

Learn to Swim Handbook

2011 – 2012

Wilston Crocs Swimming Club



Contact information

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• **Mission Statement**

To offer a high standard, professional swimming program in a safe and caring environment for all members. One that helps them gain personal satisfaction and enjoyment from their continual improvements in swimming. We will achieve this mission through engaging quality coaches, organizing and managing events throughout the season and continuing to develop and foster a strong sense of community for swimming club members and their families.

• **Our Head Coach - Anthony McLeod**

Swimming has always been, and still is, a major feature of Anthony's life. He grew up in North Queensland and first swam at the Aitkenvale Swimming Club. He was an outstanding young swimmer and became the Age Champion for North Queensland two years in a row. He then went on to reach a very high level of competitive State swimming and managed to win two Queensland State medals. His excellent times for butterfly ranked Anthony in the national top 10. Anthony not only represented Queensland in competitive pool swimming but also was a State representative in surf swimming.

Anthony has now taken his skills and experience in swimming to the role of Swim Coach. In his career to date, he has successfully coached swimmers right through to national rankings. From 2004 he began development of a young team that reached the Australian National Championships as qualifiers. Within a short 4 years he had swimmers who were reached finals in the Australian National Championships. His talent as a swim coach was further recognised when he was selected as Head Coach for a representative Gold Coast team to compete at the Arafura Games (Darwin) in 2007. He was then selected as Queensland Development Coach from 2007-2009. Anthony has also been instrumental in coaching the Queensland Junior Development Camps held on the Gold Coast in 2007 and Toowoomba 2008. Anthony is currently a Bronze level Swimming Coach and is on the way to completing his Silver level coaching qualification.

Anthony has a strong belief in the development of good swimming technique. In doing so he has a solid commitment to working on skills and teaching his swimmers to understand the mechanics of swimming. He has an excellent attitude towards all his swimmers and their families, and manages to encourage and teach a wide range of abilities from LTS programs right through to adult masters.

• Learning to Swim

Throughout my years of teaching and coaching swimming, I have often had parents tell me that their child needs to be doing more laps or more distance in their learn-to-swim class or stroke development squad. To most people this makes perfect sense. *The more you do the better you become.* Certainly for the swimmer that has had a consistent and long swimming history this is very true. But for the junior swimmer that is learning the fundamental skills of swimming, this mantra of “*more is better*” will, and does, have a detrimental effect on the swimmer’s ability to continue to improve and progress through the higher levels of any swimming program.

A swimmer may be able to win a primary school swimming race or even be age champion. But that swimmer who has missed important steps in the learning process has effectively put an expiry date on their ability to be competitive at any level of swimming into the future. Generally by the age of 11 or 12 the swimmer finds it very hard to keep up with their training group’s rate of improvement and find that swimmers that they used to be able to beat in a race now seem to be in a different league. This almost always leads to frustration and a sharp decline in the enjoyment of the sport and more often than not the swimmer ends up dropping out of the sport which used to give them so much enjoyment and pleasure. I have seen it happen countless times over my years as a swimmer and a coach.

Three skills for success

Over twelve years of teaching and coaching I have developed a *Learn-to-swim Program Manual* that all learn to swim instructors working with me use as the framework for their classes. The front page of the manual reads:

The three most important skills for successful swimming are:

1. Body position
2. Balance and control during movement
3. Effective kicking

A few years ago a parent of a child in my learn-to-swim program read this and thought I was kidding, he couldn’t understand what it meant. “*Body position, balance, kicking. What about arms and going fast and fitness? I thought swimmers had to be strong and super fit, he said.* I quickly realized there was a huge difference in the way swimming instructors and parents viewed swimming classes and the process of becoming a great swimmer.

Good technique is critical

I have since found out that these three core skills or similar versions of them are widely recognized in Australia and around the world as the corner stones of every great learn-to-swim program. I will give you a practical example of why these skills are so important and

hopefully give you a bit of insight into what we as coaches are looking for and what we are trying to achieve in any given class. Look around the swimmers next time you are at the pool, I'm sure you will be able to pick this one out. A swimmer is performing freestyle down the pool. As the swimmer starts to roll for a breath, the shoulders over rotate, the legs momentarily stop kicking and spread apart in a scissor kick motion, the hips sink down, the arm in the water crosses under the body, the head lifts up and forward and over rotates which makes the whole body sink lower in the water. This is caused by poor body position, poor balance and control during movement and ineffective kicking. You will also see swimmers the same age and size that seem to flow or glide through the water with ease. These swimmers have mastered the three key skills. It has nothing to do with strength or fitness. The swimmer with good balance and body position will actually require less effort and use less energy to maintain faster speeds. This is a very important attribute for competitive swimming.

