



FOUNDATIONS OF *Coaching*

Chapter 3: Organization and Administration

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Part 1: Governance Structures

Topic Questions:

1. How is USA Swimming organized and governed at the national and local level?
2. What are the three most common swim team organizational models?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of each model?

USA Swimming at the National Level

USA Swimming was created in 1978 with the passage of the Amateur Sports Act which specified that all Olympic sports must be administered independently. The national headquarters of USA Swimming is at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, CO.

As the National Governing Body (NGB) for the sport, USA Swimming is responsible for the conduct and administration of swimming in the United States. In this capacity, USA Swimming formulates the rules, implements the policies and procedures, conducts the national championships, disseminates safety information and selects athletes to represent the United States in international competition.

How USA Swimming Operates

USA Swimming is a non-profit organization made up of volunteers and support staff. The House of Delegates meets annually to determine any changes in the rules and regulations for the following year and to elect the USA Swimming Board of Directors which is charged with the responsibility of making policy decisions for USA Swimming. A support staff at Headquarters in Colorado Springs implements the policies and provides service to members. Coaches are strongly encouraged to get involved in the leadership and governance of swimming, first at the local level and then at the zone or national level.

How to Find Information

The USA Swimming web site, www.usaswimming.org is the main source of information. A coach should visit the site frequently and create a personal account on the web site to track vital information about his or her team and swimmers. Use the information on the web site for information, education and to find valuable resources for athletes, parents and the club.

USA Swimming at the Local Level

- **Zones.** USA Swimming is divided into four zones: Central, Eastern, Southern and Western. Each zone elects two representatives, one coach and one non-coach to the national Board of Directors. Each zone is responsible for administration of Zone Championship Meets and Speedo Championship Series Meets.
- **LSC's.** Within the United States, there are fifty-nine Local Swimming Committees (LSC's). Each LSC is responsible for administering USA Swimming in a defined geographical area. Responsibilities of the LSC's include scheduling and sanctioning swim meets and the registration of clubs, coaches, athletes and officials. Each LSC has its own set of bylaws under which it operates. A House of Delegates with representation of athletes, coaches, clubs and members of the LSC Board of Directors is responsible for managing the business affairs of the LSC. Each LSC has its [own website](#) with local information. [Map of the LSCs.](#) Coaches should attend LSC House of Delegates meetings and volunteer to serve on LSC committees.

Club Governance: Swim Club Organizational Models

Swim teams in the United States are organized and structured in a variety of ways. From programs sponsored by YMCAs or universities, to parent-owned non-profit corporations, to private businesses owned by coaches or partnerships, there are many different models of successful swimming organizations.

- **Coach-Owned or Private Business**
Many successful competitive swimming programs in the United States are coach or privately owned. Most coach-owned swim teams are legally structured as proprietorships or partnerships. The limited liability corporation (LLC)



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is rapidly becoming a very popular business form. An LLC combines selected corporate and partnership characteristics while still maintaining status as a legal entity distinct from its owners.

A coach owner has the ability to build a program based on his or her vision while enjoying the advantages of self-employment. However, the coach owner must assume considerable financial risk and may have difficulty securing needed volunteer support.

- **Nonprofit Organization/Corporation**

The most common organizational model for swim teams in the United States is the parent-owned, non-profit corporation. Also known as not-for-profit corporations, the main reason that teams select this legal structure is to obtain tax-exempt status. Most swim teams organized as non-profit corporations are governed by a board of directors that primarily consists of swim team parents. This board hires the head coach. Ideally, the head coach serves as the chief executive with prime responsibility for managing day-to-day “dry-side” operations and total responsibility for developing and leading the swimming or “wet-side” of the program. Volunteers also assume many responsibilities in the non-profit organization.

Tax-exempt status with limited legal and financial liability for the directors and staff is the main advantage of the non-profit. However a turnover in board leadership combined with the potential for micromanagement by the parent board can be problematic.

There are educational programs and personalized assistance available through USA Swimming and the American Swimming Coaches Association for parent owned non-profit swim clubs.

