

SEMINOLE AQUATICS PARENT SELF ASSESSMENT

Instructions:

1. Take some time, privately, to answer each question as honestly as you can.
2. Have a Family Meeting with your swimmer to review the questions and the answers that you gave.
3. Listen to your child, and engage in a constructive dialogue about your involvement in their swimming.

Have you:

1. Ever told your child that you'd do something or buy something for them if they accomplished a certain time or place at a meet (this could be as meaningless as a soft drink or just preparing their favorite dinner)
 - a) Never
 - b) Maybe once or twice
 - c) More than three times
 - d) Often

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: *This associates swimming performance with a tangible reward, making the child feel that they must have been "good" because they swam fast. It's bad news, because kids can't be expected to perform lifetime bests at every meet; swimming doesn't work that way. By doing this, your child can work their heart out and still feel as though they've disappointed their parent.*

2. Ever asked your child if he or she is working hard at practice?
 - a) Never
 - b) Rarely, but sometimes
 - c) At least once a week
 - d) Almost daily

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: *This puts pressure on the child and makes them aware that the parent is connected to their activity, and that the parent has an expectation of hard work every day. The pressure to please the parent becomes greater.*

3. Mentioned a college scholarship in ANY context?
 - a) Never
 - b) Occasionally
 - c) At least five times
 - d) More than ten times

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: *The child begins to equate swimming, their supposedly fun activity, as a means to help their family financially. Swimming becomes less fun and more of a job.*

4. Made your child go to swim practice (or made the child feel guilty) when he or she clearly did not want to go?
 - a) Never
 - b) Once or twice
 - c) More than three times
 - d) More than ten times

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: This is a huge mistake. It causes resentment toward the sport, and it completely takes the fun out of an activity that is supposed to be fun for your child. The old saying, “you can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink” applies here. These kids become the burnouts at ages 14-15-16, and they usually quit the sport altogether, often in their prime.

5. Asked your child after a race if he or she had “quit” during the race, or given less than his or her best effort?
- Never
 - Once
 - A few times
 - More than five times

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: A deadly question to a child that just put their effort on display in front of a lot of people. It’s a real slap in the face, a gut punch, from the source that is supposed to love the child unconditionally.

6. Heard yourself tell your child that the best swimmers in the Olympics are the ones that work hardest, practice every day, etc, etc.?
- No
 - Yes

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: It may be true, but your kids don’t want to hear that from you. They’ll take this kind of information as inspiration from their coach, and as nagging from their parent.

7. Given ANY suggestions to your child about how he or she can improve any technical part of their stroke, start, turn, or finish?
- Never
 - Once or twice
 - A handful of times
 - More than ten times

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: This may be the number one thing that your kids hate, although most don’t have the courage to tell you so. Most parent “corrections” are wrong, but even if they have merit, by “coaching” your child, you’re pushing your child closer toward quitting. Children want the roles defined clearly, and they want to live in a world where the parent parents, and the coaches coach.

8. Told your child at a swim meet, before a race, to “go out fast”, “have good turns”, “don’t forget to kick”, “streamline”, etc, etc?
- Never
 - Occasionally
 - Often

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: Please don’t do this. Often, it can contradict pre-race advice that the coach has already given the child. And it is yet again an example of the parents communicating the “stake” that they feel they have in the child’s success. The child hears this “encouragement” as, “Hey, I’ve got money on you, so don’t blow it!” It’s added pressure, and pressure is NEVER, EVER good.

9. Given an opinion to your child after a race as to what they could have done to have gone faster (“that other kid was kicking harder at the end”, or “you lost time on your turns”, etc)?
- Never
 - Maybe once or twice ever
 - Once in awhile
 - After most races

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: *Hey, your child is already exhausted and feeling bad if they didn't do great in a race, and now they have to deal with mom or dad coming up and critiquing them? And if they DID go a best time, now they have to deal with their parents telling them how they could've done even better? The swimmer's thinking, "Is there no pleasing them—EVER???"*

10. Referred to your child's swimming by using the word, "career"?
- Never
 - Yes, but not in a negative context
 - Yes, because it really IS a career, sort of

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: *Hey, it's not a career. What the parent does is a career. What the child will eventually grow up to do for money is a career. This is supposed to be fun. When it stops being fun, the swimmer quits. Case closed.*

11. Solicited the opinion of anyone other than your child's coach as to how you can maximize your child's swimming experience (this could be a former swimmer in the family, a neighbor that swam in college, etc.)?
- No
 - Yes

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: *Everybody's got an opinion. About everything. But with swimming, it's best to leave it to the coach and the swimmer. If you don't trust the coach or the program, you need to find one that you do trust.*

12. Gone on YouTube or Google to look at swimming video to get training ideas for your child?
- Never
 - Maybe once
 - A handful of times
 - More than ten times

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: *This is a huge red flag. If you're Googling "turn technique" for your high school swimmer, you have a problem. Again, trust the coaches. Don't do independent research to find "tips" for your child. Trust the plan that the coaches have for your child, and try to stay out of the way. Understand that the "tips" that you give the child can undermine what the coaches are doing.*

13. Posted information about your child's swimming accomplishments on Facebook or other social media?
- Never
 - Fairly often, just to report results for relatives
 - My Facebook is a shrine to my child's swimming

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: *Self-promotional social media venues like Facebook can cause problems for the young swimmer when the swimmer realizes the image that mom and dad have created online may be impossible to live up to. If the image of a winner and swimming success is being celebrated online, or even in print media, the child feels pressure to continue to give mom and dad big news to post. It may seem innocent, but it's pressure, no matter how you slice it.*

14. Given (or even suggested) your child any home exercises to do to supplement their training (example- lunges, planks, running, cross-training, etc)?
- Never
 - In casual conversation
 - Shown them specific exercises they should do
 - Insisted that they do certain home exercises, particularly if they aren't at the pool on a given day

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: Another big-time alert for the swimming parent. To begin with, you're interfering with your child's training program. If the coaches want your child doing lunges, they'll tell your child to do them. We've seen swimmers come to practice unable to move because their dad made them go for a 10 mile bike ride or a three mile run when they missed practice. But more importantly, you're damaging the relationship with your child by stepping over the line that exists between parenting and coaching.

