

SWIMMING AS A LIFETIME SPORT

Swimming is a wholesome, positive activity because no matter where you are in the swimming progression, the sport encompasses the fundamental elements that parents love. At USA Swimming, we believe that the core benefits of swimming include:

- Fun-whether it is the exhilaration of achieving your goal time or playing cards with your friends at a swim meet, we love this sport and stay involved because it is FUN.
- Fitness-getting kids to be water safe, keeping them moving with fundamental aerobic activity, or a low impact workout for the joints as we age, swimming keeps its participants in incredible shape and teaches basic FITNESS principles that last a lifetime.
- Friends-ask any swimmer what they like most about the sport, more often than not it will be the friendships they made through car pools to practice, hanging out at the end of the lane, or pushing their buddies to try just a little bit harder at practice.

Under the USA Swimming umbrella there are different levels of involvement as well as entry points to the sports. Listed below are the most common areas where your child can get involved with USA Swimming

USA SWIMMING PROGRESSION SYSTEM OUT-LINE

LEARN TO SWIM

Becoming safe in the water and learning to swim are essential skills. Drowning is the second leading cause of accidental death for children under the age of 14 in the United States. Many of those deaths might have been prevented with swim lessons. Swimming lessons are a fun activity for kids of all ages and are often a great entry point into swimming. Check out USA Swimming's *Make a Splash* Program and more in our *Learn to Swim Section*.

AGE GROUP SWIMMING

Many children get their competitive start through a neighborhood swim team, local recreational team, country club, school team or a USA Swimming club team. At this level, swimmers learn and refine swimming skills and begin to compete against their peers. You can find a local club to get your swimmer started by using USA Swimming's Find a Club Tool.

SENIOR SWIMMING

As swimmers mature, the goals become a little bigger and they move into senior level swimming. At this level swimmers still refine skills, but training becomes more serious and is designed by professional coaches to get athletes to peak performance when they are physically and mentally prepared to do so. Athletes are still part of the USA Swimming club system, but may also compete for a high school or college team depending on their ages.

ELITE LEVEL SWIMMING

Some athletes have the talent, dedication, and commitment to reach the elite levels of the sport. They compete at national and international level competitions and strive to make a national team to represent their country in the Olympics or other international competitions. Elite swimmers in the United States come out of the USA Swimming club system.

ATHLETE PROGRESSION

A HEALTHY PARENT-COACH RELATIONSHIP

A key component to an athlete's healthy swimming experience is the building of a positive relationship between a parent and a coach. Both the parent and the coach have important roles in supporting a swimmer. A coach is there to teach and judge a swimmer's performance and technique while a parent should love and support the child regardless of the outcome. It's helpful for a parent to realize some key things about a coach.

A lot more comes with coaching than the athletes, practice and competition. Beyond the initial hours at the pool, a coach's time is spent planning for workouts, understanding the long term-term nature of the sport and each individual swimmer's performance, doing key administrative duties, and providing emotional support for many athletes.

Ultimately a coach loves the sport and is willing to make countless sacrifices to foster swimming and its athletes in and out of the pool. Keeping this in mind, there are key things parents can do to support their child's coach and ultimately help their child achieve swimming success.

HOW A PARENT CAN HELP

- Trust and listen to the coach
- Respect and support their decisions
- Stay in the background
- Be there to support your child and not add additional pressure

UNDERSTANDING PRACTICE

Many parents have lots of questions about swim practice, especially when their children are new to the sport. It is sometimes difficult to know what to expect of your child. Your child may talk about swim practice, but you may not even understand the new "swimming vocabulary" your child is using.

Many children improve rapidly during the developmental stages due to growth and improved technique. It is difficult to resist the tendency to push young athletes at this stage. However, the emphasis should be placed on technique and not intense training. The training schedule for developmental swimmers should be flexible enough to provide them with enough time to participate in other activities. Since swimmers' careers can extend well into adulthood, swimming at the youngest levels needs to be fun, pressure free, and filled with learning experiences. This will ensure that swimming remains fun throughout their lives.

