

USA Swimming Parents Handbook

Dear Parents,

The Parents' Handbook includes important information on how to be a supportive swimming parent, as well as general information about the sport and how you can get involved as a volunteer to support your child and the entire team.

This publication has been created to help educate you on how to support your child throughout his or her swimming career. USA Swimming has conducted research about why kids choose to participate in swimming and what makes it fun. Supportive parents play a very significant role in why kids swim, as well as why kids quit. We suggest you take the time to talk to your child about your role as a needed support system for him or her. This is the best way to communicate your interest in making your child's swimming experience the best one possible.

This booklet will also provide an overview of some of the rules of our sport. It is by no means a substitute for the **USA Swimming Rules and Regulations** book, but will give you some general guidelines of what is expected of your children from a technical standpoint. As children go through developmental changes, they will often get disqualified for stroke infractions due to changes in body balance and types. We have included some helpful hints on how to make this situation a positive one.

Finally, this handbook contains ideas about volunteer jobs within your child's team and local association. If you are interested in helping, please be sure to read this section and then speak to your team's coach to find out how you can best serve the club.

Welcome to the best youth sport in the world. The network of people you and your child will meet could very well become lifelong friends. We believe that these friendships along with the fact that your child will be learning life skills and gaining a high level of fitness, really makes swimming the best youth sport in the world. Your child will continue to reap the benefits of swimming long after their participation ends.

We hope that your experience is a great one and we wish you the best of luck.

FOREWORD

Welcome to the exciting world of swimming! By joining USA Swimming, your child has become a member of one of the country's largest, most organized, and competently coached youth sports.

This handbook will acquaint you with the sport of competitive swimming and introduce you to the organization of USA Swimming. USA Swimming, the National Governing Body (NGB) for competitive swimming, is a non-profit corporation made up of dedicated volunteers. This means that everyone, from the parents and officials of your local club to the members of the National Board of Directors, gives their time and talent to serve the organization.

This booklet contains information that will help you and your family get the most out of participating in age group swimming. We want to let you know how important your role as a volunteer is to our sport. As a volunteer, you can be actively involved in many programs and instrumental in strengthening swimming in the United States. With a positive attitude and a willingness to lend a hand, you will also have a great impact on your child's athletic environment and their love of swimming.

There are many benefits to participating in the sport of swimming, including meeting terrific people. The camaraderie among swimmers is unique; many swimming buddies become lifelong friends. In addition to being around fine people, swimming provides one of the most beneficial forms of exercise for cardiovascular and overall fitness. Possibly the greatest benefits of participating in an organized swimming program are the life skills your child will develop. These skills include time management, self-discipline and sportsmanship.

Research has shown that the main motivation for children to choose sports is their desire to have fun. Age group swimming can be fun, exciting and rewarding. Many children improve rapidly during the developmental stages due to growth and improved technique and 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. We also recommend that the training schedule for developmental swimmers be flexible enough to provide them with time to participate in other activities. Since swimming 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 enjoyable throughout their lives.

Once a child reaches puberty, scientists and coaches feel more serious training can begin. This can be a particularly frustrating time for swimmers. During this transition from age group to senior swimming and from childhood to young adulthood, an athlete may experience a plateau in performance while skills and physical abilities struggle to become equal with each other. Best times can be few and far between while training time are increasing and can require more time and dedication. While the coaches have prepared swimmers for this change, many parents may begin to question whether a child's swimming career is over at this point. These factors, coupled with the other normal difficulties of puberty, can sometimes lead a swimmer to leave the sport.

prematurely It is critical that parents and coaches be cooperative and very supportive during this period of adjustment, realizing that it will likely pass and the rewards will be even better.

This handbook is designed to help you help your child succeed in swimming. Remember that not every swimmer becomes a world record holder, but everyone gains from their swimming experience. Supporting your child in any of their activities can be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life. This booklet will also give you an overview of the many ways in which volunteers contribute to the overall swimming program and will provide suggestions on how to manage and retain volunteers in your program.

Please ask questions of your coaches and officials, as well as the experienced parents on your team. They all have the same goal: to provide your child with the best possible experience in swimming. Keep in mind that the swimming program only works because of dedicated people like you !

Thanks for helping to make swimming the best youth sport.

THE GOVERNING BODY

What is USA Swimming?

USA Swimming is the national governing body for competitive swimming in the United States. USA Swimming was conceived in 1978 as United States Swimming (USS) when Congress passed the Amateur Sports Act, which specified that all Olympic sports would be administered independently. Prior to this act, USA Swimming was the Competitive Swimming Committee of the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) and was located in Indianapolis, Indiana. The USA Swimming Headquarters was established in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in 1981 and is located at the United States Olympic Training Center. In 1998 our name changed to USA Swimming.

