

Role of Parents in Swimming Success

Hints on Helping Your Swimmer Be More Successful

BE SUPPORTIVE. Both the swimmer and coach are likely to have a list of criticisms for performance, no matter how good it might have been, so what the swimmer needs is love and support. On the other hand, don't try to provide excuses for poor performances. As mentioned above, most athletes try to give their best performances in every competition, but sometimes the results are disappointing. When that happens, the less said, the better. The old adage, "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all," would probably be a good one to follow. A swimmer is generally quite perceptive about performances, and is, after all, the only one who really knows how much effort went into it. The parent and the coach only know what it looked like.

AVOID PRESSURING THE SWIMMER. The swimmer already has enough problems: trying to go fast, keep the start, stroke and turns legal; execute proper technique; impress teammates, friends and/or enemies; place; improve a time; score points; please the coach; please himself and so on. Don't add additional pressure. Most athletes at all levels are already trying to reach their best performances in every competition, and do not really need parents to remind them to do their best.

AVOID CRITICISM OF THE COACH IN FRONT OF THE SWIMMER. The role of the coach is to provide a progressive training situation in which the swimmer can develop skills and speed. Placing the obstacle of criticism between coach and swimmer creates an additional pressure on the swimmer, which can further impair performances. The swimmer needs to trust the coach in order to get the most benefit. **The best bet if the parent doesn't like what the coach is doing is to make an appointment to discuss the situation.** If unable to talk with the coach, then perhaps try a different approach.

LET THE COACH COACH. Regardless of how much the parent may know about swimming, the coach is employed to coach the child. Parents are paying someone else to do it, so let the coach do it. The child needs a parent; he already has a coach. When the child is swimming is the time to be coached. When he is out of the water, he needs your support. Keep remembering how difficult it is just to grow up, and then figure how much added pressure there is in a competitive sport. Help your swimmer by not being the source of more pressure.

REMEMBER THAT SWIMMING SHOULD BE FUN. As long as kids enjoy swimming, they will have a healthy, productive activity in which to be involved. When swimming becomes a negative experience, the swimmer is likely to want to stop. All athletes need motivation to attain their ultimate goals. When a swimmer fails to reach a goal, encourage him to keep on trying, rather than get discouraged by being shown a parent's disappointment. When a goal is achieved, let him know how proud you are and stress the fun aspect of the sport.

WHOSE GOALS ARE THEY? The swimmer's performance is not a reflection on the parents. (Manners may be, but not swimming.) Don't let ego be caught up in the reaction to the child's swims. If the swimmer eventually reaches national or international prominence, it will be because of hard work, not because parents wanted the vicarious success.

BE ENTHUSIASTIC AND SUPPORTIVE. Remember that the child is the swimmer. Children need to establish their own goals, and make their own progress towards them. Be careful not to impose standards and goals. Do not over burden the child with winning or achieving best times. The most important part of the child's swimming experience is to learn about himself while enjoying the sport. This healthy environment encourages learning and fun that will develop a positive self-image within the child.