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News For

SWIM PARENTS

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Key To Goal Setting: Parent Support

The goal of goal setting with young swimmers is to learn how to set goals. With 10 and unders it is important that they are successful at achieving the goals that the coach and parents help them set.

However, part of learning how to set goals, and also a part of growing up, is an occasional failure at achieving a goal. Failing to meet a goal can have disastrous effects, or, can be part of a healthy growing experience, depending on the support of parents and coach. While it is probably not a good idea to allow 10 and unders to set goals that they probably cannot reach, with 11 and 12 year olds, one approach is to give them more freedom in selecting goals thus allowing them an occasional "opportunity to fail".

When properly guided, a young person who fails to achieve a goal can learn that success is often built upon failure. What would be the parent, coach, swimmer relationship for goal setting for 11 - 12's? For parents this can be a very challenging time. These young people are beginning to experiment with independence. You may find that your influence does not have the immediate impact that you are accustomed. When suggesting goals to your young swimmer, regardless of how appropriate the goals are, you are likely to find some resistance. However, the emotional support a young swimmer needs at this age from you is as great as ever. While the swimmer may not want to hear your suggestions for what to do in the pool, they sure need your support for what they are attempting to do, and sometimes fail to do.

Here are some questions you might ask your goal setting young swimmer.

- Have you and Coach Andersen talked about your goals for the season?
- What are the goals you have decided on?
- Did you write them down?
- What did Coach Andersen say you needed to work on in order to reach your goals?

■ Did you get any closer to your goals today?

The coach begins to take on a more influential role in the swimming development of the young swimmer at this time. Swimmers sometimes think, eat, breath, sleep, and swim according to the direction of the coach and they may respond better to suggestions made by the coach than those made by you. For example, you may be trying to improve the nutritional aspects of your young swimmer's breakfast only to find a typical bit of standard 11 and 12 resistance. However, when the coach suggest the exact same advice to your swimmer he is ready to change his breakfast routine the next day. For this reason, plus the fact that the coach best knows the swimming abilities of your child, the primary influence in goal setting for 11 - 12's is the coach.

The coach acts as a guide, asking your swimmer appropriate questions to help him decide on goals. When your child has a goal in mind and is convinced he can achieve that goal, coaches (and parents) should accept it as a goal even if it seems too ambitious.

What happens when he fails to meet the goal? From you, he needs unconditional support and careful guidance.

Let's consider a situation where 12 year old Bobby has a best time of 1:07.5 in the 100 free, a "B" time. He has several "B" times in other strokes but no "A" times. His coach feels that a good goal for Bobby would be to make an "A" time in the 100 free, 1:03.19. However, Bobby has set his own goal of breaking a minute in the 100 free in the final "B" meet of the season. He knows if he breaks a minute he will qualify for the Junior Olympics and gain a spot on the relay. Contributing to Bobby's desire to qualify for Junior Olympics this season is the fact that he turns 13 shortly after the meet and he knows it will take a 55.3 to qualify for the next Junior Olympics as a 13 - 14 year old. Bobby also set three other goals which fall within the coaches expectations so the coach allows Bobby this "opportunity to fail".

During the season, Bobby makes steady progress as he drops his time in the 100 free to 1:04.0 and he is still hoping to break a minute. At the final "B" meet he goes a 1:03.0, a new "A" time, and wins the event. The coach and Bobby's parents are very pleased with his performance. Bobby, however, is dejected because he did not make his goal of breaking a minute.

Bobby's parents, sitting in the bleachers, observe him speaking with his coach. His mood does not noticeably change despite his coaches' congratulatory gestures, smiling face, and reassuring words. Now Bobby is on his way up into the bleachers to visit his parents. What's important to say to Bobby?

■ First, attend first to Bobby's physical needs, "Are you warm enough? Please put on your warm ups. Do you need something to drink?"

■ Then, do not deny him the opportunity to express his disappointment and do not minimize his feelings. You know it was a best time, and you know it was a good race, but you will not be able to MAKE him feel better by contradicting his feelings. Listen to him.

■ Empathize with Bobby. Say, "I know how disappointed you must be."

■ Allow Bobby to find the solution to his disappointment. "Why do you think you didn't make your goal?" Bobby can respond to this question in one of several different ways and your follow up will be based on that response. It is hard to generalize a conversation here, but what is important to remember is that through your questions and his responses, you want Bobby to

realize that while his goal for breaking a minute is a good goal, his timetable for breaking a minute was too short and there are more things he needs to work on.

■ Support Coach Anderson. Ask Bobby, "What did Coach Anderson say?" "That sounds like a good idea, do you think you can do that?"

The desired net result of the parent and athlete relationship in this type of goal setting situation is that the athlete receives support for his feelings and he comes to realize how to adjust his goal setting in order to be more successful next time. With this result, you'll find your young swimmer better equipped to establish his next set of goals with the knowledge that he has your unconditional support.