- **Institutionally Owned**

Institutions that own or operate swimming facilities often offer swim teams. These institutions typically include universities or colleges, YMCAs or YWCAs, park and recreation departments and private schools or school districts. In most cases, the institution collects revenue, in the form of team dues, program fees or membership fees. Team coaches serve as employees of the institution that owns or operates the pool. A booster club often assists this type of swim team. The booster organization is composed of parents of swimmers who provide volunteer services and additional financial support for the team.

Institutional ownership can provide stability, low cost access to facilities and frequently full-time employment for coaches. However, very often, the swim team cannot function independently and is tied to the institution both financially and philosophically.

Relationship with Other Swimming Organizations

Other swimming organizations include the [American Swimming Coaches Association](#), the [National Interscholastic Coaches Association](#) (NISCA) the [College Swimming Coaches Association of America](#) (CSCAA) and the [YMCA Coaches Association](#). As the national governing body (NGB) of swimming in the United States, USA Swimming works closely with these other organizations for the betterment of swimming at all levels. This course, Foundations of Coaching, is a cooperative effort between USA Swimming and the ASCA. Coaches are encouraged to become members of all of the relevant coaching organizations and to do all that they can to take advantage of opportunities to continue their education.



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Part 2: Working with the Swim Club

Topic Questions:

1. What is the distinction between dry side and wet side responsibilities?
2. What is the purpose of a preseason staff meeting?
3. Why is it necessary to establish effective communication with parents?
4. How can a coach successfully work with officials?
5. Why does the coach need to establish a relationship with the facility administrator?

The Role of the Head Coach

The role of the Head Coach may vary depending on the organizational model of the club. For example, a coach owner will take on different financial responsibilities than a coach employed by an institution or a parent board. However, regardless of structure, certain basic responsibilities fall to the Head Coach. These can be divided into “dry side” and “wet side” responsibilities. Dry side responsibilities refer to responsibilities away from the pool deck while wet side responsibilities refer to those responsibilities directly related to coaching the athletes in the pool. Here is a sample list of responsibilities.

Dry Side Responsibilities	Wet Side Responsibilities
1. Prepares a monthly report	1. Oversees all levels of swimming: designs and plans for all groups
2. Plans or help develop budget	2. Directly coaches at least one group
3. Member of nominating committee for team officers	3. Educates and supervises all coaches
4. Assists in fundraising	4. Sets practice schedule
5. Maintains office hours	5. Sets practice groups
6. Attends pertinent meetings (team, LSC, etc.)	6. Attends highest level of competition and sees that all swim meets are attended by a team coach
7. Oversees communication: web site, newsletters, meet information, publicity, team records	7. Determines meet schedule for team
8. Oversees purchase of equipment	8. Oversees individual and team entries
9. Runs parent education programs	9. Supervises athletes at meets
10. Writes checks as authorized	10. Sets attendance and discipline policies for swimmers

The Role of the Assistant Coach

Each coach on a team contributes in unique ways. A preseason staff planning meeting should include the entire staff discussing preferences, strengths and weaknesses. Staff meetings should also be held at regular intervals during the season. While all coaches should know how to communicate, educate and motivate effectively, many duties can be directed to the strengths of each coach. One coach may prefer teaching 8 and unders while another communicates best with adolescents. One coach may have computer and internet experience and could handle the team website while another could be in charge of the team newsletter.

Establishing responsibilities for each coach should also be part of the preseason planning meeting. Each coach should know his or her role on the team and have the opportunity to request or decline duties. All coaches must share some basic responsibilities such as general discipline and enforcing team rules. Other responsibilities such as setting the training schedule and team philosophy are ultimately the responsibility of the head coach. While the head coach is the final authority on all matters of the swim team, assistant coaches can have input into those decisions. The head coach is charged with overseeing the entire swim program and making group and coaching assignments. The experience and knowledge level of the assistant should be the determining factor in how much independence each assistant is given. The head coach has ultimate responsibility to mentor and supervise the assistants. A cohesive staff respects each other's talents, shares responsibility and ultimately speaks with one voice to the swimmers and parents.



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Working with Parents

Swimming is a family affair! The coach must recognize that swimming is one extension of each family's home life. Parents, brothers, sisters, grandparents and possibly even aunts and uncles will all be involved to some degree because the swimmer is a part of their family. Just as the coach understands that sport is a family affair, parents should understand the role of the coach and their roles as parents on the swim team. Be careful that not to step into the role of parent just as the parents must not step into the role of coach. Effective communication is essential in establishing a working relationship with parents.

