**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this handbook is two-fold: to explain to new members just who Houston Cougar Aquatics Sports Club are and to outline various policies that affect all swimmers, year after year. It should be read by all families so that they may become familiar with important facts and rules of the club.

**WHY SWIM?**United States Swimming (USS) age group swimming program is America's largest program of guided fitness activity for children. Age group swimming builds a strong foundation for a lifetime of good health by teaching healthy fitness habits;

**Physical Development**Swimming is considered the ideal activity for developing muscular and skeletal growth by many physicians and pediatricians. Why do doctors like it so much?

* Swimming develops high quality aerobic endurance, the most important key to physical fitness. In other sports an hour of practice may yield as little as 10 minutes of meaningful exercise. Age group swimming teams use every precious minute of practice time developing fitness and teaching skills.
* Swimming does a better job in proportional muscular development by using all the body's major muscle groups. There is no other sport that does this as well.
* Swimming enhances children's natural flexibility (at a time when they ordinarily begin to lose it) by exercising all their major joints through a full range of motion.
* Swimming helps develop superior coordination because it requires combinations of complex movements of all parts of the body, enhancing harmonious muscle function, grace, and fluidity of movement.
* Swimming is the most injury-free of all children's sports. It also has the fewest cases of concussion amongst participants.
* Swimming is a sport that will bring kids fitness and enjoyment for life. Participants in masters swimming programs are still training and racing well into their 90's.

**Intellectual Competence**In addition to physical development, children can develop greater intellectual competence by participating in a guided program of physical activity. Learning and using swimming skills engages the thinking processes. As they learn new techniques, children must develop and plan movement sequences. They improve by exploring new ideas. They learn that greater progress results from using their creative talents. Self-expression can be just as much physical as intellectual. Finally, their accomplishments in learning and using new skills contribute to a stronger self image.

**GENERAL DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVE**

Houston Cougar Aquatic Sports, Coogs, is a year-round club swimming team created in 2002 by the late Mark Taylor, the Head Coach of the University of Houston’s Women’s Swimming Team. We offer a guided age-group program for children aged 5 and up, from the beginning swimmer to the most competitive and skilled swimmer. When a young person becomes a member of Coogs he/she learns the values of sportsmanship and team work. The mission of the Houston Cougar Aquatics Sports is:

***“To develop our swimmers to be technically, physically and mentally prepared to achieve all of their goals in and out of the pool.”***

At Coogs we do not condone bullying in any form. Our anti-bullying policy can be found on our website. **COACHES RESPONSIBILITIES**The Coogs coaching staff provide a program for swimmers that will enable them to learn the value of striving to improve oneself--"to be the best you can be." Therefore, the coaches must be in total control of matters affecting training and competition.

1. The coaches are responsible for placing swimmers in practice groups. This is based on the age and ability level of each individual. When it is in the best interest of a swimmer, he/she will be placed in a more challenging training group by the coach.

2. Sole responsibility for stroke instruction and the training regimen rests with the Coogs coaching staff. Each of the groups practices are based on sound scientific principles and are geared to the specific goals of that group.

3. The coaching staff will make the final decision concerning which meets Coogs swimmers may attend. The coaching staff also makes the final decision concerning which events a swimmer is entered in to.

4. At meets, it is the coach’s job to offer constructive criticism of a swimmer’s performance. It is the parent’s responsibility to provide love and encouragement that bolster the swimmer’s confidence along the way.

5. The building of a relay team is the sole responsibility of the coaching staff.

**TEAM LEVELS**The Coogs use a "progressive" age group program designed to develop the child physically, mentally and emotionally in a systematic fashion. A well-defined, long-term approach of gradually increasing degrees of commitment is essential to reach peak performance levels during a swimmer's physiological prime. The emphasis in the early stages of participation must be placed on developing technical skills and a love for the sport. In the later years, a more demanding physical and psychological challenge will be introduced to the training program. In this respect, "too much too soon" is more often the cause of failure to achieve maximum potential in senior swimming than in the reverse situation.

In addition to emphasizing long-term rather than short-term results, it is also important that we establish training groups of swimmers who are compatible in respect to abilities, maturity, commitment levels and goals.

