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PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR A SWIM MEET: CREATING A PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT

Psychological Safety: A climate in which people are comfortable expressing themselves. It is a climate where people feel safe to speak up, make mistakes, and be themselves without fear of embarrassment or punishment. In sport, this means that athletes need freedom to try, fail, and learn. Key ingredients to psychological safety include: the promotion of risk-taking, an absence of threat or harm, positive interpersonal relationships, positive emotional states, inclusivity, equality, and respect.

Sport Competitions: Organized events where individuals or teams engage in athletic contests, often tailored to specific social groups, providing environments that celebrate human excellence and promote an environment free from discrimination.

In other words:

- Competition is part of sport
- Finding, realizing, and developing potential has many dimensions
- Rules exist to guide the sport
- Judges are human, too
- Self-referenced criteria for success can be both helpful and harmful
- Practice reflects reality
- Physical and mental skills are not fixed
- Competitions are just milestones, not a destination

CHECKLIST FOR AN OPTIMALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT:

- Positive relationships
- Welcoming environment
- Developmentally appropriate activities
- Shared goals and expectations
- Caring and competent coaches
- Supportive parents
- Friendly and supportive peers

Creating psychologically Safe Swim Meet Experiences:

BEFORE MEETS:

- Fix the fundamentals (sleep, food, and hydration).
- Alleviate other stressors; prepare early.
- Casual dinner conversations about goals and expectations.

DURING MEETS:

- Support autonomy by allowing athletes to own their swimming.
- Avoid sideline coaching; trust the process.
- Recognize and own your own emotional responses.

AFTER MEETS:

- Focus praise on effort, not just outcomes.
- Normalize setbacks and disappointments. Help athletes move on from them.
- Give your athlete time to process.

