

How to be a Supportive Swim Parent

1. Keep the sport fun. Ask your child if they had fun at the meet or practice. When parents back off and let kids take more ownership of the sport, the swimmer will step up and take that ownership. This includes making swimmers pack their own bags and facing the consequences if something is forgotten.
2. Don't compare your child to other children, including their siblings. A child's developmental, physical, or psychological age can be five years above or below their chronological age.
 - a. That means one swimmer may be 12 but physically developed like a 17-year old while his 12-year old friend is still developed like a 9-year old. On the other hand, some 12-year olds may be psychologically developed to behave like a 17-year old while their friend may behave like a 9-year old.
 - b. With growth comes the growth learning curve and body spatial awareness. As swimmers grow, it takes time for athletes to learn how to use their new bodies effectively. Some grow so quickly they need time to learn how to move their new bodies in the water.
 - c. Swimmers also develop mentally differently. Some embrace competition quickly, while others need time to decide they have a passion for the sport. Additionally, some may lose their passion as their bodies are going through changes.
 - d. In a few words, every swimmer develops differently and it is unfair to compare.
3. Love them regardless of their performance. Express that love both publicly as well and privately. No one cares about times in the end, but we do care about relationships. They don't need any more pressure, only love and support.
4. Let the coach do the coaching. When your child asks, "How was my swim?" reply with something like, "I enjoyed watching you swim," and refer them to the coach to answer that question. Parents need to give praise and love and let the coaches that are trained in the sport to do the technical aspects.
5. Teach them to eat right and at the right times. Children do not need to eat merely three times a day, but have frequent and small snacks. This includes a small snack an hour before practice and immediately following practice if a meal is impractical. Remember that swimmers need to have a source of protein and carbohydrates to refuel after a practice.
 - a. Eight percent of what they eat should be real colors found in fruits and vegetables. Brown and white are not real colors so they should not be the majority of their plate.
 - b. Refrain from junk calories and vitamins/supplements. Vitamins should come from the source (fruits/vegetables). Shakes and supplements are still controversial as to whether or not they provide the body with appropriate nutritional needs and shakes frequently come with unnecessary sugars.

6. Make sure they get their 8-10 hours of sleep. Keep bed time the same regardless of whether it is a weeknight or a weekend. Late nights take about 3 days before an athlete is back to peak performance level.

7. Hydrate. Most swimmers are asking for water during practice, but fail to bring a water bottle. To stay hydrated, one needs to drink equal to their body weight in ounces. That does not include water needed for exercise. In addition to the regular amount of water, they need 8 ounces before practice, 8 ounces after practice, and 4 ounces every 15 min during practice. A one hour practice necessitates 32 ounces of water, not Gatorade/Powerade which includes far too much sugar. Even if you get the low sugar options, they are full of chemicals to replace the sugars for taste, thus swimmers are feeding fake chemicals into their bodies.

8. Remember what skills swimmers learn as it relates to the real world and the world after swimming ends:

- a. How to work hard.
- b. How to show up to work with a good mental focus on the task at hand.
- c. How to work both independently and together.
- d. How to work even after failure.
- e. How to communicate with others of different ages and sex.
- f. How to be a lifelong learner because their bodies are constantly changing.
- g. Introspection: how to look introspectively at how things feel for what works and what doesn't work their own personal body.