As the National Governing Body (NGB), USA Swimming is responsible for the conduct and administration of swimming in the United States. In this capacity, USA Swimming formulates the rules, implements policies and procedures, conducts national championships, disseminates safety and sports medicine information and selects the athletes to represent the United States in international competition.

USA Swimming Mission Statement

USA Swimming is the National Governing Body for the sport of swimming. We administer competitive swimming in accordance with the Amateur Sports Act. We provide programs and services for our members, supporters, affiliates and the interested public. We value these members of the swimming community, and the staff and volunteers who serve them. We are committed to excellence and the improvement of our sport.

USA Swimming Vision Statement

To inspire and enable our members to achieve excellence in the sport of swimming and in life.

USA Swimming Core Objectives

Build - Promote - Achieve

How are decisions made at USA Swimming?

All policy decisions are made through a chain of committees reporting to elected vice presidents. The USA Swimming House of Delegates meets once a year at the annual United States Aquatic Sports convention and determines the rules and regulations for swimming for the following year. Between yearly meetings of the House of Delegates, an elected USA Swimming Board of Directors is charged with the responsibility of making decisions for the corporation.

Local Swimming Committees

The USA Swimming House of Delegates is made up of elected positions from 59 Local Swimming Committees (LSC). Each LSC may send the following voting positions to the annual convention: General Chair, Age Group Chair, Senior Chair, Coaches

Representative, Administrative Chair, and an Athlete Representative. For information on how to get involved with your LSC, contact your Coach or Board President.

USA Swimming Headquarters

The USA Swimming headquarters provides a variety of services and programs for its membership. Among the many services are publications, educational programs, fund raising activities, sports medicine programs, video resources and general information about swimming related activities. USA Swimming staff are available to provide you with additional information through the following methods:

Telephone (719) 578-4578

Fax (719) 578-4669

SwimFax: (719) 575-9606

Website: www.usa-swimming.org

THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OF SWIM PARENTING¹

1. Thou shalt not impose your ambitions on thy child.

Remember that swimming is your child's activity. Improvements and progress occur at different rates for each individual. Don't judge your child's progress based on the performance of other athletes and don't push them based on what you think they should be doing. The nice thing about swimming is that every person can strive to do their personal best and benefit from the process of competitive swimming.

2. Thou shalt be supportive no matter what.

There is only one question to ask your child after a practice or a competition - "Did you have fun?" If meets and practices are not fun, your child should not be forced to participate.

3. Thou shalt not coach they child.

You are involved in one of the few youth sports programs that offer professional coaching. Do not undermine the professional coach by trying to coach your child on the side. Your job is to provide love and support and a safe place to return to at the end of the day. Love and hug your child no matter what. The coach is responsible for the technical part of the job.

You should not offer advice on technique or race strategy or any other area that is not yours. And above all, never pay your child for a performance. This will only serve to confuse your child concerning the reasons to strive for excellence and weaken the swimmer/coach bond.

4. Thou shalt only have positive things to say at a swimming meet.

If you are going to show up at a swimming meet, you should be encouraging and never criticize your child or the coach. Both of them know when mistakes have been made. Please remember that "yelling at" is not the same as "cheering for."

5. Thou shalt acknowledge thine child's fears.

Your child's first swimming meet, 500 free or 200 I.M. can be a stressful situation. It is totally appropriate for your child to be scared. Don't yell or belittle, just assure your child that the coach would not have suggested the event if your child was not ready to compete in it. Remember your job is to love and support your child through their entire swimming experience.

¹ From USA Swimming. (n.d.). *USA Swimming Parent's Handbook*. Colorado Springs, CO: USA Swimming.

6. Thou shalt not criticize the officials.

If you do not care to devote the time or do not have the desire to volunteer as an official, please don't criticize those who are doing the best they can.

7. Honor thy child's coach.

The bond between coach and swimmer is a special one, and one that contributes to your child's success as well as fun. Do not criticize the coach in the presence of your child, as it will only serve to hurt your child's swimming.

8. Thou shalt be loyal and supportive of thy team.

It is not wise for parents to take their swimmers and jump from team to team. The water isn't necessarily bluer in another team's pool. Every team has its own internal problems - even teams that build champions. Children who switch from team to team are often ostracized for a long time by the teammates they leave behind and are slowly received by new team mates. Often swimmers find that switching teams does not improve their performance.

9. Thy child shalt have goals besides winning.

Most successful swimmers are those who have learned to focus on the process and not the outcome. Giving an honest effort regardless of the outcome is much more important than winning. One Olympian said, " My goal was to set a world record. Well, I did that, but someone else did it too, just a little faster than I did. I achieved my goal and I lost. Does this make me a failure? No, in fact I am very proud of that swim." What a tremendous outlook to carry on through life!

10. Thou shalt not expect thy child to become an Olympian.

There are 250,000 athletes in USA Swimming and we keep a record of the Top 100 all-time swimming performances by age group. Only 2 of the swimmers listed in the 10 & Under age group made it to the Top 100 in the 17-18 age group. There are only 52 spots available for the Olympic Team every four years. Your child's odds of becoming an Olympian are about .0002 %.