15. Instructed your child to warm down or warm up at a swim meet?
- Never
 - Sometimes, just because the child forgets after the coach tells them to do it

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: If your child doesn't want to warm down, that's between him and the coach.

16. Gone on www.floridaswimming.org to research FLAG times, top 10 rankings, etc?
- Never
 - Yes

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: It's all interesting, of course, but when the child senses that the parent is really into swimming, the child pulls away as they get older. The "graveyard" of great swimmers that quit prematurely is littered with parents that were all over the Florida Swimming rankings. Please trust me—your children can't stand this.

17. Recorded your child's split times at a meet, even if it was "for them" (your child)?
- Never
 - Occasionally
 - Constantly

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: Again, you are communicating to your child that you're really into their races, the splits, the strategy, etc. They already have a coach. They just want a parent.

18. Made your child eat specific foods or meals the night before or the morning of a swim meet?
- Never
 - Once or twice
 - Regularly

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: On race day, I always tell swimmers to eat what they normally eat for breakfast. Sudden changes usually don't go well. When you control the pre-race meals, they see it as just more interference into their sporting world. They just want mom and dad to give them breakfast, not manage them.

19. Attended and **watched/studied** your child during most of a swim practice?
- Never or maybe once
 - Between two and ten times
 - Between ten and twenty times
 - I watch most of the swim practices

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: I'm personally in favor of parents dropping the kids at the pool and leaving, or at most, reading a magazine. Over 25 years, I can tell you anecdotally that most of the swimmers that have parents watching practice can't stand it. Not all of them, but most of them. They definitely hate it as they get older. Swimming is supposed to be their sanctuary away from home, not an extension of it where they'll be evaluated.

20. Made any comment, to any parent (including your spouse) that assesses any aspect of your child's swimming ability (ex., "her breaststroke stinks", or "he can't sprint", or "his fly keeps him from having a decent IM")?
- Never once
 - One or two times
 - Somewhat often in casual conversation at practice and meets

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: *It's another red flag that you might be too much into your child's swimming if you share these observations with others. Parents talk, and kids talk, of course. No child wants to hear from another child that their parent said something negative about their swimming.*

21. Asked your child "What happened?" or "What was that??" after a race?
- Never
 - Maybe once, in a kidding way
 - A few times, but jokingly
 - Fairly often, always when the time is slow

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: *This statement, no matter how it's intended, is like a knife in the heart of a child that just gave their all.*

22. Told your child that you were proud of them after a race in which they dropped time?
- Never
 - Yes

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: *Almost everyone does this, of course, but what we should do is to say that we're just happy to watch our children doing something that they love. Try to avoid associating a connection between swimming fast times and pleasing the parent.*

23. Do you bring a stopwatch to meets?
- No
 - Yes, sometimes
 - Frequently

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: *Leave it at home, or donate it to the team. When children know that you're that into their times, it's not good.*

24. Communicated with your child during practice, either by calling out or by making gestures, to go faster, pay attention, work harder, etc, etc?
- Never
 - Yes

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: *Number one, this is embarrassing to your child. Number two, it absolutely WILL run your child out of the sport and damage your relationship with your child. Please remember that young children may enjoy performing for daddy or mommy when they're little, but they resent the heck out of it later. Let the coaches coach.*

25. Have you ever reminded your child of the investment that you've made in their sport, financially (gas, trips, swim suits, fees, etc)?
- Never
 - Only to remind them that sports cost money
 - Yes, in the sense that if they don't take swimming seriously, I'm not paying for it

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: *It's supposed to be fun, and when the child feels like an investment or a project, they end up quitting. Remember why most children swim---to make friends, to have fun, to get in good shape, etc. If children get competitive, then that's great. If they don't, and they're happy and healthy, then that's great, too. But you can't guilt someone into wanting to be a champion.*

26. Have you ever argued in the car with your child about swimming?
- a) Never
 - b) Yes, once
 - c) More than once
 - d) More than five times

WHY THIS IS NOT GOOD: *This is often the death knell of a swimmer getting ready to leave the sport. If you're arguing in the car, before or after practice, or before or after a meet, it's usually the beginning of the end.*

Parents,

There's no "final score" on this.

If you responded with all "a" answers, then you're the only parent I've ever seen in 35-plus years that has done so.

I well understand that this can be tough stuff to swallow---the knowledge that you might have been messing up your child's favorite sport. But what's written here isn't done so to embarrass or humiliate anyone---it's written to make you aware of what your children are seeing and hearing. Your children will tell us as coaches things that they may be afraid to tell you as parents.

Much of the damage is fixable. Just sit down with your child and discuss these things in a no-holds-barred exchange of ideas. If you feel like you've messed up because you were trying to help, just tell your child. They'll forgive. Remember, they may like their coach, they may respect their coach---but they love you.

Tony Ackerson
Seminole Aquatics Head Coach