The coach determines many of the rules for the swim team while parents decide the values in their family. The coach may not always agree with the parents. For example, a parent may decide that a swimmer will miss practice once a week for piano lessons. The coach can express an opinion about this decision and how it will affect swimming, but in the end, it is the decision of the parents. On the other hand, the coach decides how to teach swimming strokes. Parents may ask for an explanation of the skills and teaching progressions which the coach should be able to give. In the end, however the parents need to trust the coach's knowledge and experience on the technical side.

Educating the parents is the key to communication and support. Broadly stated, here are some of the topics to include in parent education:

- Coaching philosophy and expectations
- Goals and plans for the season
- Practice policies, especially any changes over the previous season
- Volunteerism
- Communication: how to get in touch with a coach
- Staff responsibilities: who does what

Please refer to the "[Successful Sport Parenting](#)" CD jointly produced by USA Swimming and US Ski and Snowboard. Check the "Club Administrator" section for tips on educating parents, securing volunteers and communicating with club members. Look in the "Coach" section for materials to educate team parents. Remember, educated parents tend to be supportive parents!!

Working with Officials

The roles of coach and official have the potential to cause conflict on the pool deck. There are instances where a difference of opinion, particularly with respect to judgment calls, comes into play. However, the opportunity exists for many more positive relationships in the interactions of coaches and officials. Promoting positive communication is an absolute key to generating a healthy environment, avoiding problems and reinforcing coaching observations.

Most officials are volunteers who find officiating a rewarding and valuable way to contribute to young people and the sport of swimming. Their approach is to be professional in executing the job of an official. Officiating is necessary in the sport to provide the consistency for fairness in competition. Training programs for officials are provided by the Local Swim Committee's (LSC).

Here are some tips for coaches when working with officials:

Coaches should:

- Be timely in bringing issues to the referee.
- Stay as calm and objective as possible; firmness and assertiveness are expected behaviors.
- Question the rule violated and understand the application.
- Ask the referee if he or she observed the violation.
- Use the rulebook to address the specific issue.
- Make the case based on specific interpretation.
- If the issue is meet specific, raise the question based on the content of the meet information.
- If there was an extenuating circumstance or event, bring it to the referee's attention for investigation.
- Ask questions in the general meeting.



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Coaches should not:

- Protest a judgment call based solely on disagreement with the official's judgment.
- Display unsportsmanlike conduct; it only hinders the case.
- Spend a lot of time questioning judgment calls requiring independent confirmation once it is confirmed that two independent people participated in the decision (e.g. false starts, relay take-off).
- Attempt to delay competition once a decision has been made.

For more information about the roles of the officials, see Resources/Team Administration.

Working with Aquatic Facility Administrators

The administrator of the aquatic facility will be responsible for many functions that affect the swim team. Two keys to working with administrators are to remember that:

- The administrator is there to help serve clients and the swim team is a client
- Many other organizations use the aquatic facility in addition to the swim team

Consequently, request help and service from the administrator for the needs of the swim team, but do not expect the administrator to work miracles. Work with an administrator regarding each of the following:

- Pool conditions. This includes water quality and temperature.
- Sharing the facility with other groups. Scheduling practices and meets around the activities of other groups using the pool.
- Equipment. Find out what equipment the team can use and what equipment team members will need to provide for themselves.
- Pool cleanup and maintenance. The team will be responsible for cleanup of equipment and general care of the aquatic facility.
- Rules and regulations. Consult with the administrator about the rules and regulations for the aquatic facility and inform the administrator of the rules for the team.
- Conducting meets. Swimming meets involve much cooperation between the team and the aquatic facility administrator. Frequent communication is a necessity prior to the meet.

Hosting a Meet

Many teams host swim meets. The coaches will have roles in the hosting of meets, but their main role during the meet should be to coach the swimmers. Coaches should be clear about roles and responsibilities and should not take on meet direction responsibility in addition to coaching swimmers. A coach should be part of the pre-meet planning process and the post-meet evaluation process and be willing to step in if there is an emergency, such as when the lane line breaks! Otherwise, entrust the actual running of the meet to the volunteer corps.



