



SSC Parents

In order for any swim program to be successful, there must be a strong triangular relationship between the athletes, the coaches, and, most importantly, the parents. Without parent support, the sport of swimming, as we know it, would die. Besides being the primary transportation system and athlete support network for the swimmers, parents also run the meets and help the club with day-to-day operations. There must be understanding and cooperation among parents, swimmers, and coaches. The progress each young athlete makes depends to a great extent on this triangular relationship. It is with this in mind that we ask you to consider this section as you join the Southeastern Swim Club. The section is set up beginning with some thoughts specific to SSC, and then closes with some outstanding articles that can apply to all athletes. These articles can be somewhat repetitive, but each one has a slightly different angle on the standard guidelines for building strong relationships between athletes, parents, and coaches.

You have done a great deal to raise your child. You create the environment in which they are growing up. Your child is a product of your values, the structure you have provided, and the model you have been. Human nature, however, is such that a parent loses some of his/her ability to remain detached and objective in matters concerning their children's athletics. 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.

We want your child to develop an excellent relationship with his/her coach concerning swimming matters. A relationship that emphasizes and relies upon the communication 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.

The coach's job is to inspire and constructively criticize the swimmer's performance. It is the parent's job to supply love, recognition, and the encouragement necessary to make the child work harder in practice, which in turn gives each athlete the confidence to perform well in competition.

And, if you are new to this sport, or your swimmer is young, please keep the long term outlook in mind. Ten and unders 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. When a young swimmer first joins Southeastern, there may be a brief period when he/she appears to slow down. This is a result of the added concentration on stroke technique, but this will soon lead to much faster swims for the individual.

Even the very best swimmer will have meets where he/she does not achieve their best times. These "plateaus" are a normal part of swimming. Over the course of a season, times should improve. Please be supportive of these "poor" meets. The older swimmers may have only two or three meets a year for which they will be rested and tapered.

Communicating with Coaches

One of the traditional swim team communication gaps is that some parents seem to feel more comfortable in discussing their disagreements over coaching philosophy with other parents rather than taking them directly to the coach. Not only is the problem never resolved that way, but, in fact, this approach often results in new problems being created. Listed below are some guidelines for a parent raising some difficult issues with a coach.

- 1) Please remember that your coaches have irregular hours and that many times they are on the pool deck for 3 to 7 hours 5 to 6 days a week. On meet weekends, a coach can often be on deck for over twenty hours. Coaches are constantly attempting to balance the needs of the team with each individual swimmer's needs.
- 2) Try to keep foremost in your mind that you and the coach have the best interest of your child at heart. If you trust that the coach's goals match yours, even though their approach may be different, you are more likely to enjoy good rapport and a constructive dialogue.
- 3) Keep in mind that the coach must balance your perspective of what is best for your child with the needs of a training group that can be rather large. On occasion, an individual child's interest may need to be subordinate to the interests of the group, but in the long run, the benefits of membership in the group compensate for occasional short-term inconveniences.
- 4) Attempt to contact the coach to set up an appointment. The preferred method for contacting your group coach is via email. All lead coaches emails are listed on the "Coach" page of the website. SSC Coaches cannot discuss matters with you on deck during practice.
- 5) If your child swims for an assistant coach, always discuss the matter first with that coach, following the same guidelines and pre-conceptions noted above. If the assistant coach cannot satisfactorily resolve your concern, then ask that the head age group or head coach join the dialogue as a third party.
- 6) If another parent uses you as a sounding board for complaints about the coach's performance or policies, listen empathetically, but encourage the other parent to speak directly with the coach. The coach is the only one who can resolve the problem

***TOP 10 LIST- of the most embarrassing things
NOT to do at one or your child's swim meets
(or games)!***

(Reprinted from Sports Illustrated for Kids.)