Swimming is much more than just the Olympics. Ask your coaches why they coach. Chances are they were not Olympians, but still got so much out of swimming that they wanted to pass the love for the sport onto others. Swimming teaches self-discipline and sportsmanship; it builds self-esteem and fitness; it provides lifelong friendships and much more. Most Olympians will tell you that these intangibles far outweigh any medal they may have won. Swimming builds good people, like you want your child to be, and you should be happy your child wants to participate.

YOUR ROLE AS A PARENT

Competitive swimming programs provide many benefits to young athletes including self-discipline, good sportsmanship, and time management skills. Competition allows the swimmer to experience success and to learn how to treat success and failure as two sides of the same coin, while becoming healthy and physically fit. As a parent, your major responsibility is to provide a stable, loving and supportive environment. This positive environment will encourage your child to continue. Show your interest by ensuring your child's attendance at practices, coming to swimming meets, volunteering for your club at swim meets, participating in fund raising, etc.

Parents contribute to the success experienced by the child and the team. Parents serve as role models and their children emulate their attitudes. Be aware of this and strive to be positive role models. Most importantly, show good sportsmanship at all times toward coaches, officials, opponents and teammates. Remember that you are teaching your child at all times.

Be Enthusiastic and Supportive!

Remember that your child is the swimmer. Children need to establish their own goals and make their own progress towards them. Be careful not to impose your own standards and goals. Do not over burden your child with winning or achieving best times. Let them know that first they are the child you love, and second, a swimmer. Tell them you will love them whether they swim well or not and ask only that they give their best effort. Learning about oneself while enjoying the sport is the most important part of the swimming experience. The swimming environment encourages learning and fun, which will help your child develop a positive self-image.

Let the Coach Coach !

The best way to help your child achieve goals and reduce the natural fear of failure is through positive reinforcement. No one likes to make a mistake. If your child does make one, remember that this is a learning experience. You and your child should learn to treat success and failure as learning experiences and not life changing situations. Encourage your child's efforts and point out the positive things. The coach is the one you have assigned to judge a swimmer's performance and technique. Your role is to provide love and support regardless of the outcome.

Keeping the Fun in Swimming

A few years ago, USA Swimming conducted a survey to try to understand why kids participate in swimming and why kids drop out of swimming. (Results from this survey were printed in the December 1996 issue of USA Swimming's Splash). Probably the most important finding from this survey was that fun played a huge role in participation. Kids stay in the sport because it is no longer fun.

Based on this finding, USA Swimming decided to conduct a follow-up research project to try to identify exactly what is fun and what is not fun about swimming. In the first phase of this project, we held focus group interviews with a total of 48 age-group swimmers (ages 8-18) from three USA Swimming clubs. The athletes were asked a variety of questions to uncover their perception of these two aspects of swimming. Two of the questions asked focused on how parents influence kids' swimming enjoyment –

“What do parents do that makes swimming fun?”

“What do parents do that takes away from the fun of swimming?”

The question was not whether parents have an influence on kids' swimming enjoyment (because we know they do) but on the specific things parents do and say which influences the fun in swimming, both positively and negatively.

Through these focus group interviews, the kids were able to help us better understand the influence parents can have on their enjoyment of swimming. From a review of the athletes' responses, several themes become evident. As you read on, keep in mind that this is coming directly from age group swimmers and reflects their swimming experiences.

What do parents do that make swimming fun? What do parents do that takes away from the fun of swimming?

Provide support

One resounding thing coming from the kids was that parents increased the fun in swimming by providing unconditional encouragement and support. For the most part, it seems that a physical presence at meets and interests in what their child is doing goes a long way towards enhancing swimming enjoyment. The kids seem to enjoy swimming when they feel their parents support them regardless of their performance. This theme is illustrated by the following:

“My parents are very supportive....I know my parents will be happy for me whatever I do. I mean, if I do bad, they'll still be comforting and if I do good they'll be happy for me. I think the people whose parents are pushy are going to have the most potential to quit because they have so much pressure on them.” (Age group 15-18)

“She (mom) doesn't expect any more from me than I expect from myself which I think is important because when parents start placing expectations on their kids, it just makes the kids more stressed. I just think parents should be very supportive.” (Age group 15-18)

“You need reassurance (after swimming poorly) that they still love you. They're still going to give you a ride home” (age group 13-14)

“I always want my mom to be there. I always want someone to be there watching me, cheering and stuff like that and I don't feel like I want to do as well when they're not there. I

kind of feel like I need to show them even though they tell me I don't need to show them"
(age group 13-14)

Don't Push Too Much

A theme that was identified by the kids as detracting from the fun of swimming related to parents' pushing too much. Some of the kids felt that excessive pushing by their parents to practice, compete and perform well made swimming less fun, as exemplified below:

"I don't like it sometimes because they push me so hard that it makes me feel bad and I just don't like to swim sometimes because they push me so much." (Age group 10 and under)

"I saw this one mom who was yelling at her kid, and saying things like, 'I spend so much money on you. I can't believe you did so bad today.' The kid was already crying and her mom was still yelling at her. Then her mom throws her stuff down and leaves. If my mom ever did that, I'd just want to quit because you need encouragement from everyone around you if you want to win." (Age group 13-14)

Learn Optimal Push

Interestingly, there was a positive side to this idea of 'parental pushing'. Kids talked about the role of parents in enhancing fun in swimming by providing a push. However, caution is warranted as there is a fine line between pushing in a positive way and pushing to the detriment of kids' enjoyment. As evidence below, it seems a slight push from parents can enhance enjoyment and, as kids point out, is often needed.

"I think your parents sort of want you to do things and I think you kind of grow to like it..... You are sort of pushed firmly by them." (Age group 15-18)

"They kind of push us to go to swimming.... And it makes us feel better that we swam." (Age group 11-12)

"I like it when my parents push me because I was out for a year and I became a C swimmer because I aged up and just this last week I became a B swimmer instead because my parents were cheering me on and they pushed me." (Age group 8-10)

"It's kind of good for them to push you or make you go to practice." (Age group 10 and under)

Resist Assuming the Role of Coach

A last theme evident from the kids' response is tied to the idea that when parents take on the roles and responsibility of the coach it takes away from the fun in swimming. Critiquing races, offering suggestions on what went wrong or how to improve, and placing expectations on performance are examples of things parents do that tend to decrease the kids enjoyment. An exception to this seems to be when parents have credibility as swimmers; advice is sometimes

welcome as it is viewed as coming from an expert as opposed to a parent. To be sure, however, parents may want to ask their kids if they want advice or suggestions regardless of the parents swimming background. Kids talk about this detrimental influence:

"My parents are supportive of me but sometimes my mom keeps asking me about what I think I did wrong if it's a bad race and I want to just forget about it. It is really annoying when she keeps asking me." (Age group 13-14)

"I like it whenever my dad gives me goals because he's a masters swimmer. But my mom, whenever she's in the pool, all she does is float and she doesn't like to get her hair wet unless she's in the shower so when she says 'You gotta keep on doing this', I'm having a hard time believing it because she doesn't really swim that much. She just likes playing around with it." (Age group 10 and under)

"My dad used to be a swimmer and he almost made it to the Olympics so his just being there is a real big motivation and he gives me advice and stuff." (Age group 13-14)

What Does all This Mean ?

- 1) Taking in conjunction, it seems that kids want parents to be a presence in their swimming but they want this presence to be one of unconditional support with little advice. In essence, the kids seem to be saying, 'Mom and dad, support my efforts but don't try to help me swim faster.'
- 2) Parental 'push' was mentioned by the kids in both a positive and negative vein. Because of individual differences in needs and preferences, it is probably very difficult for parents to define and identify an optimal 'push'; a push that is strong enough to be beneficial but not so strong that it is perceived as overpowering by the kids. However, for the benefit of the kids, every effort should be made to walk this fine line and try to achieve an optimal 'push.'

POSITIVE PARENTING TIPS

1) Your child needs your emotional, physical, and financial support.

Be liberal in providing this support.

2) Provide optimal 'push.'

3) Understand development.

Long-term development as an athlete, and growth and development impacts performance.

4) Be realistic in terms of expectations.

Factor in age and skill level; be aware of your child's perception of your expectations.

5) Emphasize performance and effort, not just outcome.

The athlete only has control over his/her performance. Define and measure success as giving maximal effort and as personal improvement.

6) Keep winning in perspective.

7) Focus on the power of rewards -

- Give plenty of encouraging and rewarding statements.
- Give rewards sincerely and when warranted.
- Catch your kids doing something right.

8) View swimming as an arena in which to teach your child about commitment, hard work, coping with adversity, etc.

9) Work to form an effective Coach-Athlete-Parent Triangle.

ARE YOU A PRESSURE PARENT?

The following survey has been taken from the Amateur Swimming Association of Great Britain. If you answer yes to one or more of these questions, you may be in danger of pressuring your child. It is important to remember that the parents' role is critical and should be supportive at all times to ensure a positive experience for your child.

- 1) Is winning more important to you than it is to your child?
- 2) When your child has a poor swim, is your disappointment, such as through body language or vocal tones, obvious?
- 3) Do you feel that you are the one to have to ‘psych’ your child up before competition?
- 4) Do you feel that winning is the only way your child can enjoy the sport?
- 5) Do you conduct ‘post mortems’ immediately after competition or practice?
- 6) Do you feel that you have to force your child to go to practice?
- 7) Do you find yourself wanting to interfere with coaching and instructions during practice or competition, thinking that you could do better?
- 8) Do you find yourself disliking your child’s opponents?
- 9) Are your child’s goals more important to you than they are to your child?
- 10) Do you provide material rewards for performance?