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Part 3: Organizing the Wet Side

Topic Questions:

1. Who are novice, age group, and senior swimmers?
2. What are some of the aspects of planning?
3. What are the keys to a successful practice?
4. What are some things the coach should not do during practice?

Basic Training Groups

There is no formal and unanimously accepted definition of what is a senior, an age group and a novice swimmer. It is helpful, however, in describing wet side organization to be specific as to what group we are referring to. Much depends on club size and structure. In general, senior swimmers are high school aged with the addition of talented, experienced 13 and 14 year olds. Age group swimmers are generally aged 9 through 12 although they may be up to age 14 and still be considered "age group". They have the skills to swim in USA Swimming or similar competition. Novice swimmers are generally aged 12 and under and are still developing stroke and turn skills as well as learning how to complete a workout. (Swimmers aged 8 and under are yet another group and where staff and pool space allow these young swimmers should have the opportunity to practice together as a separate group regardless of their ability or experience.) Novice swimmers aged 13 and over should not be practicing in the same group as much younger novices because the differences in cognitive, conceptual and social abilities are too great. Where possible they should have their own group or be integrated into a group of swimmers of similar age.

Organizing Training Groups

Most programs organize swimmers based on both age and developmental level. Swimmers are expected to progress from one training group to the next once they have mastered the skills and developmental parameters at each level. Training group assignment is a coaching decision and may, at times, be subjective in nature. However, having clearly stated guidelines for advancement and group placement alleviates some of the tension associated with this topic. Following is a basic training group design that can be altered to fit different team situations. Note the progressive skill development, training emphasis and commitment requirement at each level.

Precompetitive Groups

Category	Skill Objective	Training Objective	Main Focus
Reflexive Awareness (0-2 yrs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kinesthetic awareness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulation of the body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoyment and physical activity
Motor Memory Development (3-6 yrs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kinesthetic awareness • Use of appropriate stroke patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motor pattern development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fun • Physical and social development



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Competitive Groups

Level	Category	Skill Objective	Training Objective	Commitment
1	Sport Preparation (6-9 yrs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stroke Technique All four strokes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aerobic development Joy of participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2-3 sessions per week 30-60 minutes
2	Basic Skill Development (8-11 yrs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teaching fundamentals Technique Balance and coordination in the water All strokes, all events Develop athleticism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued progressive aerobic development Emphasis on kicking Swim practice skills Self-management and independence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2-4 sessions per week 30-60 minutes Encourage other activities/sports Intra-squad competition or low pressure competition
3	Basic Training Development (11-14 yrs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong foundation in all four strokes No specialization Stretching, calisthenics, own body weight exercise Develop athleticism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aerobic endurance Maintain good technique on low intensity interval work Focus preparation on 200 IM and 200/500 free Kicking emphasis Learn to compete 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4-6 sessions per week 60-90 minutes Year round participation Encourage other activities/sports while understanding need to meet attendance expectations
4	Progressive Training (13-18 yrs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain and refine technique Core body conditioning Additional dryland such as medicine balls, free weights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus switches to training rather than fundamentals Aerobic/Increased yardage Introduction to anaerobic threshold work and speed development Focus on 400 IM and mid-distance freestyle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6-10 sessions per week 90-120 minutes Year round including LC competition Commit to swimming Shorter breaks to minimize deterioration of aerobic base
5	Advanced Training (14 and over)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attention to detail Efficiency Technical precision Strength training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distance based physiological training All energy systems with heavy aerobic emphasis Specificity of training for stroke and distance Still train for and compete in wide variety of events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8-10 sessions per week 90-120 minutes Year round High commitment level Short breaks to minimize deterioration of aerobic base



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Plan, Plan, Plan

Organizing the wet side can be summed up in one word: PLAN! Planning involves organizing the season, organizing the month, organizing the week and finally, organizing the practice session. All planning should be done in writing. Working out the plans on a large calendar can be helpful. All of the planning should include goals and objectives. What do the coach and the swimmers want to accomplish? Determine how the goals will be accomplished and develop a timeline to meet the goals. Finally, consider how to measure success and achievement of the goals. Develop individual and team goals and objectives and have personal goals and objectives for professional development. Goals and objectives should not be limited to times and rankings. The long term development of athletes is more important than short term performance at meets.

