

No such thing as 'drown proof'

ONE of my swim school parents recently told me of their intention to stop their six-year-old's swim lessons as they believed their child was now "water safe".

When pressed as to what exactly they meant, she explained that her son had been taking lessons for three years, could swim 25m unassisted and float on his back, and was aware of basic water safety information.

Moreover, the little boy had said to his parent that he wanted to start sailing lessons instead. Discontinuation of swim lessons at this early age and for reasons similar to those mentioned is all too common.

However, before interrupting the progress of a child's swim lessons, there are several issues a parent should consider.

Firstly, there is a popular misconception that attending swim lessons will ensure a child's safety around water and guarantee them "drown proof".

There is no such thing as being either "water safe" or "drown proof", and the role of a swim school is to impart knowledge, tools and skills to a swimmer for them to use when a dangerous water-related situation arises.

So, is the decision to replace swimming lessons with another activity the right one?

Swimming differs from other activities in that it is a life-long, potentially life-saving skill. No



SCHOOL'S IN: Swimmers should be competent in all four competitive strokes, and be able to swim at least 400m freestyle non-stop with correct breathing and technique – including a relaxed and rhythmical stroke. XF

Swim safer

With
Julia Hamm



other sport or activity can be said to be able to provide the same.

But what classifies a person as adequately prepared to deal with an incident in an unwanted and unexpected water-related situation?

What is certain is that a swimmer needs to be equipped with safety skills and stroke endurance sufficient to maintain themselves until assisted.

The level of swimming ability that I suggest (and that I believe

all swimmers should aim at) is competence in all four of the competitive strokes, safety skill competence, and the ability to swim at least 400m freestyle non-stop using correct breathing and with the correct technique – including a relaxed and rhythmical stroke.

So, when it comes to the question "How do I know when my child can swim?" or "When is my child ready to stop lessons?", don't base your answer on your child's preference for one activity over another.

Ask yourself if your child has the water competence to give them the best chance of survival in all situations.



WATER WISE: Paul Norman, president of the Cannon Hill Dolphins Swim Club, poolside with children Allison, Michael, Andrew and Matthew . . . all take swimming safety seriously. XF