SWIMMING: THE SPORT

The Skills

The five competitive disciplines are freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly, and individual medley.

The Competition

Each swim offers a variety of events and distances, depending on the age group.

In **freestyle events**, the competitor may swim any stroke. The stroke most commonly used is the crawl, which is characterized by the alternate overhand motion of the arms and an alternating (up-and-down) flutter kick. On turns, some part of the swimmer must touch the wall. Most swimmers do a flip turn and touch the wall with their feet.

Backstroke consists of an alternating motion of the arms with a flutter kick while on the back. On turns, swimmers may rotate to the stomach and perform a flip turn with some part of the swimmer touching the wall.

The **breaststroke**, which is the oldest stroke dating back hundreds of years, requires simultaneous movements of the arms on the same horizontal plane. The hands are pressed out front in front of the breast in a heart shaped pattern and recovered under or on the surface of the water. The kick is a simultaneous somewhat circular motion similar to the action of a frog. On turns and at the finish, the swimmer must touch the wall with both hands simultaneously at, above or below the water surface.

Some consider the **butterfly** to be the most beautiful of the strokes. It features a simultaneous over water recovery of the arms combined with an undulating dolphin kick. In the kick, the swimmer must keep both legs together and may not flutter, scissors or use the breaststroke kick. (The butterfly is the newest stroke and was developed in the early 1950s as a variation of the breaststroke. It became an Olympic stroke in 1956 in Melbourne, Australia.)

The **individual medley**, commonly referred to as the I.M. features all four strokes. In the I.M., the swimmer begins with the butterfly, then changes after one-fourth of the race to backstroke, then breaststroke and finally freestyle. Some people feel that being the best in the I.M. means you are the best swimmer.

In the **medley relay**, all four strokes are swum. The first swimmer swims backstroke, the second breaststroke, the third butterfly, and the final swimmer anchors the relay with freestyle.

The **freestyle relay** events consist of four freestylers, each swimming one quarter of the total distance of the event.

Starts, turns and finishes. Many races are won or lost by the swimmer's performance in the start, turn or finish. At the start, the swimmer is called to the starting position by the starter who visually checks that all swimmers are motionless. When all swimmers are set, the gun or starting horn is sounded to start the race. If the starter feels that one of the swimmers has moved, left early or gotten an unfair advantage, the guilty swimmer may be disqualified after the race for a false start. Under USA Swimming rules, one false start disqualifies the swimmer.

The Rules

The technical rules of swimming are designed to provide fair and equitable conditions of competition and to promote uniformity in the sport. Each swimming stroke has specific rules designed to ensure that no swimmer gets an unfair competitive advantage over another swimmer.

Trained officials observe the swimmer during each event to ensure compliance with these technical rules. If a swimmer commits an infraction of the rules, a disqualification will result. This means that the swimmer will not receive an official time and will not be eligible for an award in that event. A disqualification may result from actions such as not getting to the starting blocks on time, false starting, performing strokes in an illegal manner, or unsportsmanlike conduct.

Disqualifications are a result of technical rules violations. They include but are not limited to :

Freestyle: Walking on the bottom; pulling on the lane rope; not touching the wall on a turn; not competing the distance.

Backstroke: Too many pulls into the wall once a swimmer has turned passed the vertical on to the breast; turning onto the breast before touching the wall with the hand at the finish of the race.

Breaststroke: An illegal kick such as flutter (freestyle), dolphin (butterfly), or scissors (side stroke); shoulders not level; alternating movements of the arms; taking two arm strokes or two leg kicks while the head is under water; touching with only one hand at the turns or finish.

Butterfly: Alternating movements of the arms or legs; pushing the arms forward under instead of over the water surface (underwater recovery); a breaststroke style of kick; touching with only one hand at the turns or finish.

For specific language on any technical rules consult the USA Swimming Rules and Regulations book. Violations of the rules are reported to the referee. The rules require that every reasonable effort be made to notify the swimmer or his coach of the reason for the disqualification. If your child is disqualified in an event, be supportive rather than critical. For beginning swimmers, a disqualification should be treated as a learning experience, not as a punishment. A disqualification alerts the swimmer and coach to what portions of the swimmer's stroke need to be corrected. They should be considered in the same light as an incorrect answer in schoolwork - they point out areas that need further practice. Disqualifications are necessary to keep the competition fair and equitable for all competitors. A supportive attitude on the part of the official, coach, and parent can make a positive situation out of the disqualification.

The Course

Competition pools may be short course (25 yards or 25 meters), or long course (50 meters). The international standard (as used in the Olympics) is 50 meters. World records are accomplished in 25 and 50 meter pools. USA Swimming maintains records for 25 yards, 25 meters and 50 meters.

