

**2023-2024
Parent Handbook**



MAINE

WELCOME TO THE MAINE GATORS

Thank you for choosing our competitive swim program for your child. We are happy to have your family join the Maine Gators family. We hope you'll find this handbook helpful as you "get your feet wet" and that it will answer some of your questions about your role and responsibilities as a swim parent and how our club works.

Maine Gators was formerly called the Portland Porpoise Swim Club (PPSC). It was formed by the City of Portland Recreation Department in the fall of 1989, as a program within the Aquatics Division, and joined the Maine Swimming LSC. Years later it became a private swim club run by a committed and energetic parent board. **In late 2022, PPSC formed a partnership with the Gator Swim Club and joined the New England Swimming LSC to provide more opportunities for our swimmers.** Maine Gators is run by our head coach of 16+ years, [Matt Baxter](#). Our volunteer board of parents run the Maine Gators Booster Club.

For 34 years, **we have provided not only the most extensive competitive programming in the area but one that offers a foundation of success for every child -- both in and out of the water.** Please read our [vision and mission](#).

We look forward to getting to know your family as your child becomes an integral part of our team. See you at the pool!

POLICIES AND SAFE SPORT

SAFE SPORT

USA Swimming, New England Swimming and Maine Gators are committed to raising awareness about the prevention of abuse in the sport. We believe that the first step to creating an empowered team environment is through education. In January 2019, we were the second competitive swim club in the state to become Safe Sport certified with USA Swimming. All of our [Safe Sport related policies, links to online training and information on how to report a safe sport issue/concern](#) is listed on our website (see the Safe Sport tab).

CLUB BYLAWS & POLICIES

You can find copies of our bylaws, code of conduct, outreach program, team travel policy, volunteer policy, and others on our website. [Click on this link](#) or go to the Safe Sport tab and scroll down the page.

TRAINING GROUPS & REQUIRED EQUIPMENT

TRAINING GROUPS SPORT

It is at the coach's discretion which group your swimmer will be placed into and when he or she is ready for advancement. Advancement is primarily based on ability, but can be influenced by other factors such as age and group composition. For a detailed description of each swim group, ability levels, advancement criteria and equipment needs, please visit our website (see [Training Groups](#) under the Our Team tab).

PRACTICE EQUIPMENT

Each swimmer will need both competition and group-specific practice equipment. The required practice equipment varies by swim group. The full list of equipment is available on our website (see [Equipment](#) under the Our Team tab). All Swimmers will also need a towel and water bottle for practices. If you have questions about your swimmer's equipment needs, please ask their coach.

TEAM GEAR & REQUIREMENTS FOR MEETS

For swim meets, all swimmers are required to wear their team suit, t-shirt, shorts and cap with the Gators logo. **All Gators branded gear** can be purchased online by visiting our website and clicking on the [Gear Store](#) tab. If you have any questions about the Gear Store, please contact Karin Tonello at karintonello@yahoo.com.

Coaches may advise some of our 13&Up swimmers to wear a tech suit at certain higher-level meets. USA Swimming does restrict certain tech suits for 12 and under swimmers. Please refer to [USA Swimming's website](#) for FAQs, a list of restricted and approved suits, and more.

COACHING STAFF

All of our coaches are highly skilled, have current certifications with [USA Swimming](#) and many are members of [ASCA](#) (American Swim Coaches Association). In fact, Maine Gators has more ASCA certified coaches than any other team in Maine. [Learn more about our experienced and talented team of coaches.](#)

VOLUNTEERING AND FUNDRAISING

The best way to support your swimmer and the team is to volunteer. We depend on all of our members to assist with fundraising, volunteer at swim meets (timing, officiating, admissions, etc.), help run our fun social events, donate food for concessions and social events, and more. We can only function if everyone does their fair share. [More information about our fundraising](#), including our annual Swim-A-Thon, can be found on our website. As we say, it takes a village to run a club and a swim meet!

