

So This Is Competitive Swimming: For Newer Swim Parents

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First, let me start off by saying you have chosen the best sport for your child. The process of developing in an individual sport supports the life lessons that any parent would like to have instilled in their child. Character traits and lessons like time management, dedication, communication, goal setting, commitment, self improvement, sacrifice, overcoming obstacles, self worth, and pride. The reason I believe this to be the best sport for development for your child is simple. Like life, what you put into swimming, you get out of it. Like life, swimming isn't always easy; it isn't always exciting; it isn't always easy to love or even to like it. But like life, the rewards that it gives are the best kind: Pride in the journey and processes that you have taken to bring about a desirable outcome. Note the use of the word "outcome" and not "result". Desired results should almost invariably be faster than actual. Desired outcomes take into account the journey, the friendships, the character growth, the actual results, the training, the relationships with the coaches, and the respect all that deserves.

I would also like to say that you have chosen the best sport because of the professionalism in our structure. USA Swimming is the single most decorated, successful and structured of any youth sport in the world. Our club employs professional coaches with a passion for the sport and a strong concern for each of our swimmers. Our Learn To Swim program offers the best 10 step process towards not only teaching your swimmer all four competitive strokes and water safety, but preparing them for success in the competitive side of the sport, should they choose to continue. Other youth sports are known for using volunteer parents with little or no background/training in the sport they are coaching.

But patience is needed. Swimming can be a life-long endeavor. Success is relative to the competition you face, and there is ALWAYS better competition to be faced (one of the beauties of the sport!) Fast at 10 years old is not fast at 12. Being super fast at 12 may be marginal at 18 years old. And, often, slow at 10 does not mean slow at 18.

Understanding is needed. Our coaches have a plan, a structure and a direction for your swimmer. It includes the possibility of swimming in college (if the swimmer wants this) and a near continual progression through the sport with growth, development and results to bring about the desired outcome as noted before. Work with the coaches and support your swimmer. Communicate with the coaches and over time, take a back seat and allow your swimmer to communicate on their own behalf.

Knowledge is needed. Comparing your child to others is not healthy. Compare them to where they were a year ago, and what is reasonable for them to strive towards over the next year. If you have a 1st grader learning multiplication, it is not reasonable for them to learn quantum physics by 3rd grade. If you have two children, you see that they differ in the way they develop, learn, grow and mature and those differences are what makes them unique and special and not less or more adequate. Use the same principles when you start to wonder why Suzie, who used to be slower than your child in the pool is now seemingly light years ahead.

As we move forward in the sport, take great comfort that your children are surrounded by great people, from the swimmers they share a lane with, to the coaches and parents that help run this club. Involve yourself as much as you can in facilitating your child's efforts in this sport by getting them to practice and meets on time, by volunteering and/or officiating, by showing them that you care as much about their involvement as they do. Support them with kind words and appropriate praise for jobs well done. Let the coaches coach, and let yourselves be the compassionate support system.