In planning the overall season, coaches should focus on development of the athlete rather than meet performance. Consider developing new events and training capacities. In planning each month, pick a focus or goal for the month such as a skill development or a particular meet. Moving down to the weekly plan, again have an overall goal for the week. Then consider what type of work or teaching will be the focus each day and be sure to balance or cycle through different types of work, recovery and skill development. Finally, plan each day, having a goal or purpose for each practice. Balance the different activities during each practice to achieve the practice goal or objective. Be flexible and don't try to accomplish too many different activities within one practice because the swimmers may be confused rather than challenged.

All of the following should be included in the planning:

- Team Development
- Stroke Training
- Training Improvement
- Mental Skills Improvement
- Strength and Flexibility
- Skill Development
- Race Technique
- Times and Rankings

Season planning and practice design will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6, Physical Conditioning.

Organizing the Practice

Structure, planning and adequate supervision are the keys to successful practices. In most cases, swimmers are broken into groups either by ability, age, skill, sex or a combination of categories, such as 9-12 year old boys or 10/unders who can swim all four strokes. Ideally, there are enough coaches to assign a coach to each group. If not, one coach will need to supervise multiple groups and give set or training assignments to the groups to complete on their own. Use of a blackboard, whiteboard or posted written workouts can facilitate multiple group practice sessions. If the environment is noisy, written practices or sets posted on each lane can be helpful. Gauge the level of understanding, skill and independence of the athletes before assigning independent work to a group.

Safety is a primary consideration when planning a practice. It is important to have clearly stated rules that are uniformly enforced. For example, do not allow some swimmers to fool around and push each other into the pool and then discipline others for doing the same thing. Along with the rules, swimmers should know the consequences of breaking the rules. A "timeout" from practice is one of the most effective punishments. Discipline problems during a practice are often directly related to lack of structure and planning. Active, involved swimmers have a harder time getting into trouble. It is important to keep swimmers busy and challenged. Gauge the attention span of the athletes when teaching or instructing. For very young swimmers limit instruction time to 10-15 minutes and then keep them active.

Also, teach the athletes at a very young age to use and read a pace clock. Even 8 and unders can do some elementary work with a pace clock. Swimmers who understand the use of a pace clock are able to complete a set independently while the coach is instructing another group. (See Chapter 6 for additional information)



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Do's and Don'ts

The coach should:

- Be early
- Have a written plan
- Start practice on time rather than waiting for the stragglers
- Catch them doing something right
- Challenge them
- Make time for games, relays and supervised play
- Talk to each swimmer several times per practice
- Know every swimmer's name ASAP
- End practice with something exciting

The coach should not:

- Talk on a cell phone during practice unless it is an emergency
- Talk to parents right before practice or during practice
- Socialize on the pool deck
- Sit down



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Part 4: The Swim Meet

Topic Questions:

1. What is the proper emphasis at a swim meet?
2. What are some of the determining factors in deciding what events a swimmer should enter?
3. What are some of the major responsibilities of the coach at a swim meet?

The Purpose of Swim Meets

Swim meets provide the opportunity to measure the development of the athletes. They are a chance for swimmers to perform and show what they have learned or how much they have improved. Swim meets are also social opportunities for the team and they should be enjoyable and fun for the swimmers.

If meets are very stressful for the coach or the athletes, perhaps the coach, parents or the athletes themselves are putting too much emphasis on performance and outcomes. Outside of competing for attention at home or school, swimming may be the first competitive experience for many swimmers. Although swimming is a team sport, during races each swimmer swims alone. There is no ball to pass to teammates. This openness of evaluation can have a profound effect upon young people who are developing their identities and self-concept.

As stated in Chapter 1, the proper emphasis in competition should be the process of competition rather than the outcome, the winning or losing. The outcome of competition depends upon many factors. Swimmers can only be responsible for themselves and their abilities, not for all the other factors that affect the outcome. Emphasize personal development (or the process) rather than race outcome. Is this an opportunity to try new events or to work on new technique or race strategy? If the coach has clearly stated goals for each meet the swimmers will have a better understanding of expectations.

How Many Meets, How Many Events?

