

# Good Habits from Hubbard Family Swim School to Home

By Kathy and Bob Hubbard



## Pool Safety = Good Habits

We work very hard at teaching good pool manners and lots of safe behavior here at Hubbard. Here are some of our most important lessons and hints on how you can reinforce them at home.

### Around the Pool

Children should learn never to enter the pool until an adult has given them the ok. This goes for all children regardless of their age or ability.

At home, we suggest teaching your children never to enter the pool without asking first. Go out to the pool area and take your time setting up the towels, rearranging chairs, applying sunscreen, and enjoying the view. In other words, stall a bit to practice patience. Make your child play and wait until you are finished getting ready before they enter the pool.

One of our favorite teachers is Judy Watts from Australia. She runs a small backyard-teaching program that has a worldwide reputation. All of her parents must be poolside 15 minutes before their lessons and sit in a chair while the youngsters explore the pool area. They learn not to enter the water or play close to the edge until they are asked to do so when their lesson starts.

Our youngest daughter, Maggie, spent days and hours with us at Phoenix Swim Club, a 10-acre facility with two enormous pools. We taught her where the edge of the pool was in lessons by having her fall in from the side before she could even stand on her own. The few times in the beginning that she went in the pool without being asked, we allowed her to go underwater and made her come back up on her back or turn around and grab the wall. We watched Maggie carefully at all times and would often sit inside the office and watch her explore on her own. She never did go near the edge of the pool and was very aware of where that edge was.

### Entering the Pool

**Jump out, turn around and swim back to the wall.** Great idea! Jump in, grab the wall - not such a great idea!

Years ago, our little daughter Katie was jumping and swimming and having a great time. We were much younger parents then, with a higher energy level, and allowed our kids to get wild and crazy! Katie jumped off the wall, turned in the air, and tried to grab the side. In the process, she knocked out her top two front baby teeth. We spent all day looking for those teeth, but the dentist found them for us: she had knocked the right back into her gums, on top of her two permanent teeth waiting to grow in.

### What do we try to teach?

"Jump in and then turn around and go back to the wall." It is a two-step process. "Jump to me, jump to me, now back to the wall."

**Toes on the edge.** When a child runs and jumps, sooner or later they will take off too far from the edge and land with their tailbone on the pool edge. Ouch! Toes on the edge is especially important for the younger ones who have very little ability to leap. Getting both feet off the ground is a major accomplishment - flying through the air comes as they get older.

**Jump in feet first or fall forward and land on your tummy.** Belly flops are awesome! Teach your kids to always enter a new body of water feet first and then teach belly flops. What a good habit – hopefully they'll remember it when they're 16 and diving into Lake Powell with their friends. There's no need to go deep when you jump in! We guarantee there will be 5 backyard pools that are all 3 ½ feet deep, but somewhere they'll dive into one that's 3 feet and bonk their heads. Start good habits now!

**Never swim alone!** Our fifth child, Patrick, idolized his older brother who was a collegiate gymnast. One afternoon we watched this little 5-year-old as he prepared to go swimming. He stood on the edge of the pool and suddenly threw himself up in the air and around. He attempted to enter the pool by throwing a back flip-just like his big brother. Patrick landed on his head on the deck and slid into the pool – his excellent swimming ability was no help at that point. Patrick was a bit dazed but otherwise fine. Never swim alone.



## Summer Backyard Swimming

Parents! We need your help!

Some thoughts for the summer as pools are beginning to open at home!

1. Do not put your swimmer in floaties
2. They will ruin our goals of teaching your child to swim with their head down and their bottoms up! Floaties allow them to paddle about, head above water and destroy any sense of balance and trust for the water that we have been working so hard to achieve. If you are boating on a lake – yes they need life jackets! If you are swimming in a pool – they need supervision, not floaties!
3. More than one non-swimmer in the pool with you? Teach the kids to hang onto your back while you work with the other child. Great way to always know exactly where they are at all times.
4. Headed for the backyard pool? Give them time to warm up and have fun and then work on the skills. Ten minutes of “teaching” is enough – you’ll be surprised what a big difference that will make!
5. Resist the temptation to have your swimmer jump off the wall to you and you catching them above the water. When they jump in, let them go under the water. There must be a consequence for stepping off a step or the edge. They have to learn to turn and grab a wall, swim back to the steps, or roll over and float. Those are their 3 choices to be safe – not being rescued by mom or dad! This takes time and patience!
6. When trying to work with them to roll over and float, give them a brief chance to initiate the roll over. Yell “roll over” first (you might be surprised on that day when they really do it without your help), then help them roll over and THEN pick them up. Be consistent – they will eventually roll over by themselves and you will have a safe swimmer. Let the water do the work – just guide them as you roll them over! You are not just teaching your children, you are training them! Through repetition!
7. Some students will swim safely for their teacher and then “forget” when they get home. We focus on giving the students confidence. When you are swimming with them at home – **if they are a jellyfish or higher** - don’t rescue them too quickly. If they can swim and roll over here they **can** do it at home. Try yelling “roll over” before you rescue them and you might be pleasantly surprised when they do!