



FROM THE STANDS TO THE POOL: A GUIDE TO EXCELLING AS A SWIM PARENT



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YOUR RESPONSIBILITY AS A SWIM PARENT

This guide should help you do much more than survive youth swimming. It should enable you to enjoy it to the fullest and help you make it fun and valuable for your child. To do that, first, you need to understand your responsibilities as a Swim Parent:



1. Encourage your child to swim, but don't pressure. Let your child choose to swim on their own
2. Understand what your child wants from swimming and provide a supportive atmosphere for achieving those goals
3. Encourage your child to view swimming as a positive and enjoyable part of their life, rather than making it the sole focus
4. Keep winning in perspective, and help your child do the same.
5. Help your child understand their performance goals set with the coaches rather than focusing only on winning races
6. Help your child understand the valuable lessons swimming can teach ([see Values Kids Learn Through Swimming](#)).
7. Help your child meet the responsibilities and rules of the team and the coach
8. Discipline your child when necessary

Being a Role Model

Children learn behavior from many different coaches, teachers, other adults, and peers. The people they learn the most from are their parents.

Your child not only soaks up what you say, but they soak up what you don't say. Nonverbal messages, such as a look of disgust or disappointment, often speak louder than words. Your attitudes toward your child and other people are not as easily hidden as you might believe. "Do as I say, not as I do" is an unnatural maxim for children to carry out because their tendency is to follow your example, not your instructions.

If you tell your child he must respect others, that's great. But the message is lost if you don't model that respect. As your child swims, you'll have many opportunities to model good behavior and attitudes. By putting your child's development and welfare ahead of winning, you'll be better able to display a healthy attitude towards swimming and life and so will your child.

Modeling Good Sportsmanship

Your behavior as a parent is a powerful influence on your child's development of good sportsmanship. Setting a positive example through your own attitude and actions towards swimming and others is essential in helping your child learn to do the same. Even though this can be difficult at times, maintaining a positive and healthy attitude, along with a cool head, can have a profound impact on your child's own behavior.

Here are ways to model appropriate attitudes and behaviors when you're at your daughter's or son's games:

- ✓ Encourage all of the swimmers
- ✓ Control your emotions in frustrating situations
- ✓ Abide by referees' or officials' decisions. Remember that most officials in youth swimming are only teenagers
- ✓ Congratulate opponents and other teammates when they win or drop time

CONGRATULATING OTHERS

Provide a good example for your kids by congratulating others yourself when they win or drop time.

HELPING YOUR CHILD ENJOY SWIMMING

You can help your child enjoy swimming by doing the following:

1. Develop a winning perspective
2. Build your child's self-esteem without pressure
3. Emphasize having fun, developing skills, and striving to win
4. Help your child understand the performance goals they set with the coach.

Developing a Winning Perspective

Every decision parents make in guiding their children should be based first on what's best for the child, and second on what might help the child win. Stated another way...

Swimmers First; Winning Second

Maintaining this proper perspective can help some children achieve even more than they would if they were consumed with the idea of winning. An obsession with winning often produces a fear of failure, resulting in below-average performances and upset children.

Building Your Child's Self-Esteem

One of the most important things you can do as a parent is to help your child develop healthy self-esteem. While this can be challenging in the competitive world of swimming, it's important to remember that success is not just about winning. Competency and improvement are measures of success in their own right, and athletes can achieve these things without necessarily coming in first place.



To support your child's self-esteem, it's important to offer more than just encouragement. Show your child unconditional love and approval, regardless of their performance. Be honest in your praise and avoid giving false compliments. If your child doesn't do well, it's ok to acknowledge their disappointment, but be sure to offer the same love and support as you would if they had won. By focusing on your child's effort and growth rather than just their race results, you can help them develop a healthy and positive sense of self-worth.

Emphasizing Having Fun, Developing Skills, and Striving to Win

The reason you should emphasize fun is quite simple: Without it, your child may not want to keep swimming. Children don't have fun when they feel pressure to win, and when they don't improve or learn new skills. Conversely, they do have fun when practices are well organized, they get to play in games, they develop new skills, and the focus is on striving to win.