Skill acquisition in swimming, as in most sporting or physical activities, is achieved by repetition. This is one of the reasons why it's important that quality technique is taught from the very start. During any given Junior Squad session a swimmer completes around 100 laps, at an average of about 20 strokes per lap. So at 2000 strokes during a single, one hour session it is easy to see how poor technique and skills can quickly become ingrained. It's much easier and faster to teach good technique at the start than it is to fix poor technique later.

Be patient and supportive

Each stage of the learning process is an important stepping stone and should be mastered before moving on. It must be remembered that when performing new skills each child develops consistent quality, at their own pace. Skill acquisition should not be rushed, rather taken slowly so that learning takes place at the swimmer's pace. Some skills may come easily to one swimmer and not so for another, and vice versa for a different skill. This is the reason why you will never see a nice straight line of improvement when mapping a child's progression. You will notice spikes and plateaus along the way which generally continues right through until about 13 or 14 years of age, when their skills, technique and performances start to become more consistent. Parents will have noticed this with their young swimmers. They may have breezed through one level of the learn-to-swim program easily and quickly to then spend what seems like forever on the next level. This is normal.

The key is to stay patient and persistent and be supportive with the lessons. Sometimes an extra lesson per week or a week of intensive classes over school holidays can be helpful in getting over a hurdle. Also see if you can get a couple of minutes of the instructor's, or head coach's time before or after classes if you have any questions or concerns about your child's progress. They will have a very good understanding of how well the swimmer is progressing and will be able to offer some words of reassurance or have some ideas on how to improve your child's learning experience.

Anthony Mcleod

Head Coach of the Wilston Crocs

• Learn to Swim Program

There are five learn to swim levels in our program. Learn to swimmers will start at Level 1 and progress through to advanced learn to swim level 5. All swimmers are constantly monitored and once they are able to perform the skills required to move to the next level they will be reassessed. Swimmers will progress through the levels as their skills and ability improves. As the swimmer attains each level they will receive a certificate of achievement. Please be aware that learning to swim is a completely individual experience and all swimmers will have varying rates of improvement.

Level One - Water Safety

For children learning to blow bubbles, kick on a board, float in a streamline position and start to perform fundamental safety skills.

Level Two - Beginners

For swimmers who can perform good kicking and balance skills, and are learning to perform backstroke arms, and bilateral breathing in freestyle.

Level Three – Little Swimmers

For swimmers who are learning to perform backstroke and bilateral freestyle, and start to perform breaststroke kick.

Level Four – Intermediate

For swimmers who are able to perform backstroke and bilateral freestyle, and start to perform breaststroke, butterfly kick and good streamlining.

Level Five - Advanced

For advanced learn to swimmers learning to perform freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke and butterfly correctly up to a distance of 25m.

After swimmers have obtained the necessary skills to pass level 5 of the Learn to Swim program, they then go into our squad program starting at mini squad and progressing through to our senior group.

Assessment procedures

Each level has set criteria that need to be mastered before a swimmer can progress to the next level. It should not be expected that at the end of each term a swimmer will be ready to move up. All swimmers in our program are continually assessed for improvement and readiness for upgrading to the next level. Once the coach believes that a swimmer is ready they will notify the Head Coach for a formal assessment. The Head Coach's decision is final and he will be happy to discuss the progress of any swimmer.

Bookings

Payment for each new term must be made prior to, or the beginning of, the second week of that term, otherwise we cannot guarantee your booking. Payments can be made by cash, cheque, or direct deposit. (Bank details are available on the web page www.wilstonswim.org.au.) If you would like to keep the same timeslot in term one please rebook during the last two weeks of term four.

Make Up Classes

Unfortunately due to the high demand for learn to swim classes we are unable to offer make up classes. Non attendance at a pre-booked session will still require payment.

Refunds

Refunds will only be offered by the committee when there are special circumstances. Usually a doctor's certificate is required. We do realise that circumstances arise from time to time that may make it impossible for your child to attend his or her class, and whilst we will endeavour to accommodate you and your family wishes wherever possible, sometimes we will be unable to achieve this. We would appreciate a phone call if you are unable to attend a lesson.

• Club Nights

Club nights are held every Friday night of term 4 and term 1, finishing with two nights of Club Championships and then trophy night. The children nominate the stroke/s they would like to swim on the night (maximum of 3) and will compete against children of a similar ability. The focus is on personal best times and not race winners. If you are interested in your child attending club nights, please see Judy in the office.

There are also 12 ½ metre races held after the 25m freestyle. These are for beginner club members who would like to attempt any particular stroke that they aren't confident in swimming a full 25 metres. Due to swimming requirements we are able to offer this for members ONLY. We regret any sibling disappointment but to allow non members to swim would put our club in breach of our affiliation with Swimming Queensland. There are also incentive schemes in place to further encourage swimmers.

• Holiday Intensive Classes and Camps

These are offered during the school holidays and provide an excellent way for your child to have intensive swimming sessions. The Learn to Swim classes and camps are usually held in the first two and the last two weeks of the Christmas holidays and during September/Easter holidays. For further details please contact the office.