

PSYCHOSOCIAL SAFETY IN COMPETITIVE SPORTS

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. Key ingredients include: the promotion of risk-taking, an absence of threat or harm, positive interpersonal relationships, positive emotional states, inclusivity, equality, and respect.

In swimming, this means:

- *Athletes* need freedom to try, fail, and learn.
- *Coaches* thrive when they can innovate without judgment.
- *Officials* feel supported when enforcing rules for fairness at swim meets.
- *Parents* feel included and valued for their efforts.
- *LSC leaders* feel supported in creating a culture for the sport.

Psychological safety is Created in 4 Phases:

- **Inclusion safety (Thoughts, Perceptions, and Feelings):** affords individuals to feel genuinely welcomed and included as valuable in the team.
- **Learner safety (Behaviors):** Enables the individuals to actively engage in the learning process and make mistakes that equip them to succeed in their role.
- **Contributor safety (Outcomes of Behaviors):** Individuals become significant contributors to the success of the organization.
- **Challenger safety (Contributors to Growth and Change):** those who successfully contribute to the organization have the security to take interpersonal risks and ask questions that challenge antiquated or dysfunctional systems without fear of retaliation.

**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

Facilitating Psychological Safety:

COACHES:

- Normalize mistakes: "That's part of learning."
- Invite athlete input: "What did you notice about that set/drill?"
- Give choices in workouts when appropriate.
- Use positive reinforcement over fear-based feedback.

OFFICIALS:

- Maintain neutrality but show humanity by interacting with warmth and fairness with the athlete
- Model fairness and consistency.
- Create an environment where rules = safety, not punishment.

PARENTS:

- Maintain neutrality but show humanity by interacting with warmth and fairness with the athlete
- Model fairness and consistency.
- Create an environment where rules = safety, not punishment.

LSC LEADERS:

- Maintain neutrality but show humanity by interacting with warmth and fairness with the athlete
- Model fairness and consistency.
- Create an environment where rules = safety, not punishment.



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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

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Creating psychologically Safe Swim Meet Experiences:

BEFORE MEETS:

- Fix the fundamentals
- 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.

