



TEAM STATEMENT ON BULLYING/ HARASSMENT/ PRIVACY/ SOCIAL MEDIA

FROM HEAD COACH TONY ACKERSON

As texting and social media continues to become the preferred method of communication among swimmers (and many parents), I thought it might be useful to discuss some possible problems that may arise, and what our team's position is on these issues. A couple of things to consider before we continue:

1. Very little, if anything, is truly private with regards to social media. Many parents place various forms of spyware on their children's phones, and screenshots can be captured of any text message before it is deleted.
2. Texts and/or social media posts can have hurtful consequences, in addition to legal ramifications, depending on the content and ages of those involved.

TO OUR ATHLETES:

1. THINK before you text, tweet, post, or hit "send". Re-read what you are about to send/post, and if you think it could be hurtful in any way, don't use it. Better yet, try and imagine either your parent or the recipient's parents reading the text or post you're about to send.
2. If a teammate's words or actions hurt your feelings, GO TO YOUR TEAMMATE and be honest with them.
3. If you ever feel as though you are being bullied, or sexually harassed, tell your parents immediately. Parents should report any concerns of bullying or sexual harassment to Coach Ackerson. We take this very seriously, and offenders will face disciplinary action by the team.

TO OUR PARENTS:

For "non-legal" issues of athletes simply not getting along well, hurt feelings, etc:

1. Encourage your child to communicate with their teammate. If another child texted something that was hurtful to your child, yet was not of a bullying nature, the best thing that you can do is to let teammates work it out. When parents get involved in minor disagreements between teammates, it often results in alienating children and causing division within the team.
2. If the teammates can't work it out, or if a parent feels as though stronger action is warranted, then that parent should approach the parents of the child involved, and talk it out like adults.
3. Parents should not approach coaches at Seminole Aquatics to resolve minor issues that are best resolved between children, or between parents. Parents SHOULD approach their child's coach if the matter involves bullying, sexual harassment, or child safety.

EXAMPLES:

1. AG2 swimmer Vance believes that his teammate stole his watch at practice. SOLUTION: Vance should tell his coach immediately.
2. AG4 swimmers Ben and Stephon don't like each other. They never speak at practice, and at school Ben reportedly tells others that Stephon is "gay". SOLUTION: It's a school and parent issue. Stephon's parents ought to call Ben's parents to discuss it. Swim coaches should be made aware of the situation however, in order to spot a problem at the pool before it escalates.
3. SR Group swimmers take unflattering photos of a female teammate and circulate them as part of a group text. SOLUTION: If the source of the text is known, then the girl's parents should approach the parents of the boy. Depending upon the nature and severity of the photo and text, Coach Ackerson may need to be involved. Again, any issues of bullying or sexual harassment should always be reported to Coach Ackerson immediately.
4. AG5 swimmer Jeff has dyslexia, a learning disability. Best friend and teammate Nate doesn't know this, and he jokingly calls Jeff a "retard" while the boys are walking to practice. Jeff's feelings are understandably hurt. He tells his parents later that night, and they are outraged, and demand that SA coaches take action against Nate for bullying. SOLUTION: Jeff should tell his friend that he doesn't like being called a "retard." That kind of honesty between good friends would have probably ended the situation on the spot. When the parent gets involved, either by approaching Nate directly, or by trying to get him sanctioned by the team, an issue of joking between friends will likely result in the end of that friendship.
5. SR Group boys, all friends, engage in so-called "mom jokes". One boy tells his parents that he doesn't like it when the boys make fun of his mom. SOLUTION: This is best handled by the boys themselves. These jokes are not allowed on the pool deck, but the coaching staff can't control what is said in text messages between friends. Parents should discuss with their children how to stand up for themselves when their friends say or write things that bother them.
6. During swim practice, out of a coach's earshot, a 12 year old boy refers to a girl in the group as a "skank", thinking he's being funny. The girl tells him to stop, but the boy just laughs. SOLUTION: The coach should be told immediately, and the boy should be disciplined by the coach. Further issues would result in the boy's suspension or removal from the group.

THE BOTTOM LINE:

- Kids can be funny, inappropriate, vulgar, offensive and over-the-line all in a single text message. If a text or social media post is hurtful to a child, parents need to assess the severity of it. If it isn't of a bullying or sexual nature, then it's usually best for kids to work things out by themselves. If they cannot, the parents should discuss the issue as adults. But, if it meets the criteria of bullying or sexual harassment, or if the safety or health of a child is involved, then the coaching staff should be notified immediately.
- TO THE ATHLETES: What you think are private texts and posts are never totally private. Conversations between friends can look a whole lot less funny when they are transcribed in writing for your parents. There are consequences to everything you say and do. Think twice before you text, tweet, or post, and if you think it might hurt someone's feelings, don't do it.

And always be a great teammate.