COMMUNICATION

Communication is the key to strong relationships. We will do its best to keep you informed, and there are several methods of communication to ensure that information can be passed on and questions can be answered. Other swim parents are also a great resource and asking them questions is a great way to make connections.

Website: You should rely on the website (www.mainegators.com) for most of your information needs. Meet schedules, practice schedules, practice changes, policies and general information about the club can be found on the website.

Email: Head Coach Matt Baxter and Assistant Coach Brenna Dowd will email the membership with reminders about changes in practice schedules, meet information (sign-up deadlines, warm

up time, etc.), meet summaries and more. Email will also be used by the Booster Club to communicate.

Back to the Pool Kickoff Event: In September, the team will hold a season kick-off meeting for parents. This is an important meeting for parents to attend to obtain information about the season ahead.

Phone or Email the Head Coach: If you have any questions regarding training, swim groups, coaching, or anything swim-related, you may contact:

- **FOR NOR'EASTER DIVISION:** Contact Head Coach Matt Baxter at 207.232.9457 or matt@mainegators.com. Since Matt coaches have early morning practices, it's best to reach him before 7:30pm. Matt tries to return all communications within 24-48 hours.
- **FOR DOLPHIN and OSPREY DIVISIONS:** Contact Assistant Coach Brenna Dowd at 631.327.8873 or brenna@mainegators.com. Brenna tries to return all communications within 24-48 hours.

Email the Board: If you have any questions regarding volunteering, policies, fundraising or other administrative matters, please contact the board at board@portlandporpoises.com.

Social Media: We use social media to share swim meet photos, inspirational quotes, etc. We do not share information on policies, practices, cancellations, etc. in these places:

- **Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/MaineGators>
- **Instagram:** <https://www.instagram.com/mainegators>

SWIM MEETS

The Maine Gators annual meet schedule is posted on the website. Check the [Team Calendar](#) as changes can and do occur throughout the seasons.

COMPETITION

Competitive meets are opportunities to elevate personal and team potential. Swim meets also provide the coaches with the opportunity to better know each athlete, to learn what best motivates them, how they respond to praise and constructive criticism, and how they handle success and disappointment. Through these observations the coaches learn how to better coach, mentor, and teach your child. Competition causes a swimmer's mental focus to become sharper, causes their spirit to soar to elevated levels, and causes their body to surpass normal expectations. Our swimmers are trained and expected to compete in all swimming events, distances, and strokes. This promotes versatility and encourages swimmers to explore their potential in a wide range of events offered in competitive swimming.

MEET ENTRY PROCESS

The head coach, with the input of level coaches, is responsible for the meet entry process (i.e. entering your child into the events they swim at the meet). The email you receive *may* include a prompt to choose your swimmer's events - ignore this feature. The coaches determine which events each child swims, eliminating the repetition of the few favorite events.

A list of your child's events and relays is available on the website once the meet is approved and entries have been sent. For instructions on how to find your child's entries and more, please refer to our [Swim Meet 101 guide](#).

MEET RESPONSE SYSTEM

*****IMPORTANT: PLEASE READ*****

Maine Gators uses our website for meet responses. The Head Coach sends an email prior to the upcoming meet soliciting meet sign-ups. The coaches expect that all swimmers attend meets. Parents are expected to read these emails and be aware of upcoming meets and plan accordingly. **A parent must respond via the website whether their swimmer is attending the meet prior to the stated deadline.** Failure to prior to the deadline results in your swimmer not being able to participate in the meet. (NOTE: meet fees will be billed upon the swimmer's declaration, as of the commitment date.) Please refer to our [Swim Meet 101 guide](#).

SWIM MEET EXPECTATIONS

Always remember that both swimmers and parents are representatives of Maine Gators. At away meets we are guests of the home team and should always be respectful.

All swimmers are required to wear the team suit (or appropriate race suit) and team cap at meets. This promotes pride and enhances team spirit.

All swimmers entered into a meet are required to participate in the warm-up prior to their events. Swimmers should arrive at the pool 10-15 minutes prior to their warm-up time.