1. **No More Tears (Please!):** If your kid makes a game-winning play or game-losing error, don't embarrass him or her by crying out loud about it. Kids say that tears - no matter how loving - are *not* cool.
2. **Let It Be:** Don't overreact to little hurts - or big ones for that matter. "When I busted my nose, my mom thought I was going to die," wrote one child. "She ran out to me when the coach was already there."
3. **Keep Your Eyes on The Ball:** Kids want you to really *watch* their games. Complained one child, "My mother was putting her makeup on in the stands!"
4. **Father (or Mother) Doesn't Always Know Best:** Kids like it when their parents know something about the sport they're playing, but parents who think they know it all can go too far. "Mom yelled at the ref when the ref was right," said one kid.
5. **No Bragging:** In addition to being *totally* embarrassing, bragging about your child to other parents puts unnecessary pressure on the kid.
6. **Close Encounters:** Fixing your child's uniform, washing his face, or brushing her hair between innings is considered a personal foul by most kids. It's okay if your kid saunters over for a mid-game snack, but *don't* go over to the bench to tie his shoes. And don't ever make that terrible mistake one dad made: He sat down on the bench and drank out of his kid's water bottle!
7. **Curses!:** Kids don't want you to say anything you wouldn't want *them* to say. As one Little League coach told a mother who was yelling obscenities at the umpire, "Remember, our children are watching!"
8. **Too Much of a Good Thing:** Your child may not mind if you come to his game with the dog, a cowbell, and a video camera, but most kids do mind. Be cool.
9. **Think Before You Speak:** Kids take exception to yells such as "Pull up your pants" and "Are you okay, honey?" Even cheering gets booed if it's for the wrong team, at the wrong time, or too loud.
10. **Affection Rejection:** Keep the hugs, kisses, and love pats to the confines of your home - preferably when none of your child's teammates is within a 10-mile radius.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR SWIMMING PARENTS

By Rose Snyder (adapted from Ed Clendaniel's 10 Commandments for Little League Parents)

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 every person can strive to do his or her personal best.

2. Thou shalt be supportive no matter what.

There is only one question to ask you child "Did you have fun?". If meets and practices aren't fun, your child should not be forced to participate.

3. Thou shalt not coach your child.

You have taken your child to a professional coach; do not undermine that coach by trying to coach your child on the side. Your job is to support, 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. This is not your area. This will only serve to confuse your child and prevent that swimmer/coach bond from forming.

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 cheer and applaud, but never criticize your child or the coach.

5. Thou shalt acknowledge thy child's fears.

A first swimming meet, 500 free or 200 IM 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.

6. Thou shalt not criticize the officials.

If you do not have the time or the desire to volunteer as an official, 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 the one that contributes to your child's success as well as fun. Do not criticize the coach in the presence of your child; it will only serve to hurt your child's swimming.

8. Thou shalt not jump from team to team.

The water is always bluer at the other team's pool. This is not necessarily true. 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. Often times swimmers who switch teams never do better than they did before they sought the bluer water.

9. Thou shalt have goals besides winning.

Giving an honest effort no mater what the outcome is, 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. This does not make me a failure. In fact, I was very proud of that swim."

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

There are nearly 400,000 athletes in United States Swimming. There are only 52 spots available for the Olympic Team every four years. Your child's odds of becoming an Olympian are 1 in about 8,000. Swimming is so much more than just the Olympics. Ask your coach why he coaches. Chances are, he was not an Olympian, but still got enough out of swimming that he wants to pass that love for the sport on to 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, and you should be happy your child wants to participate.

HOW TO BE A WINNING PARENT - A PARENT (AND COACH'S) GUIDE FOR WINNING IN THE GAME OF YOUTH SPORTS

(Dr. Alan Goldberg - "Competitive Advantage")

****Side Note*** Dr. Alan Goldberg has visited SSC several times over the course of years and is a valuable asset to not only our club, but the sport and parenting in general. We suggest you pursue his writing actively and follow his social media accounts for great (but brief) advice on parenting an athlete.*