The Team

USA Swimming is made up of 2,900 teams from all over the country. Of these clubs, nearly half have 80 swimmers or less and a handful of teams have over 500 swimmers. A team may be comprised of any number of swimmers, parents and coaches.

Participants compete in different age groups and meets depending on their achievement level and how old they are on the first day of the meet. Traditionally recognized age groups are 10 and under, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16, 17-18. Many local meets feature 8 and under, single age groups, or senior events. Team practice groups are usually determined by age and/or ability.

Officials are present at all competitions to enforce the technical rules of swimming so the competition is fair and equitable. Officials attend clinics, pass a written test and work meets before being certified. All parents are encouraged to get involved with some form of officiating.

Clerk of the Course (administration): Arranges the swimmers in their proper heats and lanes prior to a race.

Referee: Has overall authority and control of the competition; ensures that all the rules are followed; assigns and instructs all officials; decides all question relating to the conduct of the meet.

Relay Takeoff Judges: Stand beside the starting blocks to observe the relay exchange, ensuring that the feet of the departing swimmer have not lost contact with the block before the incoming swimmer touches the end of the pool.

Timers: Operate timing devices (watches or semi-automatic timing systems) and record the time for the swimmer in their lane. Two to three timers are needed for each lane. This volunteer position offers an ideal opportunity for new parents to work at a swim meet.

Turn Judges: Observe the swimmers from each end of the pool and ensure that the turns and finishes comply with the rules applicable to each stroke.

Starter: Assumes control of the swimmers from the Referee, directs them to “take your mark,” and sees to it that no swimmer is in motion prior to giving the start signal.

Stroke Judges: Observe the swimmers from both sides of the pool, walking abreast of the swimmers, to ensure that the rules relating to each stroke are being followed. The positions of Stroke Judge and Turn Judge may be combined into one position called the Stroke and Turn Judge.

Who Is a Volunteer?

A volunteer is a person who is willing to help perform any one of the necessary jobs in USA Swimming and your club. Your role as a volunteer is important to our sport. You can be actively involved in your child’s swimming program and can also be instrumental in strengthening swimming in the United States. With a positive attitude and a willingness to lend a hand, you will also have a great impact on your child’s athletic environment and love of swimming. A few of the rewards of volunteering are meeting new people, making new friends and having that great feeling that you have helped an organization in which volunteers are the most important people.

Give volunteering a try. Any contribution you can make will be appreciated. Ask the coach of your team what you can do to help. He will appreciate the offer and put you in touch with appropriate people on your team that will place you in an area where your best skills are used to make the swimming experience joyful for everyone on the team. If your club has a booster organization, find out how to join.

Volunteer Jobs

There are unlimited opportunities to get involved and USA Swimming is always looking for enthusiastic volunteers.

Board Member: At the club level, volunteers are needed to serve on club Board of Directors or booster clubs. The most experienced volunteers are needed here.

Fund Raiser: Raising funds is a priority of every swim program. It could involve anything from a bake sale to landing a sponsor for your club. If you have the gift of gab, this might be your area.

Public Relations Person: Promotions within the club and community are important to every team. Volunteers who are skilled at public speaking or writing can be useful in this area.

Data Processor/Clerical: This area may include billing, meet entries, accounts payable, account receivable, team newsletters and meet results. All of this can be done on the computer. If you possess computer skills, you could be an essential part in the management of your club.

Hospitality or Social Chairman: Social events are a fun part of every team. Pool parties, Halloween costume contests, and other group activities all serve to bond a team together. If you like to organize such functions this may be the job for you.

Snack Bar: The snack bar at any swim meet can generate tremendous income, especially if items to be sold are donated by the parents or local businesses. Baked goods, fruit and other goodies tend to be very popular.

Team Representative: Serve as the club representative or take on another volunteer role within your LSC (Local Swimming Committee).

Volunteer Retention

Communication is a key factor in retaining volunteers. By keeping everyone well informed, your program will function more efficiently and your volunteers will feel more involved.

Be sure to use volunteers in areas that enhance their interests and skills. This will make the job more interesting for the volunteer and in turn, they will be more effective. Before jumping into any activity, identify what tasks need to be done, and what the requirements are. Will the talk require technical knowledge, a certain kind of personality or the use of a car? How much time will be required?

A successful volunteer organization is usually led by someone who knows how to delegate responsibilities. Work needs to be distributed evenly so no one person feels overburdened. This will prevent burnout later on. Encourage active volunteers to recruit “new blood” to work with them.

Volunteer Motivation

Why are people motivated to volunteer? Many parents get involved to help their children. Once these volunteers feel a sense of accomplishment, they realize their contributions are worthwhile and necessary for successful programs.

