



Foothills Swim Team
Parent Meeting:
Best Practices for Parents

The Ten Commandments for Parents, plus some more!

Adapted from USA Swimming, ASCA, Parent magazine,
and various sources.

What can I do to be the best swimming parent I can be?

“Give your child that which only you can give! Unconditional love, total support, compassion and unwavering belief in them as human beings. In the long term, whether your kids become world record holders in swimming, lawyers, doctors, teachers...it is not their talent that defines them or makes them successful –it is who they are. And no one helps kids to develop values, virtues and characteristics like their family. 6 feet tall 12 year old kids with large feet and strong muscles are great, but give me intelligent, honest, hard working kids with a real sense of self belief, courage and integrity any day! Develop the person first –then the swimming power!” –“Swim Parents”, ASCA

1. Thou shalt not impose your ambitions on your child.

- Remember that swimming is your child's activity.
- Never compare your swimmer to another swimmer.
 - Progress occurs at different rates for each swimmer
 - Maturity (physical and mental)
 - Experience
 - Strength, build
- Best Practice: Remember that every person can strive to do his/her best and benefit from the process.

“Let Swimming Belong to the Child”

- John Leonard, ASCA

- Summary:
 - Sports are one of the ways that children establish an independent identity and person.
 - Most popular sport of youth, especially boys is **skateboarding** because there are no parents, no rules, no coaches, peer teaching, peer evaluation, peer recognition, and strong group identity.
 - Psychologists say that internal motivation is the strongest force there is, coming from a sense of personal control.
 - Children will leave a sport that “belongs” to their parents.

Chronologically...

- 8 and under: Parent is the most important in “swimming life”.
- Around 10-11: Coach becomes the most important.
- Somewhere 11-14: Peers become the most important. Coaches second, parents third... distant third.
- Continues until college....then parents return to an important role in swimming.

2. Thou shalt be supportive no matter what.

- Questions to ask after practice or a meet:
 - Did you have fun?
 - Were you a good teammate?
- If the answer is no, too often, then maybe have a conversation about why they want to swim.
- Debbie Phelps is hounded for advice on parenting a swimmer. In an interview she said, “I just say, parent your child. Love them for who they are, whether they swim the fastest (butter)fly or finish eighth in their heat.”
- Best Practice: Be a rock in the ocean.

3. Thou shalt not coach thy child

- Your job is to love, hug, support your child no matter what. Provide that “safe place” to return to at the end of the day.
- If you coach your child, you undermine your swimmer’s professional coach. The coach is responsible for the technical parts.
- Best Practice: Strengthen the coach/swimmer bond and allow swimmers to develop outside your help.

4. Thou shalt only have positive things to say at a swim meet.

- Never criticize your child, or the coach.
- Say things like:
 - I love to watch you swim
- Swimmers know the mistakes they made. Coaches know what they need to work on. They should discuss those.
- Consequences for bad performances further take swimming away from the swimmer.
 - “Job”
- Best Practice: You should be the encouraging, positive voice.

5. Thou shalt acknowledge thy child's fears.

- Common fears:
 - Pain
 - Losing
 - New event, unknown
 - Time
- Best Practice: This is one of your most important jobs: Support, assure, and be there through their swimming experience.
 - Shoulder to cry on
 - A hug to assure and congratulate

6. Thou shalt not criticize the officials

- They are parents too!
- They volunteer their time!
- They do the best they can!
- If you have a problem, that's where the coaches can step in and help. We have protocol and appropriate ways to inquire, solve, and bring issues to light.
- Best Practice: Allow the coaches to interact with the officials.

7. Honor the child's coach

- The bond between coach and swimmer is special.
 - Builds trust
 - Common goals
- Do not criticize the coach in front of your child.
 - Break that trust, respect, and goals they set
- Always remember that children tend to exaggerate both when praised and when criticized. Temper your reaction and investigate.
- Best Practice: Get to know your coach. Ask why they coach, their experiences, and ask questions. Praise the coach in public and discuss problems in private.

8. Thou shalt be loyal and supportive of thy team.

- Model Good Sportsmanship
- “Team jumpers” are swimmers who parents/families switch teams always looking for the “better” situation, “better” team.
 - Doesn’t allow swimmers to build friendships, relationships with coaches, and pride for their team.
- Best Practice: A team shirt, volunteering, and helping with your swimmer’s team shows you support their chosen sport.

9. Thy child shalt have goals besides swimming.

- Process not outcome!
- “Swimming teaches self-discipline and sportsmanship; it builds self-esteem and fitness; it provides lifelong friendships and much more.”
- Best Practices: Let swimming’s lessons influence their academics, social, and health....ask what they want in their lives and set goals there also.

10. Thou shalt not expect they child to become an Olympian.

- There are only 52 spots on the Olympic team, every four years. Your child's odds of becoming an Olympian are about .0002%.
- Swimming is so much more than 52 Olympians, or college swimmers, or sectionals.....its the journey, not the destination.
- Young success does NOT predict future success, they may impede it. Why? Because the strongest enemy of GREAT is good.
- Best Practice: Allow them to dream, but don't talk expectations.

Long Term Success: The 5 P's

Help your swimmer to remember:

- **Perseverance**–the ability to try and try and try and try and to never give up;
- **Patience**–it takes time to become a great swimmer –about ten years of consistent hard work;
- **Physical training**–great swimmers are usually the best prepared. It takes a high level of physical fitness, technical development and skills refinement to make it to the top;
- **Personality**–world class swimmers demonstrate some common personality traits –none the least being determination, commitment, the ability to overcome adversity and the capacity for accelerated learning;
- **Passion**–Swimming is like anything else in life: you have to love it to do it well!