A focus on developing skills and striving to win takes the pressure off winning, which as we say, no one child is in control of. But all children can improve their swimming skills. And when they see that improvement, they are usually motivated to improve more. Growth in performance is one of the most satisfying aspects of swimming.

Understanding Your Child's Performance Goals

Typically the coach will help your child set their performance goals for the season. There are two reasons why performance goals, which focus on individual skill development, are superiors to outcome goals centered on winning:

1. Performance goals are in the swimmers control
2. Performance goals help the swimmer improve

Encourage your child to share their performance goal with you, so you can encourage them throughout the season. Their coach will discuss the specifics on how to continually improve, however, your support in the progression will be a positive force.

If you can't attend one of your child's meets, don't just ask "Did you win?" afterward. Ask performance-related questions. "Did you split the race as you planned? or Did you kick off the wall as far as you wanted?"

Talking With Your Child After a Poor Performance



It can be challenging to find the right words to say to a child after a disappointing performance. While it's tempting to offer comforting words such as "you swam great" or "it's not important," these responses may not be what your child needs at the moment. It's important to acknowledge your child's feelings of disappointment and validate their emotions. At the same time, it's essential to be genuine in your praise and avoid being overly critical. Strive to strike a balance between offering praise and constructive feedback, while always being sincere and respectful of your child's feelings.



Questions to Ask Your Child After Practice or Competition

Don't feel that you always have to 'debrief' after the meet. It's okay to NOT talk about the meet or practice. Below are some good questions to keep you aware of what's going on with your child's swimming experience without being overly competitive.

- What did you learn in practice?
- What are you working on?
- Can I help you?
- What did the coach emphasize after the race?
- Did you have fun swimming today?
- Was your opponent a good sport? Were you?
- What was your favorite part of the practice/meet?
- What's the best part of being on the team?
- What do you like most about your coach?
- Were you nervous competing today? If you were, why?

KEEP THINGS BALANCED

It is important to balance swimming with other areas of life. This balance needs to come both from your child and from you.

Values Kids Learn Through Swimming

- ✓ Appreciation for an active lifestyle
- ✓ Positive self-concept through mastering skills
- ✓ Teamwork and sportsmanship
- ✓ Social skills
- ✓ Leadership
- ✓ Responsibility
- ✓ The value of setting goals and working towards them
- ✓ How to handle success and disappointments
- ✓ Respect for others

Is Your Child Too Involved?

With the great emphasis on sports in our society, some children become so involved in athletics that they neglect studies, family, and social responsibilities. If you feel your child is too involved in swimming, remind him or her that swimming is only one part of life.

Overemphasis From Parents

Sometimes children overemphasize swimming because their parents do. Ask yourself if you're giving unbalanced attention to your child's participation in swimming. If so, slack off and show interest in other areas of your child's life. Otherwise, your child will be getting the wrong perception about the role swimming plays in life, may feel too much pressure to succeed, and eventually burn out and quit. While swimming is a very memorable part of childhood, don't forget that so are birthday parties and family vacations.

Be Involved...

Every youth swim program needs volunteers. Volunteering not only helps your child's program, but it's also an enjoyable way to meet other adults. Here are just a few ways to become more involved.

- Be an official
- Keep time or score
- Maintain equipment or facilities
- Coordinate registrations
- Be an announcer
- Be a fundraiser
- Be a first-aid attendant
- Coordinate refreshments
- Be a publicity director
- Coordinate transportation

...But Not Too Involved

No youth swim coach wants to be or should be, second-guessed by parents on strategy moves or other coaching decisions. Signs that you are being too closely involved include:

- You are overly concerned with the outcome of practices and meets
- You monopolize the time of the coach about the meet, swimmer skill levels, and/or management of practice/meets
- Your child has stopped enjoying swimming or has asked you to stop coming to meets or practices
- You require your child to have extra practice

SWIM PARENT'S CHECKLIST FOR SUCCESS

Consider these questions before your child begins to swim. If you can honestly answer yes to each one, you and your child are likely to have a favorable experience with youth swimming.