You should certainly ask questions at swim team parents' meetings or schedule an appointment with your child's coach to clarify things

ATHLETE PROGRESSION

Factors Affecting an Athlete Moving Into New Workout Pod

Attendance. Attendance is one factor. At the early stages, it is important to attend regularly but not imperative for move-ups. Being at practice frequently enough to learn new skills is often good enough. During the later stages, it is a very important factor.

Work ethic and attitude. Attendance is coupled with work ethic and attitude. A swimmer who attends every practice but fails to push beyond a certain level is less likely to move than a person with slightly less attendance who does not hesitate to work at a consistently high level. Attendance, attitude and work ethic usually combine to produce faster times as swimmers progress through the program. But even speed cannot be a single determining factor when it comes to move-up's.

Performance and skill development. At an early stage in the age group program, a faster swimmer may not move-up if she cannot master basic skills that are being taught. "Fast swimming" at this level commonly is a result of early physical maturity or natural ability. Failure to learn how to better propel oneself through the water may result in a very short career. Perception of success will diminish as other kids physically catch-up and then surpass the early achiever in skill development

Other factors. Other factors include, but are not limited to, time management skills (the ability to juggle schoolwork and a training regimen without compromising either), confidence level and emotional maturity. Because so many factors are involved with a move-up, it is rare for a specific group of athletes to move up at the same rate. Each individual is "graded" on his or her own attributes. Consideration is given to what conditions will best serve the athlete's swimming future. It is this individual consideration that usually causes the most confusion among parents. While they often can discern some of the factors, they may not recognize all of them. Sometimes this leads to questions. These questions are welcomed by the coaches. Sometimes, however, it leads to "Little League parenting", and this is abhorred by the coaches.

Many "Little League parents" see themselves as simply looking out for the best interest for their children. Just how destructive can "Little League parenting" be? Let's go back to the examples. A parent who demands that his child be moved-up has overstepped his position. As mentioned above, he cannot know all of the factors involved in the decision. In addition, the parent displays a lack of confidence in the program. This can have a variety of effects on both the program and the child. The child has worked in an effort to progress through the program. When a parent demands a move, the child will never truly know if she earned it. Since success in swimming is attained primarily through hard work and dedication, it is essential that the swimmer learns this lesson at an early age.

If a parent creates added anxiety to his child by frequently discussing move-ups or treating move-ups as an absolute necessity, then the parent places value on group placement above the swimmer's personal development. Simply put, he learns that he can only achieve success if he is in a certain group. Instead the lesson should be that he is always in a position to succeed if he applies himself to his potential.

Some parents will take an opposite approach and try to hold their child back, instead of encouraging them to progress as their skills improve. As an athlete becomes proficient in the skills and workout yardage being offered, they need to progress into more challenging stroke drills and workouts. Otherwise there is the risk of an athlete falling behind their peers. If a parent commonly gossips in the stands at practice and/or meets about moveups then both of the above factors come into play, as well as setting a bad example to new parents and outsiders. Each of these examples displays a lack of confidence in the program and the coach.

An essential element in coach/swimmer relationships is the support of the parent. Without this support, it is more difficult for a swimmer to attain the level of trust with the coach necessary to foster a good learning environment.

The long term development of the swimmer is the most important aspect of coaching. Within the staffs at each facility, the coaches have witnessed the development of a great number of swimmers. They have seen what happens to kids who move-up too early seeking the prestige of a certain group. They have seen what happens to kids who are held back seeking the comfort of their current group. These athletes often leave the sport prematurely. The coaches have also seen that swimmers who move in a timely manner or even "late" still have ample opportunity to succeed.

The next time move-ups come around, be a good "Swimming Parent" and discuss your swimmer's development in an appointment with the coach. Ask questions and express your concerns, but in the end, trust in the coach's decision to do what is best for your swimmer.