Sometimes the Club is responsible for providing timers at away meets. **If you have no timing experience, give it a try — you will be trained prior to the start of the meet — it's easy!** It's a fun way to be in the middle of the action.

We always recommend that swimmers bring extra caps, goggles and suits to meets in case they break and are not available for sale on site.

For more information on swim meet expectations, please read our [Swim Meet 101 guide](#).

TRAVEL MEETS

There are several meets every year that Maine Gators attend that require swimmers and their families to travel outside of the greater Portland area. To help clarify the Club's stance, we have developed a Team Travel Policy which is posted on our website. In brief:

- For ALL meets, local or otherwise, Maine Gators will provide appropriate coaching and supervision for your swimmers that are scheduled to swim in that session, and only while they are on the pool deck.
- Swimmers that are not scheduled to swim a session are considered spectators and should not be on the pool deck. They should proceed to the spectator viewing area to watch the meet with their family or other designated guardian.
- Families are required to provide their own transportation, lodging, and supervision for their swimmers at all times. This includes any and all times the swimmer is not on the pool deck actively competing (locker rooms, hotel, etc...).

At this time, Maine Gators does not facilitate what is considered a “Team Travel” meet. We are glad to accommodate all swimmers that want to attend the meet, but we are not yet in a position to organize or accept liability for the team to travel as a group away from their family.

PARENT GUIDELINES

Communication, understanding, and involvement produce success within the triangle relationship (swimmer-coach-parent), just as with any relationship. It is important to keep in mind that developing a swimmer **takes time**. The following guidelines help you keep your child’s development in the proper perspective:

- Every individual learns at a different rate and methods of presentation;
- It takes a great deal of the swimmer’s attention to master the skills of proper stroke technique;
- Plateaus can occur at one time or another in every swimmer’s career; it does not happen on a continuum.

Swimmers under 10 years of age are the most inconsistent. This can be frustrating for the parent and swimmer alike. We must be patient and permit our children to learn to love the sport.

It’s the coach’s job to offer constructive criticism of a swimmer’s performance. It is a parent’s job to supply the unconditional love, recognition, and encouragement necessary to help the young athlete feel good about him/herself.

If you have questions about your child’s training, speak directly to their coach. We ask that parents do not undermine the coach in front of their child or other children and ask that parents do not actively participate in coaching in any manner.

Be sure that your child is swimming because he/she wants to. Self-motivation is the stimulus of all successful swimmers.

Drop-off: have your child at practice 5 minutes earlier than the assigned practice time. It is beneficial to your children to have social time with friends and plenty of time to prepare/dress for practice. The times listed on the practice schedule are when athletes get in the water.

Pick-up: each practice ends at the time listed. Please pick up your athlete at the end of their practice time.

FINANCIAL OBLIGATIONS

REGISTRATION

During registration, you’ll pay the USA Swimming registration fees, meet surcharge fee, the first installment of the membership dues, and any previous account balances, if applicable. Payments made during registration are non-refundable. Invoices for subsequent membership dues payments and meet entry fees will be sent electronically once the season begins. **Please note that registration for OSPREY-Challenge, NOR’EASTER-Challenge and NOR’EASTER-Elite constitutes a commitment for the entire short course (September – March) season or long course (May – July) season. Registration for NOR’EASTER-Competitive constitutes a**

commitment for Session 1 (Sept. 12 – Nov. 19), Session 2 (Nov. 21 – Feb 17) and Session 3 (Feb. 18 – March 31).

Maine Gators requires that payments are automated via credit card or withdrawal from your bank account. This helps the club best manage our expenses. For more information on fees and seasons for each group, visit our website (see Pricing under Our Team tab – you must be logged in to see the dues information).

MEMBERSHIP DUES

The membership dues correspond to the level of resources required to support the club, namely pool time, coaching and travel to meets. The first dues payment is made at registration. Subsequent payments are due monthly and will only be accepted electronically. If your fees are past due, your swimmer cannot swim in practice or at a meet until the fees are paid.