- Can you share your son or daughter?**

This means trusting the coach to guide your child's swimming experiences. You must be able to accept the coach's authority and the fact that she or he may gain some of the admiration that once was directed solely toward you.
- Can you admit your shortcomings?**

Sometimes we slip up as parents. Our emotions cause us to speak before we think. We judge too hastily, perhaps only to learn later that actions were justified. It takes character for parents to admit when they make a mistake and to discuss it with their children.
- Can you accept your child's disappointments?**

Being a parent means being a target for your child's anger and frustration. Accepting your child's disappointment also means watching your child swim poorly during a meet when all of his or her friends succeed, or not being embarrassed into anger when your 10-year-old breaks into tears after a failure. Keeping your frustration in check will help guide your daughter or son through disappointments.
- Can you accept your child's triumphs?**

This sounds much easier than it often is. Some parents, not realizing it, may become competitive with their children, especially if their son or daughter receives considerable recognition. When a child swims well in a meet, parents may dwell on minor mistakes, describe how an older sibling did even better, or boast about how they swim better many years ago.
- Can you give your child some time?**

Some parents are very busy, even though they are interested in their child's participation and want to encourage it. Probably the best solution is never to promise more than you can deliver. Ask about your child's swimming experiences and make every effort to watch at least some meets during the season.
- Can you let your child make his or her own decisions?**

Decision-making is an essential part of any young person's development, and it is a real challenge to parents. It means offering suggestions and guidance but finally, within reasonable limits, letting the child go his or her own way. All parents have ambitions for their children, but parents must accept the fact that they cannot mold their children's lives. Youth swimming offers parents a minor initiation into the major process of letting go.
- Can you honestly say that you are modeling and providing consistent positive messages?**

Take a step back before the season begins and evaluate your own motives for your son's or daughter's participation. If you are truly putting your child's desires and development ahead of your own ego, then it will be easier for you to model appropriate behavior.

Coach's Responsibilities

- ✔ To model the Values and Behaviors of the club and to celebrate others that do the same.
- ✔ To foster a supportive and inclusive environment for swimmers at all levels, promoting aquatic safety, opportunity for skills improvement and engagement.
- ✔ To provide swimmers and coaches with the necessary resources to learn, train, teach, and compete at their highest individual level of achievement.
- ✔ To continue to improve and expand aquatic programming by allowing opportunities for members to benefit while exceeding quality expectations and industry standards.

Swimmer's Responsibilities

- ✔ To model the Values and Behaviors of the club and to celebrate those that do the same
- ✔ Listen to your parents and coaches
- ✔ Do well in school
- ✔ Work hard in practice
- ✔ Congratulate all teammates for a good race
- ✔ Show good sportsmanship at all times
- ✔ Be responsible for your practice and meet gear.
- ✔ Positively represent the Club's brand at meets and anywhere you wear your swimming gear.

Parent's Responsibilities

- ✔ To model the Values and Behaviors of the club and to celebrate those that do the same
- ✔ Provide proper nutrition and rest for the swimmers
- ✔ Do not communicate with Coaches during practice. The Coaches must be engaged with the swimmers, not the parents
- ✔ Let the coach instruct your swimmer
- ✔ Do not coach your swimmers during training or at the meets
- ✔ Please do not linger on the deck while your child is being coached. This forms a distraction. The coach will contact you if they need you
- ✔ Understand the coach has the final decision
- ✔ Check your email and team website on a regular basis
- ✔ Ask the Coach to clarify anything you are unfamiliar with
- ✔ If your child is feeling frustrated or overwhelmed, contact the coach
- ✔ Let your child know you support participation in swimming. Get involved-volunteer your time in the league, practice with your son or daughter, attend games, and show that you care
- ✔ Provide proper equipment for your child and encourage correct use
- ✔ Monitor participation so you know how your child is developing
- ✔ Keep the coach informed if your child is injured or ill
- ✔ Help the coach when asked to do so
- ✔ Keep control of yourself. Show by example how you want your child to behave in and out of competition
- ✔ Plan to arrive at the meet 15 minutes before the warm-up time
- ✔ Represent the Club brand at meets and anywhere you wear Club gear

Questions and Feedback

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