Hope
Autism Clinic

Adaptive Swim Lessons: A Parent's Guide

How to find the right program and what to ask before your child's first lesson.

Swimming lessons are one of the most powerful safety investments you can make, but they work best when matched to your child's needs. Use this guide to find a program that fits and to know what to ask before you book.

Why Adaptive Lessons?

Standard group classes can move too fast and feel overwhelming. Adaptive or one-on-one lessons go at your child's pace and often teach safety skills first, such as knowing when it is and is not okay to get in, how to reach the side, and how to get out.

What to Look For

- [ ] Instructors trained or experienced in working with children with autism.
- [ ] One-on-one lessons or a very small student-to-instructor ratio.
- [ ] A safety-skills-first approach, not just stroke technique.
- [ ] Willingness to move at your child's pace and adjust as needed.
- [ ] A sensory-aware setting that manages noise, echo, and chlorine smell.
- [ ] At least one lesson practiced with clothes on, since a child who wanders in will not be in a swimsuit.
- [ ] Clear communication and visual supports your child can follow.

Questions to Ask Before You Book

- [ ] Have you worked with children with autism before? Can you tell me about it?
- [ ] What is your student-to-instructor ratio?
- [ ] Do you teach water-safety skills first?

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Questions to Ask Before You Book (continued)

- [ ] Can a parent stay and observe?
- [ ] How do you handle a child who is anxious or resistant?
- [ ] Can we visit the pool once before the first lesson?
- [ ] What are your quietest, least crowded times?

Preparing for the First Lesson

- [ ] Visit the pool once beforehand so the space feels familiar.
- [ ] Make a simple social story or picture sequence of what will happen.
- [ ] Practice at home: putting on the swimsuit, water on the face, blowing bubbles.
- [ ] Pack comfort items, goggles, and a towel your child likes.
- [ ] Schedule the lesson for your child's best time of day.
- [ ] Tell the instructor your child's signals, fears, and what helps them calm.

One Important Reminder

- Swimming ability lowers risk – it does not remove it
- Even a strong swimmer needs supervision, barriers, and a safety plan.

For informational purposes only. This resource does not replace professional advice, constant supervision, or emergency services. In an emergency, call 911.