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## Swimming Coaches & Parents: Building the Relationship

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The relationship between swimming coaches and parents can sometimes become strained

In this article, Coach Arthur will provide advice, tips, hacks and examples of how swimming coaches and parents can develop an effective swimming relationship.

For a competitive swimmer to reach their full swimming potential, they will need to be committed and dedicated. They will also need to be provided with the correct support and training. Providing support is mainly the responsibility of the parents, and providing the training is mainly the responsibility of the coach.

However, the relationship between swimming coaches and parents can sometimes become strained.

Coach Arthur provides advice on a variety of situations, where the relationship between a swimming coach and a swimmer's parents can be developed to provide an effective swimming relationship, for the benefit of the swimmer.

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## Understanding The Other's Viewpoint

In our experience, there are several situations that could put a strain on the relationship between coaches and swimming parents. These could be eased considerably if both sides better understood and appreciated the viewpoint of the other. For example,

### Swimming From A Coach's Viewpoint

- Most coaches spend many, often unsocial hours on the poolside/deck for little or no monetary reward.
- Their reward is seeing the swimmers they coach, develop and reach their full potential.
- Some coaches are under the added pressure of needing to succeed.

### Swimming From A Parents Viewpoint

- Some swimming parents, spend long hours in the viewing gallery
- Some swimming parents have to get up in the early hours for morning training
- Swimming parents provide love, support, finance and their time

- Some parents believe that although it's important to their child, there's more to life than swimming
- Some parents have other children to consider

## Unrealistic Expectations

To have a chance of getting to the top, swimming takes years of consistent and persistent practice. Some parents and swimmers have unrealistic swimming expectations. For example, Expecting to become a national swimmer, when they only train for two or three sessions per week.

Some coaches have unrealistic expectations of a swimmer. Some swimmers do not want to push themselves to their limit and prefer the social, health and lifestyle benefits that competitive swimming provides.

**Coach Arthur says:** “Coaches, swimmers and swimming parents should set realistic and achievable swimming goals, driven by the swimmer’s aims and objectives”.

### Related Article On Swimming Goals

We have produced a related article on the benefits of setting swimming goals. Which you can view by clicking this link: [Swimming goals](#)

## Squad Promotions

Some parents get disappointed and frustrated when their child has not been promoted to another training squad. This is especially the case when a friend or training partner has been promoted and their child has not.

**Coach Arthur says:** “It understandable that parents may be disappointed in this circumstance, but there are usually good reasons why this has happened. These could include,

- Recent illness or injury
- Training attendance
- Training performance
- Competitive performance
- Swimmer development: sometimes a swimmer is not promoted because the coach wants to develop a key swimming skill further before they can be promoted.

If the parents are disappointed with this situation, then they should talk to their child’s coach”.



Some parents get too directly involved in coaching their child

## Second Coaching

Some parents get too directly involved in coaching their child. This can happen even if the parent has no swimming background or experience. Some shout or mime actions from the viewing gallery or poolside/deck. While some other parents give their child swimming instructions prior to competition or training.

**Coach Arthur says:** “Let the coach, coach. Don’t be a second coach to your child. This can cause confusion if the parent says something that contradicts the coach. This situation results in increasing pressure on the swimmer, as they try to satisfy two coaches. Which very often leads to a poor swimming performance”.

## Squad Discipline

Many swimming parents complain about the lack of squad discipline, where swimmers are late to training, cut out lengths/laps and generally mess around. Not only does this make the training ineffective, but it can also be dangerous.

**Coach Arthur says:** “Coaches need to provide consistent squad discipline to all swimmers.

Introducing a set of etiquette and safety guidelines for swimmers to adopt, should ensure a safer and more harmonious training environment”.

### [Related Article On Lane Etiquette And Safety](#)

We have produced a related article, on lane etiquette and safety. Which you can view by clicking this link: [Lane etiquette and safety](#)

## Favouring Certain Swimmers

A regular complaint from parents regarding coaches is that they tend to favour better and faster swimmers.

**Coach Arthur says:** Although this may be a natural reaction, coaches need to remember that as they expect every swimmer’s best efforts in training and competition, so every swimmer has the right to expect the same from their coach.

## Coaches Becoming Distracted

Coaches becoming distracted while coaching can be very annoying for many swimming parents. The most common distractions for coaches are phones, parents and other poolside/deck staff.

### **Coach Arthur says:**

- “Unless in an emergency, coaches should never use their mobile/cell phone on poolside/deck”.
- “Parents should consider the timing of when they wish to speak to the coach, so not to become a poolside/deck distraction”. (see Opportunities for a parent to communicate above)
- “Although coaches do from time to time have to consult other poolside/deck staff, they should keep all such communication short and professional, so to keep any distraction from their coaching duties to a minimum”.

### **Not Making Training Fun**

Competitive swimmers need to train hard for long hours if they wish to be successful.