How many meets should a swimmer compete in? This is a very hard question to answer because much depends on the level and age of the athlete as well as the nature of the swim meet. Is the meet a trials and finals meet lasting three days with the swimmer competing in multiple events each day? Or is the meet a dual meet that is over in two hours with the swimmer competing in only two or three events? Different physical and mental stress levels are involved depending on the type of meet.

As a general rule of thumb, swimmers might compete in meets one or two times per month with one or two months during the year completely free of meets. Competing one or two times per month may not be realistic if swimmers are on high school or YMCA teams that swim dual meet schedules. In these cases it is important that the coach allow plenty of recovery time following the intense competitive season, allowing considerable time with no competition at all.

Being in charge of the wet side means that it is the coach who sets the meet schedule for the team and for each swimmer. Additionally, it is the coach's job to select the events for each swimmer. This may be done in consultation with the swimmer, or, in the case of very young swimmers, in consultation with the parent, but ultimately the choice of events is up to the coach. In most cases the coach is also responsible for submission of the team entries.

The next question that arises concerns how many events a swimmer should enter in each meet. Generally, the more a swimmer races, the more relaxed the swimmer becomes in race situations. Most young swimmers enter the maximum number of races allowed by the meet rules. The event selection is more important than how many events a swimmer enters. Allowing young swimmer to experience personal success by competing exclusively in events in which they already excel will hinder their need to develop skills that will be beneficial in the future. Parents often want their swimmers to enter only their "best events." The coach's job is to broaden the horizons of both the swimmers and the parents. As swimmers become ready for new challenges, choose the 500 free instead of the 100 free or the 200 backstroke instead of the 50 backstroke. Swimmers gain confidence and can often see great and rewarding improvement in new, more challenging events.



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The Coach at the Swim Meet

When it comes to the meet itself, the coach has many jobs. Even when the team is hosting a meet, the coach's primary responsibility is to coach, not to direct the meet management. Regardless of whether the team is hosting or not, here is a list of suggested activities for coaches at swim meets:

- Arrive early. In fact, be the first one there. Claim the team's "territory" with the swimmers.
- Be prepared. At a minimum bring a stop watch, split book, extra pens, a copy of the team entry and a copy of the meet information. Other items to bring include a small notebook or practice notebook, swimmers' goal sheets, best time charts and a practice attendance list.
- Complete any required check-in procedure. Greet other coaches, officials and workers.
- Stand at the end of the lane where the swimmers can find you for warm-up. Alternately, meet the swimmers at a prearranged location prior to warm-up.
- Greet the swimmers enthusiastically. If swimmers are late, talk to their parents later. Age groupers do not drive themselves to meets, so it is probably not the swimmer's fault that he or she arrived late.
- Warm-up as a group. The swimmers should have practiced or discussed warm-up with the coach prior to the meet.
- Hold a team meeting after warm-up to go over procedures, goals and responsibilities.
- Remind swimmers to talk to the coach before and immediately after each race. Do not allow parents to attend these conversations and remind the swimmer to come to the coach after the race before talking to the parent.
- Pre Race: Give the swimmer one, two or three major things to remember or think about.
- During the race: Take splits, watch the race, record notes about the swim. Have another swimmer act as "the secretary" during the races.
- Post Race: Ask the swimmer how he or she swam before giving input. Comment on the race technique, technical aspects and the time. Keep it brief and find something good to say. Give one specific thing to work on for the future. Prepare the swimmer for the next event.
- Maintain a professional demeanor: Hydrate and eat right, dress professionally, monitor personal emotions, be a role model.
- Talk to other coaches. When they are free, ask questions with a sincere interest in learning something.
- At the end of the meet, police the team area with the swimmers. Be the last one to leave. Pick up any awards the swimmers have not collected. Thank the officials and meet workers.
- After the meet, tabulate best times, goal times, and other results and be ready to discuss and evaluate the meet with the swimmers at the next practice.



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Part 5: Risk Management

Topic Questions:

1. What are the requirements for USA Swimming coach membership?
2. When should a Report of Occurrence form be completed?
3. How can the coach participate in risk management?
4. What conditions must be met for USA Swimming insurance coverage to be in effect?

The topics of risk management and safety are covered extensively in the Safety Training for Swim Coaches course. This document is meant as a brief review of major points.