If you want your child to come out of his youth sports experience a winner (feeling good about himself and having a healthy attitude towards sports), then he needs your help! You are a vital and important part of the coach-athlete-parent team. If you do your job correctly and play YOUR position well, then your child will learn the sport faster, perform better, really have fun and have his self-esteem enhanced as a result. His sport experience will serve as a positive model for him to follow as he approaches other challenges and obstacles throughout life. If you "drop the ball" or run the wrong way with it, your child will stop learning, experience performance difficulties and blocks, and begin to really hate the sport. And that's the GOOD news! Further, your relationship with him will probably suffer significantly. As a result, he will come out of this experience burdened with feelings of failure, inadequacy, and low self-esteem, feelings that will generalize to other areas of his life. Your child and his coach need you ON the team. They can't win without YOU! The following are a list of useful facts, guidelines and strategies for you to use to make you more skilled in the youth sport game. Remember that no one wins unless everyone wins. We need you on the team!

1. **When defined the RIGHT way**, competition in youth sports is both good and healthy and teaches children a variety of important life skills. The word "compete" comes from the Latin words "com" and "petere" which mean together and seeking respectively. The true definition of competition is seeking TOGETHER where your opponent is your partner, NOT the enemy! The better he performs, the more chance you have of having a peak performance. Sports are about learning to deal with challenges and obstacles. Without a worthy opponent, without any challenges, sports are not so much fun. The more the challenge, the better the opportunity you have to go beyond your limits. World records are consistently broken and set at the Olympics because the best athletes in the world are "seeking together," challenging each other to an enhanced performance. Your child should NEVER be taught to view his opponent as the "bad guy," the enemy or someone to be hated and "destroyed." Do NOT model this attitude! Instead, talk to/make friends with the parents of your child's opponent. Root for great performances, good plays, NOT just for the winner.
2. **Encourage your child to compete against himself.** The ultimate goal of the sport experience is to challenge oneself and continually improve. Unfortunately, judging improvement by winning and losing is both an unfair and inaccurate measure. Winning in sports is about doing the best YOU can do, SEPARATE from the outcome or the play of your opponent. Children should be encouraged to compete against their own potential, i.e. Peter and Patty Potential. That is, the boys should focus on beating

“Peter,” competing against themselves while the girls challenge “Patty.” When your child has this focus and plays to better himself instead of beating someone else, he will be more relaxed, have more fun, and therefore, perform better.

3. **Do not define success and failure in terms of winning and losing.** A corollary to #2, one of the main purposes of the youth sports experience is skill acquisition and mastery. When a child performs to his potential and loses, it is criminal to focus on the outcome and become critical. If a child plays his very best and loses, you need to help him feel like a winner! Similarly, when a child or team performs far below their potential but wins, this is NOT cause to feel like a winner. Help you child make this important separation between success and failure and winning and losing. Remember, if you define success and failure in terms of winning and losing, you’re playing a losing game with your child!
4. **Be supportive. Do not Coach!!!!** Your role on the parent-coach-athlete team is as a Support player with a capital S! You need to be your child’s best fan. UNCONDITIONALLY!!!! Leave the coaching and instruction to the coach. Provide encouragement, support, empathy, transportation, money, help with fund-raisers, etc., BUT . . . DO NOT COACH! Most parents that get into trouble with their children do so because they forget to remember the important position that they play. Coaching interferes with your role as a supporter and fan. The last thing your child needs and wants is to hear from you after a disappointing performance or loss is what they did technically or strategically wrong. Keep your role as a parent on the team separate from that as the coach, AND, if by necessity you actually get stuck in the almost no-win position of having to coach your child, try to maintain this separation of roles, i.e. on the deck, field or court say, “Now I’m talking to you as the coach;” at home say, “Now I’m talking to you as a parent.” Don’t parent when you coach, and don’t coach at home when you’re supposed to be parenting
5. **Help make the sport fun for your child.** It’s a time-proven principle of peak performance that the more fun athletes are having, the more they will learn and the better they will perform. Fun MUST be present for peak performance to happen at EVERY level of sports from youth to world class competitor! When a child stops having fun and begins to dread practice or competition, it’s time for you as a parent to become concerned! When the sport or game becomes too serious, athletes have a tendency to burn out and become susceptible to repetitive performance problems. An easy rule of thumb: IF YOU CHILD IS NOT ENJOYING WHAT HE IS DOING, NOR LOVING THE HECK OUT OF IT, INVESTIGATE!! What is going on that’s preventing him from having fun? Is it the coaching? The pressure? Is it YOU??! Keep in mind that being in a highly competitive program does NOT mean that there is no room for fun. The child that continues to play long after the fun is gone will soon become a drop out statistic.
6. **Whose goal is it???** #5 leads us to a very important question! Why is your child participating in the sport? Are they doing it because they want to, for them, or because of you? When they have problems in their sport, do you talk about them as “our” problems, “our jump isn’t high enough,” “we’re having trouble with our flip turn,” etc. Are they playing because they don’t want to disappoint you, because they know how important the sport is to you? Are they playing for rewards and “bonuses” that you give out? Are their goals and aspirations YOURS or theirs? How invested