Membership dues are generally non-refundable. Partial refunds are considered on a case-by-case basis for good cause (ex: your child suffers an injury and cannot swim for a period of time). Refunds are not given on the basis of swimmers not swimming their full training schedule during a session. For more information, refer to “Discontinuing Swimming” on the last page.

USA SWIMMING FEE

This covers registration and insurance costs from the national governing organization and is paid annually and directly to USA Swimming. This fee is not refundable.

MEET ENTRY FEES

Meet entry fees vary by the type of meet, but generally run anywhere from \$25-\$90 per meet. Meet fees are always listed in the meet packet, which is posted on the event page on our website. Swimmers must declare their commitment for each meet, prior to the deadline, via the Maine Gators website. Meet fees are added to your account under My Account / Billing Summary.

NOTE: If your swimmer is signed up for a meet and does not attend, you will still be charged the meet entry fees as they are passed onto the meet host on the deadline date. If your swimmer is signed up for a relay and is a no-show, you will be charged the entire relay fee.

NEW SWIMMERS

New swimmers can join the club at any point during the year as long as space is available. New swimmers are expected to do the following. Our Team Registrar will provide detailed instructions on how to register and pay...

- Meet with the Maine Gators coaching staff and be assessed for appropriate placement within the club based upon age and ability. We encourage everyone to take advantage of our free, one week trial.
- Register on our website and pay applicable dues
 - Initial membership fees are prorated for new swimmers to the nearest half month in which the swimmer joins and is at the discretion of the Team Registrar.
- Register with USA Swimming and pay the annual fee

If your swimmer swam previously with the team but took time off they are considered a “returning swimmer”. Returning swimmers are welcomed back to the club with the following guidelines:

- If their designated group has not reached capacity and space exists.
- Swimmer's prior and current account balances must be **paid in full**.
- If swimmer's USA Swimming registration has lapsed, they need to re-register and pay the annual registration fee.

LATE PAYMENTS

Membership dues is the primary source of income for the club and vital to its continuing operation. Therefore, timely payment of accounts is important. It is our policy to give families ample notice of upcoming fees and deadlines and we also publish the entire dues schedule at the beginning of each swim year. To that end, accounts that have outstanding balances that are more than 30 days overdue are assessed a \$15.00 late payment penalty. In addition, accounts that continue to carry balances beyond the 30 days are assessed an additional \$15.00/month for every month that the account is in arrears. If your fees are past due, your swimmer cannot swim in practice or at a meet until the fees are paid.

NSF/OVERDRAFT

A \$30.00 fee is assessed to any account that submits a payment for ACH that fails to clear at the bank. The family will be contacted and will need to immediately re-issue payment for the original amount plus the \$30.00 fee. This fee is for Maine Gators to recover any charges levied by our bank in association with the failed transaction. This fee will be over and above any fees that may be levied to your account by your own bank.

DISCONTINUING SWIMMING

Should you find it necessary to discontinue swimming with Maine Gators, you must communicate that information with your child's coach immediately **and also** notify the club registrar at registrar@mainegators.com. The club requires that this notice be given at least **30 days in advance** of the discontinuation.

Swimmers discontinuing participation in OSPREY-Challenge, NOR'EASTER-Challenge and NOR'EASTER -Elite will be responsible for ALL dues and other account balances through the end of the short course (September – March) season or long course (May – July) season. For all other groups, you will be responsible for all dues and other account balances accrued through the 30-day notice period. **A verbal conversation with the coach is not considered formal notice.**

We will generally not refund any months prior to this notice regardless of the swimmer's attendance. If you discontinue swimming, you will not be allowed to rejoin the team until the beginning of the following season barring personal injury or other extenuating circumstances.

DISPUTE RESOLUTION

The above practices and policies are maintained and followed by the Team Registrar. Questions and disputes should be directed to that person via email at registrar@mainegators.com.