Coach Safety, Background Check and Education Requirements

To become a USA Swimming coach member, the coach is required to have current certifications in CPR, First Aid, and Safety Training for Swim Coaches as well as a current background check completed via the USA Swimming website. In addition, all coaches must complete USA Swimming's Athlete Protection Education every three years and must pass The Foundations of Coaching test before the second year of registration as a coach. The coach is responsible for keeping certifications current. The club, as an employer, should also keep track of the certifications. *If certifications are not current, coach membership status is invalid.* Therefore, the USA Swimming insurance provided for coaching activities would be denied. To see more information about the safety and educational requirements, [click here](#).

Report of Occurrence Forms

The Report of Occurrence form is used to notify USA Swimming and Risk Management Services, Inc. when an accident occurs. Reporting all incidents, no matter how minor, is important to put both USA Swimming and its insurer on notice of accidents and potential claims.

A Report of Occurrence form should be completed any time an injury occurs at a USA Swimming function, whether or not it involves a USA Swimming member. Injuries involving spectators should also be reported. The form should be filled out by a meet director or by any club personnel responsible at the time of the incident. The form should not be completed by the injured individual or his or her parents.

The Report of Occurrence forms keep Risk Management Services, Inc. informed of potential claims or liability situations. If the accident is of a serious nature, USA Swimming National Headquarters confers with Risk Management Services and an investigation of the incident is initiated.

Risk Management

According to the National Safety Council, 85 percent of all accidents are preventable; accidents that might have occurred are prevented or reduced when risk management plans and loss control programs are developed and implemented.

With a plan to minimize risk and ongoing loss control activities, a coach takes a proactive approach. A coach's involvement in developing a plan to minimize risk projects an attitude that says—

- I am a knowledgeable professional.
- I am concerned about safety.
- I will do what is necessary to provide a safe environment.

In addition to preventing accidents, plan to minimize risk is also extremely important in the event of legal action. A proactive program shows intent and acts as evidence of responsible care. A plan to minimize risk and a loss control program should contain procedures in prevention, safety inspections, safety meetings and emergency action. Common types of emergencies that could occur should be considered when planning for emergencies. A detailed plan should be put in writing and thoroughly reviewed and practiced. In developing a plan to minimize risk, the following points should be considered:

- **Safety Rules and Regulations.** Assist in the safe operation of the program by establishing and adhering to rules and regulations that are designed to minimize the risk of injury. Assemble all of the safety rules and regulations pertaining to the facility, USA Swimming and/or any other governing body that may be involved. Review all rules



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and regulations and the procedures used to enforce them. Post and/or publish appropriate rules and procedures, such as warm-up procedures.

- **Supervision.** Coaches and meet officials should be active in enforcing rules and regulations, such as the warm-up procedures. A club safety coordinator acts as liaison between the club and facility.
- **Training and Certification.** As stated above, all coaches must have the necessary certifications. Follow facility guidelines for required supervision of aquatic activities by certified personnel. Some facilities require certified lifeguards on duty.
- **Safety Inspections.** The first step toward actively preventing injuries is to recognize potential hazards. This requires a systematic and routine method of inspecting the swimming facility. A series of checklists and a method of documenting and reporting faulty equipment or facility dangers should be established.

Insurance Coverage

A club's USA Swimming insurance coverage is in effect when all three of the following conditions are met:

1. The club is a member in good standing of USA Swimming
2. All swimmers at practice and at meets are athlete members of USA Swimming
3. All coaches are coach members of USA Swimming with current required certifications.

Activities such as dryland training, team tryouts, fundraising and social activities are also covered by USA Swimming insurance provided the above conditions are met. It is always wise to check the insurance coverage before planning any activity.



Part 6: Legal Considerations

Topic Questions:

1. What is negligence and when might a coach be considered negligent?
2. What legal duties have been imposed on coaches?
3. How does the USA Swimming code of conduct apply to coaches and sexually inappropriate behavior?

Coaching is an honorable profession and many beginning coaches view coaching as a possible career choice. The desire to be treated as a professional carries the responsibility to act professionally at all times.

Legal Duties and Responsibilities

There is a growing trend toward formalized duties for coaches through written job descriptions and contracts. Once formalized, these duties may be treated as legal responsibilities. Briefly stated, courts have determined that coaches are held to a standard of conduct expected of an ordinary reasonable person under like circumstances. Failure to meet that standard is considered negligence. Negligence is the failure to do what a reasonable and prudent person would do in the same or similar circumstances or doing something that a reasonable and prudent person would not have done. It is the coach's responsibility to always act reasonably under the circumstances.