Ways to Motivate Volunteers

1. Recognize and reward volunteers for their contributions.
2. Train volunteers to be effective and encourage them with positive reinforcement.
3. Be positive and enthusiastic.
4. Make projects a “team effort”.

Respect and Appreciation

The success of a group is determined by how well the people involved see their responsibilities affecting the program in a positive way. The volunteer who feels appreciated will continue to work and be productive. Praise is the easiest and quickest way to encourage someone. Saying “Thank you” can be the same as a Gold Medal !

How to Make a Good Volunteer Great

- 1. Recruit Volunteers.** Don’t wait for volunteers to speak up – take the first step and approach people to serve on a committee or carry out specific duties. Once they have agreed, explain the value of their contribution to the program, and emphasize the importance of reliability and commitment.
- 2. Match the volunteer to the job.** By listening to volunteers, you’ll find out why they want to be involved, what their interests and talents are, and how much time they are able to give. Give complete and accurate descriptions of all tasks and make sure the volunteers understand any requirements for training and/or certification, as well as the time commitment.
- 3. Provide training.** Training will enable the volunteer to perform his tasks competently and to understand how his work relates to that of others. While a volunteer may already have great skills and experience in doing whatever job you have assigned him, he needs to know how his role fits into the overall program.
- 4. Provide guidance and reinforcement.** It is important to provide volunteers with positive feedback and guidance for their jobs. Just as our swimmers need a pat on the back, so do our volunteers. Be quick to praise and be sure to provide direction so that these volunteers become increasingly more effective.
- 5. Share the glory.** Volunteers want to feel that their efforts contribute to the success of the team, whether it be a meet or a fundraiser. Be sure to share the glory and the limelight with those volunteers that made the success possible.

If you are in charge of volunteers please keep in mind that the volunteer who feels appreciated is more likely to be productive. Here are a few suggestions on how to work with and keep volunteers.

- Smile and greet volunteer by name

- Introduce yourself to new volunteers
- Provide refreshments like coffee, doughnuts or soda
- Create pleasant surroundings
- Provide a babysitter
- Maintain safe working conditions
- Recognize and accommodate personal needs
- Invite participation in policy formulation and planning
- Enable volunteers to grow through the activities
- Give additional responsibility
- Provide opportunities for conferences and evaluation
- Enlist them to train other volunteers
- Distinguish between groups and individuals in the group
- Celebrate outstanding projects and achievements
- Give informal social events and/or plan ceremonial occasions
- Send holiday or birthday cards
- Nominate for volunteer awards
- Praise them to their friends
- Plan a “Recognition Edition” of the newsletter
- Award special citation for extraordinary achievements
- Promote a volunteer-of-the-month program
- Send a letter of appreciation to their employer
- Write thank you notes
- Say “We missed you” and “Thank you”

GLOSSARY OF SWIMMING TERMS

Age Group Swimming

The program through which USA Swimming provides fair and open competition for its younger members. It is designed to encourage maximum participation, provide an educational experience, enhance physical and mental conditioning, and develop a rich base of swimming talent. Nationally recognized age groups are 10 and under, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16, and 17-18. Local meets may also include events for 8 and under and single age categories.

Block

The starting platform.

Bulkhead

A moveable wall, constructed to divide a pool into different courses, such as a 50 meter pool into two 25 yard courses.

Circle Swimming

Performed by staying to the right of the black line when swimming in a lane to enable more swimmers to safely swim in each lane.

Coach

A person who teaches and trains athletes in the sport of swimming.

Coach-Athlete-Parent Triangle

It has been shown that a balanced positive relationship between the coach and athlete, the coach and parent, and the parent and swimmer offers the swimmer the best opportunity for both high swimming performance and positive life experience.

Code of Conduct

An agreement signed by swimmers, coaches and parents stating that they will abide by certain behavioral guidelines.

Cut

Slang for qualifying time. A time standard necessary to attend a particular meet or event.

Distance Events

Term used to refer to events over 400 meters/500 yards.

DQ

Disqualification. This occurs when a swimmer has committed an infraction of some kind (e.g. freestyle kick in butterfly.) A disqualified swimmer is not eligible to receive awards, nor can the time be used as an official time.

Drill

A teaching exercise involving a portion of a stroke which is used to improve technique.

Dryland Training

Training done out of the water that aids and enhances swimming performance; usually includes stretching and calisthenics (also see weight training).

Entry Form

Form on which a swimmer enters a competition. Usually includes club and swimmer name, USA Swimming number, age sex, event numbers, event names and entry times.

False Start

Occurs when a swimmer is moving before the start is sounded. In USA Swimming, one false start will result in disqualification.

Final

The championship heat of an event in which the top swimmers from the preliminaries compete.

Finish

The final phase of the race; the touch at the end of the race.

Flags

Backstroke flags placed 5 yards (short course yards) or 5 meters (long and short course meters), from the end of the pool. The flags enable backstrokers to execute a backstroke turn safely and more efficiently.

