

# News For

# SWIM PARENTS

Published by The American Swimming Coaches Association  
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## “Practice is Too Hard!”

Yes, sometimes some of the things we do are “hard.” I prefer the word “challenge.” Part of what we do in practice is to challenge swimmers to extend themselves beyond what they thought they are capable of doing. We do this with care and in a systematic and progressive manor. We do not attempt to drive weaker age group swimmers from the sport. Nor do we attempt to make each swimmer an Olympic swimmer. I have long term patience for each swimmer’s development.

How much “challenge” is enough? The answer depends on the age and level of swimmer. In our age group program less than 15% of the available time (on a weekly basis) is set aside for “challenge sets.” (Three 15 minute blocks of time per week.) We record and track times on these test sets and coach the children to higher levels of performance each week. For some swimmers with the desire and ability, challenge sets will eventually make up 30 to 40 percent of the available workout time. It may take some swimmers two or three years to get to that point.

All the facts and figures do not matter to a swimmer who says “It’s too hard.” This is where helpful support from parents can be of great assistance. Parents can remind children that some exercises push children into zones of uncomfortableness with good reason. We do not adapt without some workout overload or stress. It is a basic principle of training applicable to all ages. It is also a basic principle of life that sometimes things get uncomfortable and we work a little harder to bring about a change.

With the change in coaching and in coaching styles the practices are indeed very different. We do far more stroke work now and we also challenge a bit more. With patience and support I am hopeful that all the children will adapt and eventually enjoy the practice session. In my 27 years of coaching I have rarely lost children from the program because they did not have fun or felt it was too hard. Indeed, in the past the most common complaint about my age group programs has been that I did not give enough work and that I was holding swimmers back. (I was guilty of preparing swimmers for the future rather than my own and the parent’s own immediate gratification.)

At the age group developmental level our primary goals are to teach swimming skills, learn good practice habits, expose the children to life skills, set the aerobic conditioning foundation for senior level swimming, introduce competition opportunities, and to have fun.

“Fun” is an interesting word. One day at age group swim practice I asked 12 very exhausted swimmers aged 10 through 12, “How many of you had fun today?” This I asked after they had completed their first ever 3000 yard workout in a 75 minute period. Of course I was expecting none of them to say they had fun. What I was hoping to do was create a teaching moment where we could talk about the difference between fun and satisfaction. To my surprise every child wearily raised their hands and said that they

had had fun. When I asked them to explain, they all said they felt that way because they had never done 3000 yards before. Eventually, three years later, 4 of the 12 swimmers completed 6000 yards in a 90 minute period and the other 8 completed between 4000 and 5000. All those swimmers are still swimming and still loving the sport because the challenge is the fun and the fun is the challenge.

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## ”What Is Swimmer’s Ear?”

Answered by: Robert T. Scott, M.D.

Most competitive swimmers have been bothered at one time or another by what is known as “swimmer’s ear”. There seems to be many ways of curing the tiresome disease but it often requires a swimmer to stop swimming for a week or two. Swimmer’s ear can reoccur weeks, months or years later for no apparent reason. For some individuals, it becomes a chronic painful inflammation of the skin inside the outer ear canal. There are multiple symptoms of varying intensity. Itching and pain are mild to intense, depending on the degree of inflammation and swelling of the skin. The amount of the discharge (pus), which causes blockage of the air column leading to the eardrum, determines the severity of the interference with hearing. A dull fullness may exist for weeks to months with mild skin inflammation. However, a canal with maximally thickened skin will exert pressure on bone and cartilage, resulting in extreme pain and complete clogging of the air passage. This leads to clogging of the air passages and will result in temporary hearing loss and is a common sign of swimmer’s ear.

To help prevent swimmer’s ear, the ear canal should be kept as dry as possible. This will help maintain the natural protective action of the earwax. A thin mantle of wax prevents maceration (softening) of the skin surface and its acid pH inhibits the growth of bacteria and fungus. Some individuals have very little wax, and just the water that enters the canal from normal bathing or showering becomes trapped and prepares the skin for infection ensuing inflammation. A snug-fitting bathing cap will help prevent the headaches associated with cold water swimming and will also help keep water from washing in and out, taking ear wax with it.

Using comfortable earplugs while swimming will help keep ears dry. A good fit will keep water from washing back and forth through the canal. The constant traffic of water in and out of the canal will remove the protective layer of the ear wax and the more one swims, the more wax is washed out. After a workout most swimmers can clear moisture from their ears by tilting the head and shaking it to the side. Warm hair dryers are also very useful in drying the ears after a swimming session. A warm blast of air will effectively dry out the canal in five to ten minutes and enable the ear wax to reform and do its protective job.

If a swimmer loses his earwax easily, then a couple of drops of acidifying eardrops can help prevent the growth of bacteria. Eardrops can be used without a prescription or two drops of household vinegar will also work for most swimmers.

Each case of swimmer's ear is individual and a physician should supervise treatment. Most swimmers will be required to stop swimming for a few weeks but then again; it depends on the individual. If you can wear a well-fitting earplug that will keep water out and also keep in the drainage from your ears so that it will not infect other swimmers, then I believe it is safe to continue your training. However, if the ear plug itself is causing an irritation by touching irritated skin, then the ear plug is not the answer and some time out of the water may be necessary. A sport minded doctor will usually give you a reasonable answer.