are you in their success and failure? If they are competing to please you or for your vicarious glory, they are in it for the wrong reasons! Further, if they stay involved for you, ultimately everyone will lose. It is quite normal and healthy to want your child to excel and be as successful as possible. BUT, you cannot make this happen by pressuring them with your expectations or by using guilt or bribery to keep them involved. If they have their own reasons and own goals for participating, they will be FAR more motivated to excel and therefore, far more successful.

7. **Your child is not their performance - love them unconditionally.** Do NOT equate your child's self-worth and lovability with his performance. The MOST tragic and damaging mistakes I see parents continually make is punishing a child for a bad performance by withdrawing emotionally from him. A child loses a race, strikes out, or misses an easy shot on goal, and the parent responds with disgust, anger, and withdrawal of love and approval. CAUTION: Only use this strategy if you want to damage your child emotionally and ruin your relationship with him. In the '88 Olympics, when Greg Louganis needed and got a perfect 10 on his last dive to overtake the Chinese diver for the gold medal, his last thought before he went was, "If I don't make it, my mother will still love me."
8. **Remember the importance of self-esteem in all of your interactions with your child-athlete.** Athletes of all ages and levels perform in DIRECT relationship to how they feel about themselves. When your child is in an athletic environment that boosts his self-esteem, he will learn faster, enjoy himself more, and perform better under competitive pressure. One thing we all want as children and NEVER stop wanting is to be loved and accepted and to have our parents feel good about what we do. This is how self-esteem gets established. When your interactions with your child make him feel good about himself, he will, in turn, learn to treat himself this very same way. This does NOT mean that you have to incongruently compliment your child for a great effort after he has just performed miserably. In this situation, being empathetic and sensitive to his feelings is what's called for. Self-esteem makes the world go round. Make your child feel good about himself, and you've given him a gift that lasts a lifetime. Do NOT interact with your child in a way that assaults his self-esteem by degrading, embarrassing, or humiliating him. If you continually put your child down or minimize his accomplishments, not only will he learn to do this to himself throughout his life, but he will also repeat YOUR mistake with HIS children!
9. **Give your child the gift of failure.** If you really want your child to be as happy and as successful as possible in everything that he does, teach him how to fail! The most successful people in and out of sports do two things differently than everyone else. FIRST, they are more willing to take risks and therefore, fail more frequently. SECOND, they use their failures in a positive way as a source of motivation and feedback to improve. Our society is generally negative and teaches us that failure is bad, a cause for humiliation and embarrassment, and something to be avoided at all costs. Fear of failure or humiliation causes one to be tentative and non-active. In fact, most performance blocks and poor performances are a direct result of the athlete being preoccupied with failing or messing up. You can't learn to walk without falling enough times. Each time that you fall, your body gets valuable information on how to do it better. You can't be successful or have peak performances if you are concerned with losing or failing. Teach your child how to view setbacks, mistakes, and risk-

taking positively, and you'll have given him the key to a lifetime of success. Failure is the PERFECT stepping stone to success.