Goal

A specific skill or time achievement a swimmer sets and strives for. Can be short or long term.

Gutter

The area along the edge of the pool in which water overflows during a race and is circulated through the filtration system.

I.M.

Short for Individual Medley. An event in which the swimmer uses all four strokes in the following order: butterfly, backstroke, breaststroke, freestyle.

Lap Counter

A set of display numbers used to keep track of laps during a distance race longer than 500 yards. (Also, the title given to the person who counts for the swimmer, stationed at the opposite end from the start.)

Long Course

A pool 50 meters in length. USA Swimming conducts most of its summer competition in long course pools.

Long Distance

Term used to refer to events of 800 meters, 1000 yards, to 1500 meters/1650 yards.

LSC

Local Swimming Committee. The governing body for swimming at the local level. There are 59 LSC's in the United States.

LSC Camps

The LSC Camps provide local age group athletes with camp experiences that focus on skill development and athlete education and motivation.

Meet

Competition designed to be a learning experience. By implementing what has been learned in practice, the swimmer races against the clock to determine improvement.

Middle Distance

Term used to refer to events of 200 yards/meters to 400 meter/500 yards.

National Reportable Time/Top 16

Time standards set for both short and long course to give national recognition to the fastest 16 swimmers in each stroke, distance, gender, and age group. Achieving these standards allows a swimmer's time to be submitted for consideration each year. They do not guarantee achieving a Top 16 ranking.

National Team

The "A" team comprises those American swimmers who are ranked in the Top 8 in the world. The "B" team includes those ranked in the Top 16 in the world.

Negative Split

Swimming the second half of the race equal to or faster than the first half.

NGB

National Governing Body.

Official

A judge on the deck of the pool at a sanctioned competition who enforces USA Swimming rules. There are stroke and turn judges, administrative officials, starters, timers and referees.

Open Water Swims

A freestyle event from 5000 meters to 25,000 meters, conducted in a natural body of water, such as a lake, river or ocean.

Optimal 'Push'

That combination of encouragement and restraint that gives the swimmer the most parental support with the least interference.

Pace Clock

Large clock with a large second hand and a smaller minute hand, used to check pace or maintain intervals in practice; may also be digital.

Prelims

Short for preliminaries. Also called Heats or Trials. Those races in which swimmers qualify for the championship, consolation finals or semi-finals.

Q-Time

Qualifying time necessary to compete in a particular event and/or competition. Also known as a cut.

Relay

An event in which four swimmers compete together as a team to achieve one time.

Safety

The condition of being safe. Safety procedures are designed to prevent accidents.

Scratch

To withdraw from an event prior to it being held in a competition.

Shave

Prior to major competitions, older, more experienced swimmers sometimes shave their entire bodies to reduce resistance and heighten sensation in the water.

Short Course

A pool 25 yards or 25meters in length. USA Swimming conducts most of its winter competition in short course yards.

Split

A time recorded from the official start to the completion of an intermediate distance within a longer event. Also the time for one of the four individuals in a relay. Under certain conditions, splits may also be used as official times, for example, the lead off swim in a relay, or the lead off portion of an event.

Sprint

Describes the shorter events (50 and 100). In training, to swim as fast as possible for a short distance.

Streamline

The position used by swimmers when starting or pushing off the walls designed to reduce water resistance.

Taper

The final preparation phase, sometimes referred to as 'rest'. The slow gradual reduction of workloads and intensities in preparation for season ending competition.

Time Standards

Performance requirement to enter a swimming competition. Standards are determined for local swim meets by the LSC.

Time Trial

A time only swim, which is not part of a regular meet.

Touch Pad

A large touch sensitive board at the end of each lane where a swimmer's finish is registered and sent electronically to the timing system.

USAS

United States Aquatic Sports.

USA Swimming

USA Swimming, Inc. is the national governing body for competitive swimming in the United States.

USA Swimming Registration Number

A number assigned to a swimmer upon joining USA Swimming. The membership card with this number may be required at any given competition.

Warm Down

Low intensity swimming used by swimmers after a race or main practice set to rid the body of excess lactic acid and to gradually reduce heart rate and respiration.

Warm Up

Low intensity swimming used by swimmers prior to a main practice set or race to get muscles loose and warm. Warm up gradually increases heart rate, respiration and helps to prevent injury.

Watches

Stop watches used to time swimmers during a competition. When totally automatic timing equipment is used, watches serve as a back-up method.

Weigh Training

A form of dryland training that is suggested only for older swimmers. Excessive weight training in younger swimmers can injure the growth plates and cause bone and joint problems later in life.

Zones

USA Swimming is divided into the Eastern, Southern, Central and Western Zones. The Zone meets are the highest level of age group competition available to USA Swimming age group swimmers.

Bibliography

USA Swimming. (n.d.). *USA Swimming Parent's Handbook*. Colorado Springs, CO: USA Swimming.