

Advice for Swim Parents: Give More to Get More

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Courtesy of: Kyle Staggs

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At the start of every swim season parents often ask themselves "How can I help make my swimmer better?" At pools everywhere you will find parents that believe the answer lies in pushing and demanding more from their swimmer--but that is not the answer. The answer is simple. Give to the sport and your swimmer will excel.

It is a safe bet at swim meets across the country you will find The One. The One parent pacing beside the pool as their child swims, usually offering rather animated stroke instruction. The One parent cheering so loudly all the swimmers can hear and a few out in the parking lot as well. The One parent that will berate their child for a poor finish. But I am intrigued by the bigger question, "how does any of this help your child swim better?"

For all the "pacer parents" I challenge you to think about what the rest of the pool is seeing as you pace back and forth. How much of the information you were attempting to telegraph in the middle of a race was actually received by your swimmer? My guess would be little to none, but it is probably a safe bet you embarrassed them. Swimmers need to focus on the race, focus on their actual coach, their signals and not yours. When a swimmer enters the water how they perform is theirs to own--the good, the bad and the ugly. With ownership comes responsibility. Let them learn that lesson.

If you are the parent publicly berating your swimmer for a poor performance, shame on you! I would be lying if I said I have never been disappointed in my swimmers' performances on

occasion. I must remind myself, like any parent, it is not about the race but the lessons we can learn from it. A last-place finish can often teach us more life lessons than a first.

We know when our children are "mailing it in," whether it is in school, cleaning their room, or sports. As parents we must separate the performance from the person. Sports are a gift to parents; treat them as one. Sports allow us to wrap life lessons up in them and serve the lessons to our children. Never be upset because your child did not win. Be upset if they did not shake the hand of the swimmer next to them, be upset if they throw their cap and goggles, and be upset if they blame everyone but themselves for their performance. Challenge them to find the lessons in their experiences.

We all want our children to succeed. We relish the opportunities to cheer them on but there is a fine line between cheering and yelling. I am in no way saying do not cheer for your child. Please understand their head is usually located under water so the odds of them hearing you, no matter how loud, is pretty minimal. I love hearing cheering at meets but since no one can hear you anyway, go ahead and cheer for the swimmer next to yours as well. Be a positive role model for other swimmers on the deck. There will only be one winner but we can all be champions for sportsmanship.

Why do we put our children in sports? We put them in sports for social interaction, character development, and to keep them active. When parents intercede every time there is a problem they are actually limiting their child. Let them figure out how to take instructions from another adult, let them put words to their thoughts and feelings. Let your child own their dreams, let them set their own goals, let them succeed, let them fail, watch them grow. There is a famous quote that says, "Success can be measured by simply getting up one more time than you fall down." Believe in them. Believe they will get up.

If you really want to help your child be a better swimmer then VOLUNTEER. Find out what you can do to make your team or your LSC a success. Can you help with fundraising? Can you help with timing? Can you work to become an official? Can you be an ambassador for your team and welcome new families into the crazy life of a swim parent? Next time you are at the pool instead of telling your swimmer what they can do better ask yourself what have I done today to make this sport better?