I want to get something that is in the water.



When I follow the safety rules, I can stay safe in and around the water.



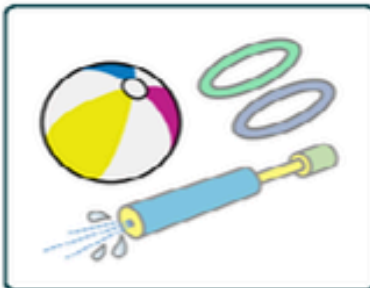
When I follow the safety rules, water can be fun and safe!



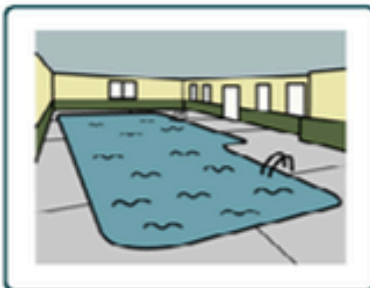
When I am at the pool I will stay close to my helper.



When I am at the pool I will ask my helper before I go in the water.



When I see a toy in the pool that I want, I will ask for help to get it.



When I am at the pool I will follow the safety rules so that I can stay safe.



When I am at the beach I will stay close to my helper.



When I am at the beach I will ask my helper before I go into the water.



When I am at the beach I will follow directions so that I can stay safe.



I am safe when I follow the safety rules at the beach.



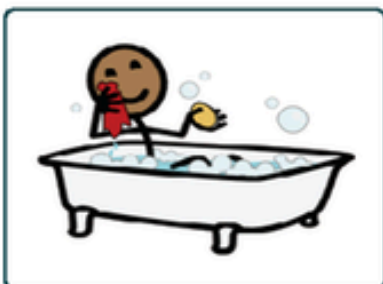
When the water is on in the bathtub, shower, or the sink I will follow directions.



I will ask before I turn the water on in the bathtub, shower, or sink.



I will ask an adult before going into the bathtub or shower each time.



I am safe when I follow the rules when I use the water in the bathtub, shower, or sink.



**Autism
Society**
Inland Empire



IEAutism.org

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Your local Autism connection

