



## HOW TO BE A SUCCESSFUL SWIMMING PARENT

We have put together a collection of philosophies and practices for parents that have proven, over the years, to foster healthy and happy swimmers. From accepted works of sports psychologists and expert coaches, we share this information as a guide to parents who wish to help their young athletes enjoy a successful swimming career. To begin, we have some general parent rules that comply with school and team policies for practice time. Please follow team rules of practice behavior.

**1. Parents are not permitted on deck.** Parents are welcome to sit in the bleacher area and observe practice. US Swimming and Diving require that only registered coaches, athletes and officials be permitted on deck during practice or meets. Because of the nature of our litigious society and the liability concerns of our school system that we serve, we need to strictly adhere to this rule. If parents need to speak with the coach, they may call at anytime. Coaches are usually available briefly before and after practice, and after both meet sessions have concluded.

**2. Please, no distractions.** During swim practice, our coaching staff incorporates structured lesson plans that will lead directly to the athletes' development and success. Running an efficient workout is what we are paid to do and our coaching staff will ensure that athletes stay on task. Practice will run the entire practice time with few exceptions and, in our pursuit of success, we will systematically avoid distractions whenever possible. We ask that parents do not interrupt workouts, except in the case of an *emergency*.

**3. Parents are to avoid communication with swimmers during practice.** Our coaching staff works to create an atmosphere of positive experiences through hard work and focus. We use the tools of group dynamics to create and motivate our team to encourage team members to push their own limits. In order to develop team atmosphere, athletes need to be tuned in to the practice and tuned out to communicating with their parents between swims.

**4. Please make an attempt *not* to attend *some* practices.** We greatly appreciate the fact that parents wish to come and support their children's activities. It is still more impressive that parents are willing to take time out of their days to be there for their kids. However, in any sport psychology texts, one

can find the term, “intrinsic motivation.” This concept describes a motivation that comes from within the individual athlete and not any external source. This promotes motivation from within. Without a parent a practice, the child may be at first less focused, but they soon learn to stay on task out of intrinsic motivation.

**5. Please do not coach the swimmers.** We accept the role of coaching the athletes and safely leading them through the progressions of competitive swimming. In accepting the role of coach, we ask for support from our parents in helping the athletes succeed. We involve our parents in running meets, transporting athletes to practices and meets, running club activities, etc. This shall be the parent’s role for which are coaches are very grateful and your children will someday appreciate. However, in efforts to help, we ask that parents do not cross that line into actually coaching the swimmers. This raises many issues of concern and we will share some of them here. When parents cross the line and begin coaching athletes,....The children are often put in the unfortunate position of having to choose who to listen to, their parents, or the coach. Our coaching staff never wishes to engage in a power struggle between the parents and the coach, as this would go against the natural benefits of sports in general and we wish to avoid this potential conflict.

An imbalance of corrective feedback occurs. Athletes can only take so much constructive criticism at a time, and coaches dish out an awful lot in the one or two hours we see the athletes at practice. If our athletes are then told how to improve by their parents at the pool, in the car ride home, at the dinner table, etc. the athlete will suffer from what is known and clearly understood by coaching circles as “over-coaching” Over-coaching produces performance digression and athlete burn out – it dulls the athlete’s ability to respond to instruction during practice and meet situations.

We lose some of that vital connection between athlete and coach that is a key ingredient to producing successful athletes. Coaches need to foster a positive relationship of trust with athletes.

#### **OTHER PARENT GUIDELINES TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE AND DEVELOPMENT**

Try to make sure your child is at practice on time and ready to swim. Car pools are usually the best solution to transportation woes. However, try not to have your swimmer arrive more than 10 minutes prior to the start of practice without your direct supervision.

Encourage your child without pressuring them. Interest and enthusiasm go along way for improving performance.

Do not criticize coaches, officials, other swimmers or other swimming parents in front of your child. Save that for arranged meetings with the parties involved.

- Please help out with the many activities that make this team special for our athletes.
  
- Do let your child know you love and support them the same if a practice or meet does not go well, and that you love and support them the same if a practice or meet does go well.
  
- Supply recognition, love, and encouragement without conditions.
  
- Develop a significant level of enthusiasm for the special activities and opportunities presented in our program.
  
- Avoid the “but” comment. “You did well, but....”
  
- Don’t desire success more than the child desires it, but gently encourage their child to develop internal goals and dreams. Our coaches’ greatest satisfaction comes from being in the successful service of young people. If we are going to make our world more beautiful than it is, we need to encourage our young people to strive for greatness and redefine their limits. Our coaches expect JAWS athletes to put their best effort on the line during practices, and especially meet to reach performance goals. In expecting so much, JAWS coaches must make earnest attempts to evaluate the quality of workouts and meet performances. Because of the sincere efforts of our coaches in a sometimes thankless profession, a simple “thank you coach” goes a long way in refueling our coaching staff’s efforts. Please remind your swimmer to thank their coach, occasionally, for anything that has benefited them in the program. Such simple words aren’t spoken enough and they mean so much to our coaches