10. **Challenge - don't threaten.** Many parents directly or indirectly use guilt and threats as a way to "motivate" their child to perform better. Performance studies clearly indicate that while threats may provide short-term results, the long-term costs in terms of psychological health and performance are devastating. Using fear as a motivator is probably one of the worst dynamics you could set up with your child. Threats take the fun out of performance and directly lead to your child performing terribly. IMPLICIT in a threat (do this or else!) is your OWN anxiety that you do not believe the child is capable. Communicating this lack of belief, even indirectly, is further devastating to the child's performance. A challenge does not entail loss or negative consequences should the athlete fail. Further, implicit in a challenge is the empowering belief, "I think that you can do it."
11. **Stress process (skill acquisition, mastery, and having fun), not outcome.** When athletes choke under pressure and perform far below their potential, a very common cause of this is a focus on the outcome of the performance, i.e. win/lose, instead of the process. In any peak performance, the athlete is totally oblivious to the outcome and instead is completely absorbed in the here and now of the actual performance. Furthermore, focusing on the outcome, which is completely out of the athlete's control, will raise his anxiety to a performance-inhibiting level. So If you truly want your child to win, help get his focus AWAY from how important the contest is and have him focus on the task at hand. Supportive parents de-emphasize winning and instead stress learning the skills and playing the game.
12. **Avoid comparisons and respect developmental differences.** Supportive parents do not use other athletes that their child competes against to compare and thus evaluate their child's progress. Comparisons are useless, inaccurate, and destructive. Each child matures differently, and the process of comparison ignores significant distorting effects of developmental differences. For example, two 12 year-old boys may only have their age in common! One may physically have the build and perform like a 16 year-old while the other, a late developer, may have the physical size and attribute of a 9 year-old. Performance comparisons can prematurely turn off otherwise talented athletes on their sport. The only value of comparisons is in teaching. If one child demonstrates proper technique, that child can be used comparatively as a model ONLY! For your child to do his very best, he needs to learn to stay within himself. Worrying about how another athlete is doing interferes with him doing this.
13. **Teach your child to have a perspective on the sports experience.** The sports media in this country would like you to believe that sports and winning/losing are larger than life. The fact that it is just a game frequently gets lost in translation. This lack of perspective frequently trickles down to the youth sport level, and young athletes often come away from competition with a distorted view of themselves and how they performed. Parents need to help their children develop realistic expectations about themselves, their abilities, and how they played without robbing the child of his dreams. Swimming a lifetime best time and coming in dead last is a cause for celebration, not depression. Similarly, losing the conference championships does not mean that the sun will not rise tomorrow.

STRADDLING THE LINE
PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Written by: Coach Dick Hannula

I've always believed that swimming parents want to be a contributing factor to their children's success in our sport. This is not always achieved, and in too many instances the opposite is true. Parent behavior can and does adversely affect the potential successes of their children. Coaches need to communicate what works best in parent/swimmer interaction.

Parent involvement is vital in the early stages of swimming. Age group swimmers need a lot of parent support. They need to be transported to practice and competition and usually require at least one parent to be in attendance. Swimming suits and equipment and assistance in completing the forms to enter meets are usually parent responsibilities. The swimmer begins to assume many of these responsibilities as he becomes older and enters senior competition. Parents are not as vital to all the swimmer's needs as when the swimmer was still in age group.

Senior-level swimming presents a new set of circumstances for the swimmer, and they are not as easily understood. The age group experience is usually marked by fairly continuous improvement. Growth and swimming experience usually keep this pattern fairly steady. Senior-level swimming entails more specific training, both in endurance and quality. This results in fewer personal best swims in competition. Sometimes endurance background requirements of a national-level training program can be very long range, and personal best swims may be reduced for longer time periods.

