

*FAST Swim Program manual offers an easy to follow curriculum that has proven success with 20+ years of instructional use. The program advocates teaching participants bubbles & air technique while wearing properly fitted USCG-approved life jackets.*

## **TEACH CHILDREN TO SWIM FAST: FLOTATION AIDED SWIM TRAINING**

By LINDA BOLGER

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# TEACH CHILDREN TO SWIM

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## ***FAST***

**FLOTATION AIDED SWIM TRAINING**



**LINDA BOLGER**

**CREATOR OF THE REVOLUTIONARY FAST SWIM PROGRAM**

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This manual provides content related to aquatic topics. As such, use of this manual implies your acceptance of this disclaimer.

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# Abbreviations

**AAP** - American Academy of Pediatrics

**ACFASP** - Advisory Council on First Aid, Aquatics, Safety and Preparedness  
(American Red Cross)

**CDC** - Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

**CNCA** - Council for National Cooperation in Aquatics

**ISR** - Infant Survival Resource

**NDPA** - National Drowning Prevention Alliance

**USCG** - United States Coast Guard

**WSI** - Water Safety Instructor



# ***FAST* Program Purpose**

The purpose of this manual is to introduce an effective method of swim training for young children called ***FAST, Flotation Aided Swim Training program***. *FAST* is a learn-to-swim program where instructors and parents utilize United States Coast Guard (USCG) approved Type III/V lifejackets. The program will adhere to all AAP and CDC water safety guidelines to prevent any fatal or non-fatal incidents. Priority is given to the child's developmental abilities. Participants will move progressively and developmentally to advanced levels with the assistance of parents and guardians. Linda Bolger, the program developer, has designed this innovative program following many years of successful instructional experience and research.

## ***FAST* Program Versus Forced Infant Submersion**

Across the country, infants and toddlers are being introduced to swimming and survival skills through various types of programs. These preschool swimming programs have been praised for promoting water awareness at a young age and providing learning experiences in a new environment. However, should the experience be practical as well as enjoyable for all concerned? Recent research now shows that forced submersions may have negative physiological and psychological effects on children. In fact, the Council for National Cooperation in Aquatics (CNCA) specifically prohibits forced submersions and advises that no child be considered water-safe or left unsupervised even with extensive swimming and survival skills.

From my own research and personal experience as a swimming instructor for the past fifty years, I have made several observations regarding forced submersion:

1. It appears there is NO regulatory body, nor accredited certification to guarantee a requisite standard of care when or where the safety of students is concerned during swimming lessons.
2. I found infants and toddlers who were forced under the water on many occasions crying and showing signs of distress before and after submersion. Several participants cried immediately upon entry into the pool area even before submersion techniques took place. On separate occasions, children were found vomiting after swimming lessons where submersion was involved. Infants were found to be involuntarily holding their breath for one to ten seconds.
3. I interviewed many aquatic instructors and parents over the course of fifty years and discovered that many parents removed their children after several lessons which included forced submersion leading to anxiety for the child. More studies are necessary to test infant and toddler readiness toward forced submersion and total survival swimming lessons.

Teaching styles for infants and toddlers swimming techniques are varied. One argument offers that many instructors and pediatricians feel strongly that children should wait until age two or three to begin instruction. The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advocate water safety guidelines which should be required during swimming lessons.

Instructors and parents should be aware of potential physiological and psychological ramifications when introducing forced submersion or holding one's breath without notice. Teaching techniques that include parental involvement will develop a solid emotional, physical and social foundation. Building that foundation with progressive swimming skills should be a priority when structuring swimming programs for young children of all ages.

Under no circumstances should a child who has not successfully completed a facility swim test be left unsupervised or without a USCG lifejacket while around or near bodies of water.

The following are my conclusions based on updated research:

1. A large percentage of instructors received their background from varied books and experimental techniques of their own. These various backgrounds appear to breed inconsistencies in programs. Some programs advocate lifejackets while others do not allow or implement lifejackets. Valid information is lacking regarding lifejackets creating a false sense of security. Many programs utilize group lessons which do not follow AAP and CDC water safety guidelines.
2. Instructors' philosophies ranged from total survival methods to water adjustment programs with and without submersion. The success rate of infants and toddlers varied with each program. No conclusive statement can be made at this time about the relationship of philosophies to success rates.
3. Water intoxication infants received attention from the Journal of Pediatrics when a five-month-old infant suffered resultant status epilepticus, meaning continuous seizures. The infant had swallowed a large amount of water from the swimming pool. At a minimum, parents need to become knowledgeable of possible effects due to forced submersion techniques.
4. Unilaterally, we need to address safety factors for non-swimmers during lessons rather than put our children at physical or emotional risk.
5. Twenty pediatricians surveyed in the state of Florida were equally divided as to the risks vs. benefits of survival techniques for infants (April 2019).

