



splish splash

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Water fun for you and your baby

“Our son’s become a hippopotamus,” says River Ridge resident Beth Bracy, laughing. No, she’s not referring to his size, but his affinity for lounging underwater, albeit in a pool instead of a river in Africa. “He’ll only surface to take a breath.”

Three-year-old Dylan Bracy, who is naturally a Pisces, first became familiar with the pool two years ago when he and his mom participated in a Water Babies class at LoveSwimming, one of several programs in the New Orleans metropolitan area that offers “swim” programs for parents and their babies—some as young as six months old—and young children. Learning to swim before a child can crawl might seem like a stretch, and it is. For the youngest infants, these classes stress bonding with the child, getting acclimated to the water, and setting a foundation for swim lessons that will come, eventually.

LoveSwimming, located Uptown and in Lafayette, offers its Water Babies program for parents and their children ages six months to three years. The class incorporates specially tailored songs, games, and play time with water toys that encourage the development of a child’s water skills, such as floating, kicking, gliding, and other movement. The babies gradually will build up to very brief submersion.

Like all of the infant/baby swim programs profiled here, parents (either mom or dad) participate fully in the class. LoveSwimming employs gentle and effective techniques that empower the parents with the knowledge of swimming and instills fundamental skills in the child.

“Our program is about being in a loving, caring environment, and about exposure, about being in the water,” says Kaye Doiron, co-owner of LoveSwimming. She adds that most infants who begin the Water Babies program at six months old are swimming short distances by the time they’re a year and a half old. According to Doiron, these same children will be able to swim the length of a pool with two breaths at two-and-a-half, and by the time they’re four, they’ll be swimming freestyle, taking

side breaths.

She’s quick

to add, however,

that “swimming lessons for young children are about making the situation less dangerous; they are not about making it safe.”

Classes at LoveSwimming are offered year-round.

At the **Elmwood Fitness Center** in Harahan, parents can also enroll infants as young as six months of age—and up to three years—in its own Waterbabies program. “This is a water acclimation class,” explains Christina Offutt, Elmwood’s Aquatics Manager. “It is not a learn-to-swim program, and there is absolutely *no* submersion.”

The goal of Elmwood’s Waterbabies program is to provide parents with the appropriate information about water safety and techniques that will aid in making water-adjustment a pleasant experience for the child. Instructors make the classes fun, engaging the parent, and more importantly, the infant or young

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child, through games, laughter, and specially altered nursery rhymes in an interactive curriculum organized around weekly lesson plans.

“We want to get [the babies] comfortable in the water, get them used to getting their face wet, without fear,” says Offutt.

Classes are offered year-round.

For 45 years, Mr. Fish—AKA Charles Philippi—has been teaching children to swim in the greater New Orleans area, with locations of the **Mr. Fish Swimming School** now in Metairie and on the West Bank. And the owner of the swim school starts them young. His Baby Swim program enrolls children ages 10

months to four years old, and *all* will be swimming underwater by the time their lessons are complete. “After 10 lessons, they’re swimming,” says Philippi. At two-and-a-half years old or older, children who’ve had 20 lessons can jump (“or fall or be pushed” says Philippi) into the deep end and return to the side of the pool on their own. Parents are active participants in these classes as well.

While Philippi explains that building a foundation for water safety is the primary reason parents enroll their children in his program, he also stresses the opportunity for parents to bond with their child in a meaningful way. And he says it’s great for brain development.

“Swimming is one of the first organized, educational activities you can do with an infant,” he says. “You’re helping to stimulate brain development as early as possible, and that’s a great thing.”

Classes are offered in the summer and early fall only.

When choosing a swim program for you and your infant or young child, consider what you want to get out of it. An opportunity to bond? To overcome a fear of the water to make a simple bath time ritual more enjoyable? Or do you want to build a foundation for future swim lessons?

nola baby magazine would be remiss if it didn’t report that the American Academy of Pediatrics does not recommend swim lessons for children under the age of four, mainly because the group fears parents would be lulled into being less vigilant with their child around water thinking he could swim on his own; and because young children who are immersed repeatedly in water risk swallowing too much and developing water intoxication. The programs detailed in this article specialize in lessons for young children, and can address specific questions or concerns you might have. And of course, all stress that even a child swimming laps at age two or three (or six, for that matter) should never be left unsupervised.

Beth first joined a class at LoveSwimming with her son’s playgroup, mainly for fun. She’s continued with the Water Babies program because she has a pool in her backyard and she wants Dylan to learn how to swim. “He’s doing amazing,” she says. “Not just survival swimming, but swimming proper strokes. Will I ever take my eye off of him in the pool? No. But it’s a far safer situation now, and we’re continuing on with his lessons for the foreseeable future.”



top far right:
Julie Nice and son “Ace” enjoy Parent-Tot class at Loveswimming.

below that:
Albert “Big Al” braves the water at Mr. Fish.

bottom left:
Marshall Love of Love Swimming with students.



please, tell me more

For more information on the swimming programs, including hours and costs, please contact them directly:

LoveSwimming
504.891.4662
www.loveswimming.com

Elmwood Fitness Center
504.733.1600, ext 34062
www.elmwoodfitness.com

Mr. Fish Swimming School
504.835.5554
www.mrfish.biz