At each level, the goals and objectives are specific and directed toward meeting the needs of the swimmer. The long-term goal of total excellence is always in mind. As each child is different, he/she will progress at his/her own rate. The coaching staff recognizes this fact by making team assignments based on a swimmer's physical, mental, and emotional level of development. Coaches may use their discretion in placement of swimmers in the following groups:

National

Senior Red

Junior Red

Junior Blue

Age Group Gold

Age Group Red

Age Group Blue

Development

**National Group**Our National group is for swimmers over the age of 14 with sectional cuts and above. This group focuses training and competitive efforts at the National level and qualifying for National level meets. All swimmers are required to maintain a minimum of 8 practices a week.

**Senior Group**Our Senior group is for swimmers over the age of 14 who are experienced and proficient and are working towards achieving at a State level. This group focuses on building speed and endurance, improving swimming technique, and preparing athletes for the National group. Ideally swimmers in this group should have 3 or more 15/16yr old “A” times.

**Junior Groups**

Our Junior groups are generally for swimmers aged 12 to 15 that are committed and motivated in preparation for higher levels of swimming. These groups focus on stroke refinement, aerobic training and strength building both in and out of the pool

**Age Groups**

Our Age Group program is designed to introduce and advance swimmers in year-round swimming. The groups are based on stroke instruction and progressing to competitive training. Dryland is a very important aspect of these groups to build overall fitness. The goal of our Age Group program is to get swimmers to TAGS.

**Development**

Our Development group is for young swimmers who are ready to learn more advanced stroke techniques. They must be able to complete a minimum of 25m freestyle and 25m backstroke to join this group. Swimmers should have a basic understanding of the other two strokes and will continue to learn by means of drills and games designed to make swimming fun.

***\*All group movements are at the Coaches discretion and a swimmer must compete in a Championship meet that season before they can advance.***

**Masters**

Our Master’s group is for anyone over the age of 18 who wishes to train to keep fit or to compete. This group is also great for triathletes.

**PRACTICE AND ATTENDANCE POLICIES**

Houston Cougar Aquatic Sports does not have a minimum attendance policy (except for National Group) and does not discourage our athletes from participating in other extracurricular activities. However, swimmers with higher attendance tend to improve faster. Whenever possible, the coach should be informed in advance of an illness or injury.

**SWIMMERS TRAINING RESPONSIBILITIES**As a swimmer's level of swimming ability increases so does his/her responsibility. The program is designed to encourage all swimmers to be college swimming bound and as a swimmer improves, this is a deep commitment that requires great effort on all parts. A swimmer has responsibilities to the team, the coach, his/her parents, and most importantly to themselves. Swimmers need to prepare themselves for a 100% effort each time they come to practice.

Swimmers will be required to bring specified training accessories to workouts. It is the swimmer's responsibility to make sure they have these items.

**Required Team Equipment**

Swimmers in the COOG program are required to have the following equipment at all practices:

Goggles, Coog Swim Cap, Arena Swim Suit, Pull Buoy, Fins, Snorkel (older swimmers only), Paddles (older swimmers only), Dry Land Kit.

***Failure*** ***to have the correct suit and cap at practice will result in the swimmer not being allowed in the pool.***

**PARENTS . . . YOUR ATHLETE NEEDS YOU**To have a successful program there must be understanding and cooperation among parents, swimmers and coaches. The progress your swimmer makes depends on this triangular relationship.

The following guidelines will help you keep your child's development in the proper perspective and help your child reach his/her full potential as an athlete:

The coach is **The Coach**!!! We want your swimmer to relate to his/her coach as soon as possible concerning swimming matters. This relationship between coach and swimmer produces the best results. When parents interfere with opinions as to how the swimmer should swim or train, it causes considerable, and oftentimes insurmountable, confusion as to whom the swimmer should listen to. If you have a problem, concern, or complaint, please contact the coach.

Be the best kind of parent you can be! While it is the coach's job is to motivate and constructively criticize the swimmer's performance, it is the parent's job to supply the love, recognition, and encouragement necessary to make the child work harder in practice, which in turn gives him/her the confidence to perform well in competition.