One of the greatest changes in senior swimming is the result of moving up to the elite level. Moving to the top of your state and region competition is one level. Junior Nationals and to the top of Juniors is another. Senior Nationals and to the top of Seniors is another. International and to the top of international competition, such as the Olympics, is another. World records are the highest levels. What do these progressive levels have in common? The higher you move on the elite level, the more pressure is placed on the athlete. This must be handled effectively by the athlete in order to succeed at the next highest level.

Every athlete performs best when he or she is relaxed. Excited, "psyched up," but in their best performance comfort zone. How many times have we read that some great athletes were just too tense, too tight, pressing too hard to perform at their best? This is true in every sport. Great coaches try to reduce anxiety and pressure and focus on getting into "their game" or game plan. This is a comfort zone of performance that produces the most success. Swimmers compete as individuals in their specific races. They must be able to focus on the race itself. There is enough pressure at every level and especially at the more elite levels. A good coach will want to reduce the pressure so that the swimmer can focus on the essentials of the next race. Parents can help by creating a success environment.

The ability to focus on the technical aspects and race strategy is best served by the swimmer when other pressures are eliminated. This is why parent involvement must contribute to this type of competitive environment for the swimmer.

What makes up that successful swimmer/parent environment? I have specific conclusions that have come from 44 years of coaching at every level. But for this article, I decided to poll coaches at the World Championship Trials. This was a very elite level of competition, and I was curious as to what other coaches believed. I even asked two swimmers.

I asked two questions: Give me one example of parent behavior that is performance-inhibiting to your swimmers, and the second question was the opposite - give me one example of performance-enhancing behavior by parents. All of the following answers are quotations from the coaches and swimmer interviews. Fifteen coaches were polled, and at least seven of them were former Olympic Team coaches. Two swimmers - both national champions at this championship, one a current world record holder, were also questioned.

I have tried to match up the responses to both questions by the number assigned to each answer. That number indicates that is the same interviewee for #1, #2, etc.

Responses to the question on parent involvement that is performance inhibiting.

1. "Over-interest. Taking the 'hands-on' attitude. This is a killer when the parent crosses the line of support. They end up hurting the swimmer. Being too aloof can also hurt the swimmer. Stay on that line of support."
2. "The 'Yes, But . . . Syndrome.' The swimmer races and it is an acceptable performance for that stage of the training to the coach and swimmer. Maybe the swimmer is beaten or below his best time. The parent says, 'Nice race, but so and so beat you,' or 'Maybe you did beat so and so, but it wasn't your best time.' The parent has eliminated the positive element."
3. "This is a true example. I had a girl get fourth at Senior Nationals in the spring of 1988. Her dad then told her she had to make the Olympic Team. I told her father that the best college kids weren't at the spring nationals and that making the top two at the Olympic Trials wasn't realistic. He insisted that she could do it. This comment destroyed her capacity to be successful at the big meet, and she went backward."
4. "I had a terrible example at a national championship. I found out about it from girls rooming with that swimmer. She had called home after her first swim, which was off her best time. The parent went into a criticism of the race that centered on, 'If you can't swim faster than that, we're not going to spend all this money on sending you to nationals,' etc. The girl cried all that night and destroyed the rest of that meet."
5. "Offering a young swimmer a higher expectation than is realistic. They can put the swimmer in a failing position when it is something they can't achieve. In wanting the swimmer to be great, they bury the swimmer."
6. "Don't ride the roller-coaster. Don't tell them how great they are one day and how bad they are on another. Be low key at the meet. My father told me when to get in the

water when I was young, and I fought it. Have little contact with your swimmer at the competition.”