This manual is not intended to be a scare tactic against early age swimming lessons. Rather, it is intended to make parents and instructors aware of the *FAST* Swim Program which will meet the needs of each individual child in the area of water safety by implementing AAP and CDC water safety guidelines.

Swimming should be an enjoyable and safe lifelong experience without the use of unanticipated forced submersion leading to survival techniques. As a reminder, a child in distress still awaits being rescued.

The *FAST* Swim Program begins at an energetic pace with lifejackets properly fitted on the swim participants. This manual will assist in learning how to become *FAST* Swim Program instructors as well as how to introduce various techniques for parents to build confidence, strength and swim skills that will last a lifetime for their children. This manual is an invitation for water safety instructors, pool managers, teachers and parents to share the joy of swimming with the early-age child.

## **American Academy of Pediatrics Swim Safety Tips**

The AAP has given updated advice on drowning prevention, stressing that children need to learn to swim, but even advanced swimming skills cannot ‘drown-proof’ a child of any age.

Parent/caregivers must also closely supervise their children around water and know how to perform CPR.<sup>1</sup> The *FAST* Swim Program exemplifies this philosophy with the emphasis on parent/caregiver supervision, participation in the swim lesson training, as well as ongoing behavior expectations around bodies of water.



## **Adopt CDC Guidelines**

For swimmers and non-swimmers in or around natural water settings, the CDC recommends the following:

- Swimmers should use USCG-approved Type III/V lifejackets.
- Adults should supervise swimmers in and around water.
- Adults should not engage in distracting activities – such as reading, playing cards or talking on the phone - while supervising swimmers, even if lifeguards are present.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/pages/AAP-Gives-Updated-Advice-on-Drowning-Prevention.aspx>

## *Lifejackets empower!*



*Alexis who has been diagnosed with cerebral palsy is walking independently in the water.*

Because drowning can occur quickly, the AAP feels strongly that parent/caregivers should never, even for a moment, leave children alone near bodies of water.<sup>2</sup> State laws require that we restrain children safely in certified car seats or booster seats; therefore, it only seems logical that we use similar levels of protection for non-swimmers regardless of age. We add the appropriate level of protection for all non-swimmers by advocating for all non-swimmers to wear an approved lifejacket when entering any body of water and to have a responsible adult supervise within an arm's length.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aap.org/en-us/about-the-aap/aap-press-room/news-features-and-safety-tips/pages/sun-and-water-safety-tips.aspx>

The *FAST* Swim Program advocates for improved water safety awareness by encouraging non-swimmers of all ages to wear approved lifejackets for swimming instruction and recreational activities. Successful completion of the progressive age levels guides both the parent/instructor and participants to a successful outcome without causing distress.



*Parent involvement is strongly encouraged.*

The CDC states an important statistic, “For every child who dies from drowning, another five receive emergency department care for nonfatal submersion injuries.”<sup>3</sup> According to the Foundation for Aquatic Injury Prevention (FAIP), as many as 20 percent of near drowning survivors suffer severe, permanent neurological disability.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.CDC.gov/homeandrecreationalsafety/water-safety/waterinjuries-factsheet.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.aquaticisf.org/facts.htm>

## TEACH CHILDREN TO SWIM FAST

The *FAST* Program encourages non-swimming adults/parents to adopt and practice these same guidelines leading to competency.



*Dad, Reggie, demonstrates his swimming skills after following FAST guidelines. He then qualified for admission to the police academy as well as became a competent FAST WSI (Water Safety Instructor).*





Consider these philosophies from well-known swim programs:

- One implies that swim lessons may be a high-risk situation.
- Another believes that lifejackets have limited usefulness as teaching aids.

The *FAST* Swim Program promotes that swim lessons should never be considered a high-risk situation and that non-swimmer participants should wear approved lifejackets especially in group lessons when learning to swim. *FAST* Swim Program advocates for managers supervising any body of water to encourage lifejacket use for non-swimmers of any age. Governing bodies should establish guidelines for anyone unable to pass a swim test. Readily available lifejackets should be the new norm while endorsing and enforcing AAP and CDC water safety guidelines. We need to all work together to eliminate drowning incidents while teaching children how to swim.