Legal duties for coaches have been established, on specific facts, through various court cases. Though not applicable in every situation, coaches should know that if an accident happens, someone might argue that the coach had a duty that he or she failed to carry out. In specific circumstances, courts have held these duties to include:

- Duty to properly instruct an athlete
- Duty to properly supervise an activity
- Duty to warn of inherent dangers in a sport
- Duty to provide a safe environment and equipment
- Duty to properly condition an athlete
- Duty to provide care in an emergency
- Duty to enforce rules and regulations
- Duty to fairly classify and group participants for competition according to skill level, age, experience, etc.

This list is not all-inclusive, and it might not apply to a particular situation. The bottom line is that there can be significant legal and financial consequences for not behaving reasonably.

In addition, there are best practices that can help prevent injury. These include:

- Reasonable planning to anticipate potentially dangerous circumstances and situations. As a professional, a coach should reasonably plan for all foreseeable hazards.
- Safety through organization and planning. Well organized, planned activities and workouts are more likely to be safe than chaotic, disorganized situations.
- Recordkeeping. All injuries and accidents should be reported as determined by the national governing body. For example, accidents should be documented on USA Swimming [Report of Occurrence](#) forms. Coaches should also keep records of safety hazards that have been documented and reported.

Sexual Misconduct

In working with each child, it is essential that we are mindful of their physical, emotional, and developmental needs. We must also be particularly diligent in recognizing the unique vulnerabilities that are an inherent part of childhood. It is the responsibility of all adults to not only recognize these vulnerabilities, but to develop the knowledge and skills needed to create and maintain a safe and child-centered sports environment.

Sadly, sexual abuse is a serious issue in our society today, and one that all youth-serving organizations must be aware of and guard against. As a coach, it is your job to provide a safe environment for your athletes, and, on the subject of sexual misconduct, that means knowing and adhering to USA Swimming's [Athlete Protection Policies and Best Practice Guidelines](#). These policies and guidelines are in place to foster a safe and healthy environment for all our members – including coaches.



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The coach should never put him or herself in a situation where there is even a hint of impropriety. Coaches must conduct themselves professionally at all times. If you have questions about the policies and guidelines, [please contact our Athlete Protection Officer](#).

The code of conduct in the [USA Swimming Rule Book](#) states that “any sexual contact or advance or other inappropriate sexually oriented behavior or action directed towards an athlete by a coach, official, trainer, or other person, who, in the context of swimming, is in a position of authority over that athlete” is a violation of the code of conduct. In cases of sexual misconduct, USA Swimming always seeks, through its National Board of Review, to ban the offending individual for life from the organization.

Reporting Suspected Abuse

State laws mandate that certain persons engaged in a professional capacity or activity who learn of facts that give reason to suspect that a child has suffered an incident of child abuse are legally obligated to report the suspicion. Coaches may be included among the professionals required to report any suspected abuse. The failure of a coach to make a timely report of suspected abuse may result in criminal charges being brought against the coach. Coaches should educate themselves regarding the specific state laws applicable to them.

Additionally, at the 2010 Aquatic Sports Convention, USA Swimming’s membership adopted legislation to make it mandatory that any member report “firsthand knowledge” or “specific and credible information” regarding sexual misconduct. Failure to report such information is now a violation of the USA Swimming Code of Conduct. To report such information, you can call the Athlete Protection Officer at 719-866-3589, email athleteprotection@usaswimming.org, or use the anonymous form located [here](#).

It is every member’s responsibility to promptly report any incident regarding sexual misconduct by a member as described in Article 304.3.5 to USA Swimming’s Athlete Protection Officer. Reporting must occur when an individual has firsthand knowledge of misconduct or where specific and credible information has been received from a victim or knowledgeable third party. Various state laws may also require reporting to law enforcement or to a designated child protection agency.

There is a lot more to coaching than developing workouts and going to swim meets. Coaches should always keep the guidelines and legal considerations discussed in this chapter foremost in their minds to avoid jeopardizing their athletes and themselves.