

Training for Age Group Swimmers (USA Swimming Guide)

Many parents have lots of questions about swim practice, especially when their children are new to the sport. It is sometimes difficult to know what to expect of your child. Your child may talk about swim practice, but you may not even understand the new "swimming vocabulary" your child is using.

Many children improve rapidly during the developmental stages due to growth and improved technique. It is difficult to resist the tendency to push young athletes at this stage. However, the emphasis should be placed on technique and not intense training. The training schedule for developmental swimmers should be flexible enough to provide them with enough time to participate in other activities. Since swimmers' careers can extend well into adulthood, swimming at the youngest levels needs to be fun, pressure free, and filled with learning experiences. This will ensure that swimming remains fun throughout their lives.

You should certainly ask questions at swim team parents' meetings or schedule an appointment with your child's coach to clarify things. However there are many common questions that might be answered in our [FAQs](#). Read through the [FAQs](#) and see if you have found yourself asking these same questions.

Q: 01. Some days he likes to just play with his friends. Should I force him to go to practice?

A: You should not force your child; you want his participation to be his decision. Reinforce the choices and decisions he has made to start swimming. For example, your son chose to go to practice on Tuesday and Thursdays, on other days he has the freedom to do other activities. As a parent, explain your expectation that he fulfill the commitment he made by joining the team. You don't want to force your child into a sport that he does not enjoy, yet you want your child to be involved in a 'lifetime sport', to learn about making and keeping a commitment and to interact with peers So, what are you to do?

Instead of allowing your child to make a daily decision about going to practice, allow him to decide whether or not he wants to swim for the season. Once the decision is made to swim, he is making a commitment to the team and needs to follow through on it by attending practice on a regular basis. A haphazard schedule is detrimental to the swimmer's overall development.

Interestingly, when asked to reflect on the role of their parents in their swimming, athletes from the World Championship team talked about being pushed to swim by their parents on a weekly basis but knowing they could quit if they stopped having fun with swimming.

Q: 02. What will happen to my child's meet results if he only makes half of the offered workouts because he is participating in other sports?

A: Children involved in other activities can benefit in the areas of coordination and balance, as well as improved social and intellectual development. Specialized training in one activity does not necessarily need to take place at this stage of development. Will your son's teammate who makes all practices have better results? Probably, because his teammate is working solely on developing swimming skills. It is up to you to explain to your child that making the choice to participate in other activities can have its consequences. Tell your son that he should not compare his results to that of his teammate, but to focus on the fact that he is benefiting from and enjoying both sports.

Q: 03. It looks like my child has too much fun, shouldn't she be working harder?

A: Be happy that your child is having fun! According to a recent study conducted by USA Swimming children who experience fun while participating stay in sports longer (Tuffey, Gould, & Medbery, 1998). At this stage of the game, the most important aspect of development is the mastery of skills, which means learning to swim the strokes with proper technique. Fundamentals must be established prior to true "training" taking place. And, if she is having fun in the process of learning, she is more likely to continue to swim.

Q: 04. Shouldn't my child be swimming more laps instead of doing all those drills?

A: Your child needs to develop a solid foundation in stroke mechanics. Drills and drill sets serve the specific purpose of teaching skills and fundamentals. Drills develop motor coordination, motor skills, and balance. In fact, your child's coach may prescribe a particular drill, just for your child, in order to improve a part of her stroke. In addition, she may actually be experiencing a "training" benefit from drills. Drills require concentration and aerobic energy to do them correctly.

Q: 05. My daughter's coach makes her sit on the side of the pool. What's that teaching her?

A: The coach has set up expectations of proper behavior both in and out of the water. Hopefully, your child is aware of the consequences of testing these boundaries. Obviously the coach is reinforcing what is expected of the children at practice. We encourage you to reinforce the coach's practice expectations by discussing your child's behavior and the consequences of that behavior. Hopefully, this "time out" begins to reinforce self-discipline, accountability and respect for others.

Q: 06. My son came home and said he had his best result on a test set of 100s on 1:45, what does that mean?

A: Some coaches use test sets to measure improvement. This particular challenge set consists of swimming a certain number of 100s on every 1 minute and 45 seconds, which is the send off. Praise your child for this accomplishment. In addition to achieving the physical goal, your child is also learning to swim on an interval, read the pace clock, and accomplish practice goals. Congratulate him on his efforts and let him know you are proud of him.