Ten and Unders: Kids that are in the “Ten and Under” age group are the most inconsistent swimmers, and this can be frustrating for parents, coaches, and the swimmer alike! Parents and coaches must be patient and permit these youngsters to learn to love the sport.

Not every race may be a best time: Even the very best swimmer will have meets where they do not do their best times. This is a normal part of swimming and over the course of a season, their times should improve. Please be supportive of your swimmer at these meets, keeping the long-term goal in mind, especially with the older swimmers who may have only two or three meets a year for which they will be shaved and tapered. Winning ribbons, medals or trophies is NEVER the main goal.

**PARENTS RESPONSIBILITIES**Please make every effort to have your swimmers at practice on time, this is at least 10 minutes before the session starts. Also, please make sure to be at the pool on time to pick your swimmer up if leaving them at the pool. Realize that your child is working hard and give all the support you can. Encourage a good diet and sleeping habits, they will serve your swimmers well.

**FEE STRUCTURE**

**PAYMENT POLICIES**

Each Coog family will be responsible for the following regular fees. Fees can be paid by check (payable to “Coogs”) or online through our website. (Select the make a payment tab on the right side of the home page.)

1. Monthly dues - All Swimmers. This is determined by assigned training group for **each** swimmer. A “multi swimmer discount” is applied for those families with multiple swimmers on the team. Monthly dues are only charged for 11 months out of the year with swimmers receiving sessions in August for free. The monthly dues are as follows:

National Group $210.00

Senior Groups $195.00

Junior Groups $170.00

Age Group Gold $140.00

Age Groups $115.00

Development Group $95.00

Masters Group $70.00 monthly or $140 for a 20 session punch card

College Swimmers $50.00 monthly (for those athletes training with Coogs over the summer)

**DISCOUNTS**

Families that pay their annual fee in full at Registration will receive a 10% discount (Coaching fees only). **This is a non-refundable amount**. In addition, there is no refund for unused months if the swimmer leaves at any point during the season.

**Multiple family member discount:** The 2nd member of a family is discounted 10%. The third member of a family is discounted 20%, the fourth member is discounted 30%, and the fifth member will not be charged. **Please note that if you, or your son/daughter swims in any part of a month, you are still responsible for the full month’s fee**. Discounts apply only for the monthly fees, not registration.

2. Annual COOG Registration Fee- All Swimmers. This registration fee of $180 for **each** swimmer will also include a registration fee that is paid to USA swimming, a team practice suit, t-shirt & latex swim cap. Swimmers joining after April 1st will only be charged a $120 registration fee. Registration fees although collected in September at the time of registering cover the entire following year. For example, a registration fee in September 2018 will cover the swimmer through December 31st, 2019. Coogs offers a non-competitive registration option of $100. Non-competitive swimmers will not get the free suit or cap and cannot attend meets.

3. Volunteer Escrow Account - All Coog families are required to pay an annual $300 volunteer escrow fee. Each family is required to commit to 20 hours per year volunteering for team activities such as social event planning and helping at meets. If the volunteer commitment is met, then $100 is “rolled forward” to the next year. Through the season, for each meet a family volunteers to time at they receive a $25 credit to their account, up to $200 for the year. The volunteer year runs from September- August and is prorated depending on when you sign up.

4. Meet Entry Fees - Throughout the year, you will receive information regarding upcoming meets. You will be billed separately for each upcoming meet that your swimmer participates in. Fees for meets are set by the Host teams and payment is required before the event starts. Once a swimmer is entered in to a meet we cannot refund this amount for any reason.

**Importance of Timely Payment**Characteristic of any business, Coog expenses begin the first day of every month. A positive cash flow is required to assure payroll requirements and various other expenditures. It is, therefore, imperative for all Coog parents to pay their swimmer’s monthly installment on or before the due date which is the **10th** of each month, after that date **a late fee of $10 will be attached to their account**. (No exceptions! Once this charge has been applied to an account it will not be removed!)

**CANCELLING COOG MEMBERSHIP AND GOING “INACTIVE”**

At times a swimmer may need to go “inactive” for a period of time due to long-term illness or injury. Notification of the need to go “inactive” must be submitted to the swimmers Coach and, except in emergency circumstances, requires a **written notice due 30 days prior to the swimmer’s last practice.**

If you have any questions about any billing you may have received, please contact your coach.