Ben Franklin once commented, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." For swimmers everywhere who hope to avoid swimmer's ear, his words are quite literally sound advice.

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### That's Not It

Last week, we had a Mom come to us and "inform us" that her 13-year-old daughter would be gone for two weeks vacation in late June, maybe another week after that.

Her daughter was not much of an age group swimmer, but she has some endurance capacity and comes regularly to workout at 5:30 am and again at 5:30 pm daily. She works hard, demonstrates little talent, but lots of determination.

Her mother is not athletic and clearly does not value athletics. We expressed our dismay that she'd be missing for 2-3 weeks in the middle of the most important training of the summer. Her mother's response?

"Who cares, she'll never be an Olympic swimmer, so what does it matter really?"

This is a dagger in the heart to any swimming coach, and it is to me.

If we only cared about and worked hard with, those 52 people who will eventually, once every four years, go off to the Olympic Games, it would be a small, empty and meaningless sport.

My response was "That's really not it."

What is it?

It is the fact that young people need to learn to dedicate themselves to something that is difficult, something that requires perseverance, guts and the daily determination to get your butt out of bed and go out and push your body till it can't go anymore.

Why do they need to learn this?

Because their lives are too easy, too soft, too catered-for. Too many people carry them, make excuses for them, never allowing them to try to be "heroic." Is it "heroic" to get your butt out of bed and go swim at 5 am? It is if you haven't done it before. Is it heroic to "make" 10x200 fly on 4:00? It is if you haven't ever done it before. Is it heroic to finish your swim and turn around and cheer for the teammate who is even further behind than you are, and is struggling to make the set? Need I say it? It is if you've never done it before.

And that is what "It" is about. About doing what you haven't done before. And learning that sometimes you succeed. Sometimes you fail. If you fail, you go again until you learn to succeed.

It's not about being an Olympian.  
It's about being Olympian. Learning to be a hero.

And what it takes to learn that.

Or, you can Be Comfortable and teach your child that its more important to be Comfortable.

So, if that's your choice, I only have one question?

What will happen to your child on the day when they are made "uncomfortable" by life?

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Reply from George Block, Alamo Area Aquatics Assoc., Level 5 Senior

Your article really struck home as it reminded me of Robert Reyes – arguably the worst swimmer to ever go through our program – rescuing four of his buddies from choppy, night seas... a hero. Robert Reyes swam on our high school team and he was always the slowest guy in the race, but he would swim ANY race and go all out, all the way.

He was the same way in water polo. We have seven high schools sharing the same pool, so we don't have any weekday games. Every Saturday they play 3 or 4 games, 3 or 4 hours of wrestling up and down the pool. Robert Reyes was always the slowest guy, but he would never quit. Even then, the real reason he was swimming was to help him when he went in to the Navy. He had his goal way back then and was preparing back "in Taft High School" for when his moment came. I told our kids that the famous Olympians actually have it easy. They know exactly when their moment is going to

come. They can prepare precisely for that moment and they have a lot of help getting them there. For the rest of us it's a lot different.

Your phrase to the mother, "being Olympian" hit it perfectly. All of us will have our "Olympics," when the very best we can bring is called from us. We don't get to know when that moment is going to be. We have to constantly prepare. We may have no one to help us. No one may ever know.

It may come like it did for Robert, as a physical test on a dark night, in choppy seas, with the flaming wreckage of a helicopter still floating in the water. It more often than not won't be a physical test, but a moral one -- that integrity thing. I tried to explain to my team that the reason they have to prepare every day is because they have to be prepared every day. "Being Olympian." That is it.

**Man Rescues Navy Pals**  
**By Amy Dorsett - Express-News Staff Writer**

A San Antonio sailor saves four crewmembers after a helicopter crashes into the Mediterranean Sea.

A San Antonio Navy man came to the aid of four comrades in the choppy waters of the Mediterranean Sea last month, rescuing them after their helicopter crashed into the sea. Petty Officer 2<sup>nd</sup> class Robert Reyes, assigned to a helicopter combat support squadron aboard the USS Kearsarge, made the rescue June 22 when a helicopter flying a routine search-and-rescue mission crashed into the water. Reyes, 21, whose boyhood love of helicopters propelled him to enlist in the Navy three years ago, quickly suited up for what was to be his first rescue mission. Already feeling the rush of adrenaline, Reyes' emotions were running even higher because the crewmembers were like family. "Just the day before we flew together," Reyes said. "While I was dressing out, I was trying to calm myself down."

Within minutes, Reyes' helicopter was hovering in the nighttime sky above the downed chopper. Reyes, a trained rescue swimmer, jumped from his helicopter. "I started swimming up to them, seeing if they were alert," Reyes said. One by one, Reyes helped each crewmember swim to the pickup point, where they were hoisted into the waiting helicopter. Navy officials say the four who were rescued are quick to call Reyes a hero, a title he brushes off. "When they say that, I just think I'm happy they're there," Reyes said, adding some of his water skills were acquired while on Taft High School swimming team.