- A training session with new and challenging sets and drills is not only more interesting for swimmers of all ages, but for the coach as well.
- There are endless possibilities for both a coach and swimmer to add variety to a swimming training session. All it requires is a bit of pre-planning, some inspiration and imagination.

**Coach Arthur says** “Just because a set or a drill is fun, it doesn’t mean that it doesn’t help fulfil some swimming objective or goal. For example: Conducting a relay race where the swimmers perform butterfly arms with a freestyle leg kick, can help a swimmer increase their stroke rate”.

#### **Related Article On Swimming Training: Making It Fun**

We have produced a related article, on swimming training: making it fun. Which you can view by clicking this link: [Swimming training: making it fun](#)

### **There’s More To Life Than Swimming**

Coaches often get criticised by parents for not taking school, social and family commitments into consideration.

#### **Training, School Examinations And Revision**

As a swimmer grows, so can the need to commit more time to their academic studies. Most coaches will understand completely and will be ok with a reduction in their swimming training around revision and examination times. Coaches just want to be communicated to, and informed when they can expect this to take place.

**Coach Arthur says:** “Examination and revision time can be very stressful for any student. Sometimes swimming can provide the perfect outlet for that stress. By all means, reduce your child’s swimming commitment during examination time, but don’t give it up altogether”.

#### **Social And Family Occasions**

From time to time there are special family occasions and other social activities outside swimming that a swimmer should attend.

**Coach Arthur says:** “As long as these are occasional, and you inform your coach there should be no great effect on their training performance. However, making activities like a sleepover, where a swimmer rarely gets enough sleep a habit, can have a damaging effect on their training performance. As in swimming as with a lot of things in life, it’s about prioritising and getting the balance right”.

### **Poor Communication**

Last but certainly not least is the common problem of poor communication between coaches and parents. In a vacuum of information, you sometimes get gossip, rumour, exaggeration and half-truths.

**Coach Arthur says:** “Coaches can be particularly poor at communicating with parents. Coaches need to ensure they communicate regularly with their swimmer’s parents”.

### **Opportunities For A Coach To Communicate**

There are many opportunities for a coach to communicate to a swimming parent, including,

- A club’s welcome pack
- Presentation of the annual training plan
- End of season review
- New-season preview
- Club newsletter
- Club’s website
- Email bulletin

**Coach Arthur says** “Communication is a two-way process, and unfortunately many swimming parents can also be particularly poor at communicating with coaches. Swimming parents need to ensure, that when appropriate, they communicate with their child’s coach”.

### **Opportunities For A Parent To Communicate**

When coaches are coaching other children, may not be the best time to speak to them, so please don’t come onto the poolside/deck during a training session.

- Speak to the coach either before or after a training session.
- Encourage your child to communicate directly with their coach as much as possible.
- Try and refrain from telephoning coaches.
- Never phone the coach after an evening training session, when they are often tired and may be preparing for a morning training session.
- If errors or oversights do happen, remember everybody makes mistakes, so give the coach the benefit of the doubt if they miscalculate from time to time.
- However, sometimes certain issues should be brought to the attention of the head coach.
- Issues involving children can be quite emotive, so try to check your emotions and wait 24 hours to evaluate your response, if you think one is required.
- Arrange a convenient time and place to meet them.
- When you do finally get to speak to the head coach, please avoid being accusatory, the chances are that the problem is simply a matter of different perceptions.

### **Opportunities For A Swimmer To Communicate**

- The main responsibility of a coach is to impart their knowledge and experience to the swimmer, in order to aid their development.
- Therefore, it’s important that the swimmer establishes a rapport with their coach. Where they feel confident in asking them for assistance, support, and information.
- Swimming parents should encourage their child to talk with their coach at any time they feel they need reassurance, assistance or clarification.

**Coach Arthur says** “The key to an effective swimming relationship is the communication between all of the parties”.

- Keep one another informed.
- Ensure you are informed and up to date.
- Don't just send negative communication, also send positive communication when something good happens.

### **Related Article On How To Become A Great Swimming Coach**

We have produced a related article on how to become a great swimming coach. Which you can view by clicking this link: [how to become a great swimming coach](#)

### **Takeaway**

There are many situations that could put a strain on the swimming relationship between a coach and a swimming parent.

In our experience, these situations would be eased considerably if both sides,

- Better understood and appreciated the other's viewpoint.
- Improved communication between themselves.



The Parent's Guide to Competitive Swimming

### **Related Publication: The Parent's Guide To Competitive Swimming**

We have published a related publication: The Parent's Guide to Competitive Swimming. For further details and ordering information, please use the following link: [The Parent's Guide to Competitive Swimming](#)

### **Swimming Resource Library**

We have provided a swimming resource library, containing links to all of our publications and blog articles. To access any article simply click on the attached page link: [Swimming resource library](#)

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