## Importance of Lifejackets

According to Dr. Adam Katchmarchi, the executive director of the National Drowning Prevention Association (NPDA), “We know that these are difficult times and many of our lives have been significantly impacted and disrupted.” He continues to state, “However, drowning will not stop due to pandemics such as COVID-19 and expect to see an increase in the number of drownings with children in the unforeseeable future.” As the program developer of the accredited [fastswimprogram.com](http://fastswimprogram.com), please consider this advice:

According to the CDC: You should make lifejackets a must. Wearing a lifejacket can reduce the risk of drowning by up to 50 percent.

According to the AAP: You should never leave a child in or around any body of water. Provide arms-length or touch supervision.



*Thrive vs. Survive*



## **Swim Lessons Guidelines Before Registration**

When registering for swimming lessons, look for programs which allow parental observation and one that does not allow children sitting on ledges or steps unsupervised or without a lifejacket. Ask how much instructional water time your child will receive. Ask if instructors have had background checks. Be alert and research any incidents of reported child molestation and/or drowning incidents during swimming lessons at the facility of your choice.

What should you do to prepare your non-swimmer for lessons? Start by practicing blowing bubbles and taking a breath in the bathtub. Add the flutter kick and enjoy the show. Let's work together to keep all non-swimmers safe until they have successfully completed a skills test. Check with local organizations such as Red Cross, YMCA or Lifeguard Pro for skills test information. *FAST* Swim Program advisors also have listed guidelines in their instructor manual; go to [info@fastswimprogram.com](mailto:info@fastswimprogram.com). This manual will also help you set a strong foundation without distress. For those dedicated and committed to teaching their children how to swim, follow the guidelines as outlined.

Recommend introducing basic commands starting at approximately age 18 months old such as:

"Yes, to teaching blowing bubbles in the bathtub"

"Yes, to practicing the flutter kick"

"Yes, to learning and practicing pool rules"

"Yes, to practicing dry land activities"

"Yes, to bubbles and air (take a breath)"

"No, to touching the stove"

"No, to crossing the street without mom or dad"

"No, to going near bodies of water without mom or dad"

"No, to going in the pool without a lifejacket"

"No, to playing in the toilet"



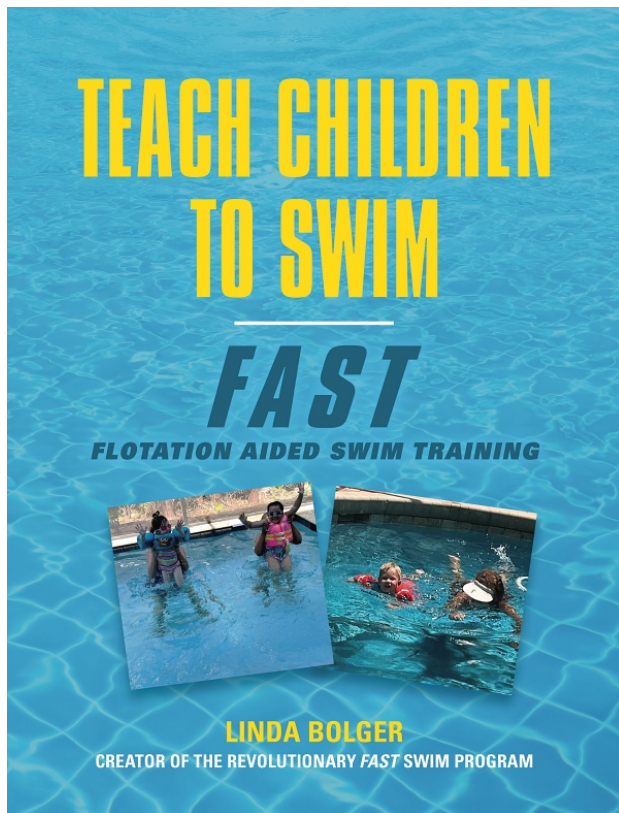
TEACH CHILDREN TO SWIM FAST

*Just like mom!*



*I can do this  
all by myself!*





*FAST Swim Program manual offers an easy to follow curriculum that has proven success with 20+ years of instructional use. The program advocates teaching participants bubbles & air technique while wearing properly fitted USCG-approved life jackets.*

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