

10 Commandments for Swim Parents

Rose Snyder is a former coach as well as noted and popular national presenter on parent education. This article was written by Rose while she was working with USA Swimming in the early 1990's. It's adapted from Ed Clendaniel's 10 Commandments for Little League Parents and has been republished by swim clubs across the US and 12 countries around the world, including Australia, Croatia, New Zealand, Thailand and the United Kingdom.

"Parents of swimmers, if you follow these suggestions on behavior, you will be much happier." – about.com

1. Thou shalt not impose your ambitions on your child.

Remember that swimming is your child's activity. Improvements and progress occur at different rates for everyone. Don't judge your child's progress based on the performance of other athletes and don't push them based on what you think they should be doing. Kids should simply strive to do their personal best and will benefit from the process of competitive swimming.

2. Thou shalt be supportive no matter what.

There's only one question to ask your child after practice or a competition – "Did you have fun?" If swim meets and practices are not fun, your child should not be forced to participate.

3. Thou shalt not coach your child.

You are involved in one of the few youth sports programs that offer professional coaching, do not undermine the coach by trying to instruct your child on the side. Your job is to provide unconditional love, support and a safe place to return at the end of the day. Love and hug your child no matter what; tell them how proud of them you are. The coach is responsible for the technical part of the job. You should not offer advice on technique or race strategy or any other area that is not yours. Above all, never pay your child for a performance. This will only serve to confuse your child concerning the reasons to strive for excellence and weaken the swimmer/coach bond.

4. Thou shalt only have positive things to say at a swim meet.

If you are going to attend your child's swim meet, you should encourage and never criticize your child or the coach. Both know when mistakes have been made. Remember, 'yelling at' is not the same as 'cheering for'. You should be positive anytime you are around the pool with your swimmer.

5. Thou shalt acknowledge your child's fears.

A first swim meet, new event, longer or more difficult event can be a stressful situation. It is totally appropriate for your child to be scared. Do not yell or belittle, simply reassure your child that the coach would not have suggested the event if your child was not ready for it. Remember, your job is to love and support your child through all parts of the swimming experience. Most of their fears are ones you have given them.

6. Thou shalt not criticize the officials.

If you do not have the time or desire to devote to volunteering as an official, do not criticize those who are doing the best they can for free. You too can be trained to be an official in an afternoon.

7. Honor your child's coach.

The bond between swimmer and a coach is a special one and contributes to your swimmer's success and enjoyment of the sport. Do not criticize the coach in the presence of your child or any other swimmer; it will only serve to hurt your child's swimming.

8. Thou shalt be loyal and supportive of the team.

It is not wise for parents to take their swimmers and jump from team to team. The water isn't necessarily better in another team's pool. Every team has their own challenges, even teams that win or build champions. Children who switch teams are often ostracized for a long time by the teammates they leave behind and are slowly received by their new teammates. Swimmers that switch teams rarely do better than before looking for better water.

9. Your child shalt have goals besides winning.

Most successful swimmers are those who have learned to focus on the process and not the outcome. Giving an honest effort regardless of the result is far more important than winning. One Olympian said, "My goal was to set a world record. Well, I did that, but someone else did it too, just a little faster than I did. I achieved my goal and I lost. Does this make me a failure? No, in fact I am very proud of that swim." What a tremendous outlook to carry on through life.

10. Thou shalt not expect your child to become an Olympian.

There are approximately 280,000 athletes in USA Swimming. Only 2% of the swimmers listed in the 10 & Under age group will make it to the 17-18 age group. Of those, an even smaller percentage will make it to the elite level or world-class status. There are only 52 spots available for the Olympic Team every four years. The odds of your child becoming an Olympian are about .0002%! Swimming is much more than just the Olympics. Ask your coach why they coach; chances are they are not an Olympian but still got so much out of swimming they want to pass the love for the sport onto others. Swimming teaches self-discipline and sportsmanship, builds self-esteem and fitness, provides life-long friendships and so much more. Most Olympians will tell you those intangibles are far more important than any medal they won. Swimming teaches life lessons through sport and builds good people; the type you want your child to be. You should be happy your child wants to participate in this great sport!