**FUND RAISING**

Houston Cougar Aquatics Sports will occasionally host fundraising activities. Families will be notified in advance of all team events.

**TEAM UNIFORM**

Coogs is sponsored by Arena. Part of that sponsorship deal requires that all swimmers purchase Arena merchandise such as bags, warm ups, suits etc. At Championship “Shave and Taper” meets, swimmers aged 13 and older may wear “Arena” Technical suits with their coach’s permission. The coaching staff does not allow these suits for swimmers below this age. If you have any questions, see your swimmer's coach.

If a swimmer chooses to wear a cap, he/she **must wear the Coog team cap**. Caps cost $5 for latex and $15 for silicone. These caps are available through the coaches at practice or at meets. All swimmers will be given one free latex cap upon registration.

Swimmers are required to wear Coog t shirts at all meets. All swimmers will receive one free team shirt upon registration. Additional registration shirts can be purchased from the coaches for $15. You can also purchase additional clothing through our D&J link on the website.

**As mentioned above, all swimmers are required to wear an Arena training suit at practices and Coog swim team caps.**

**SWIM MEET INFORMATION**

All meets that Coogs will attend are listed on the website at the start of the season under the events header. The different types of swim meets are as follows;

**INTRASQUAD**

These are meets hosted by Coog for Coog swimmers only. These are good practice meets for beginning swimmers and are held primarily to build team spirit and camaraderie.

**DUAL**

Dual meets are competitions between two clubs.

**INVITATIONAL**

An invitational is a meet where the host team invites other teams at their discretion. Sometimes, swimmers with only certain time standards may attend. Many invitational meets are split format which means 12/under swimmers swim in a separate session from 13/over swimmers.

**OPEN MEETS**

All teams within the Gulf are invited to these meets and they are open to all age groups. Just like invitationals, they are usually split format to help the sessions run faster. With Gulf open meets entries are usually due three weeks in advance. As there are a large number of teams entering these meets there are usually multiple venues. Once entries are in, teams are allocated to their venues in order to keep all meets around the same size. For this reason, we may not know which pool we will be racing at until the week of the meet.

**CHAMPIONSHIPS**

Athletes who meet certain time standards during the season will qualify for season ending Championship meets.

**SWIM SEASONS**The swim year is divided into two seasons. The Short Course season runs from mid-September to mid-March. The meets are primarily held in a 25-yard pools. The Long Course season runs from early April to mid-August. These meets are generally held outside in 50 meter pools (Olympic size).

In competition, the important measure is not who collected the most medals, or even who improved the most seconds; the real critical measure is who learned the most from the competitive experience.

Swimmers quickly forget the medals, records, and other material benefits. They will, however, remember the development of interpersonal skills, discipline, listening skills, time management, goal setting and enhanced self- image. These are the things that make the swimmer a more successful person with a better chance of living a life closer to their peak potential, and to contribute to the world they live in.

**LEVELS OF ACHIEVEMENT & BASIC USA SWIMMING INFORMATION**1. There are seven different age group classifications recognized by United State Swimming which is the governing body of the sport. They are: 8-Under, 10-Under, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16, 17-18, and Senior.

2. The “Senior” classification includes any age registered swimmer who has achieved the prescribed qualifying time for that event.

3. Not all age group classifications are offered at every swim meet.

4. The swimmers age on the first day of a meet will generally govern the swimmers age for the entire meet.

5. Swimmers “age up” on their birthday (unless it is in the middle of a meet)

6. Within each age-group, there are different nationally recognized levels of achievement based on times. All swimmers begin as "C" swimmers. As they improve, they advance from "C", to "BB", "B", "A", "AA", "AAA", and ultimately "AAAA". The times required for each ability level are published each year by United States Swimming. This permits fair, yet challenging, competition on all levels.

In some cases, a swimmer may be in a different class for each stroke. An example: a "C" breaststroke time, a "B" freestyle time, and an "AA" backstroke time. In addition, swimmers may also be in different levels for different distances within each stroke; for example: an “A” time in the 50 yard free and a “B” time in the 100 yard free.