7. “When parents try to be knowledgeable about how their swimmer should be swimming. There are too many factors involved for them to understand. They may feel that they are helping to motivate by ‘needling,’ but it inhibits the swimmer.
8. “Parent criticism and not supporting. If a parent goes to practice or meets, never criticize the swimmer.”
9. Look at performances. Elite-level performances come much less frequently, and parents don’t understand this. Must support through some tough times.”
10. “Parents should never pay for best times.”
11. “Sometimes a parent will put age group swimmers on double workouts when the coach is trying to bring them along gradually and comfortably. A parent may take the age group swimmer to too many meets and interfere with the coach’s long-range goals. Another killer: ‘All that money spent on you, and you’re not going fast.’”
12. This is a summary of similar comments by several coaches: “All of the following will defeat a swimmer when it is time to get on the blocks to race. Call it ‘vicarious living.’ If you are being treated in this manner, you aren’t in swimming for the long haul.” “Why didn’t you do your best?” “If you win, or final, or whatever, I will buy you dinner (rewarding only success).” “Giving monetary value prizes.” “Parents harping on a bad swim.”

One of the national championship swimmers polled stated that his biggest gripe was having to talk the whole workout over at the family dinner table after practice.

Responses to the question on parent involvement that is performance enhancing.

1. “Support in a ‘hands-off’ manner. Their best line is support, and avoid crossing the line into coaching.”
2. “Eliminate the ‘but’ element. Tell your swimmer good job, and stop. Forget the ‘but’ add-on. The ability to stop is a positive characteristic of parent involvement.”
3. “The best parents were Mr. and Mrs. X. They were proud of their children’s work ethic and were totally supportive no matter what were the results. They were happy parents. If there were more Mr. and Mrs. X type of parents, the Chinese women swimmers would have to be worrying about the US women swimmers.”
4. “Be supportive regardless of that performance. The swimmer and the coach will make adjustments. Future successes won’t be helped when the swimmer remembers that conversation during their next big meet.”
5. “A lot of love and encouragement, especially when their swimmer doesn’t have a good meet, comes home tired from practice, or is beat up from school work or at home. Learn how to love’em and hug’em. The coach must be the demanding one, not the parent. Your swimmer must know that you love’em.”
6. “Keep your own dedication. Encourage but don’t get involved with the competitive aspects. Don’t get involved with the coaching.”
7. “Let the butterfly go, and it will come back to you. Let your swimmer go until they become self-reliant, and they will be able to perform at their peak.”
8. “Encourage your swimmer to do the best that they can do. There is too much pressure already without parent pressure. Support them. If you have something to discuss,

then discuss it with the coach and never the swimmer. No swimmer needs another coach at home. One coach is enough.”

9. “See progress regardless of time. Recognize the workload and the adjustment to that load. Parents must be a support system.”
10. “Stay out of the coaching aspect. Support your swimmers. Don’t smother them. Be supportive, but don’t overdo it.”
11. “As the swimmer gets better, there is more of a spotlight on them. Parents should not expect more of them. Let them relax and have fun in competition. I believe there was a poll of one of the Olympic teams, and somewhere between 60% to 80% of their parents hadn’t gone to a national championship. Parent involvement at the elite level wasn’t a springboard to the Olympic team.”
12. “Parents should be supportive and not coach. A baby needs to know that it is loved. It must be held, hugged, and the baby will be secure and self-confident. The same is true for swimmers; support your swimmer regardless of any race outcome.” “Talk about self (love) and not performance.” “Be a parent #1; accept the results.”

These are the comments of our elite coaches and swimmers. They have the coaching and competitive experience at the highest levels. These are the experts, and their comments should be of value to all of our swimming parents.

**HINTS ON HELPING YOUR SWIMMER BE MORE
SUCCESSFUL**

(from United States Swimming)

Be supportive. Both your swimmer and his coach are likely to have a list of criticisms for his performance, no matter how good it might have been; so what he needs from you is love and support. On the other hand, don't try to provide excuses for poor performances. As mentioned above, most athletes try to give their best performances in every competition, but sometimes the results are disappointing. When that happens, the less said, the better. The old adage, "if you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all," would probably be a good one to follow. A swimmer is generally quite perceptive about his swims, and is, after all, the only one who really knows how much effort went into it. You and the coach only know what it looked like.

Leave your swimmer alone. Your swimmer already has enough problems: trying to go fast, keep his start, stroke and turns legal; execute proper technique; impress his teammates, friends and/or enemies; place; improve his time; score points; please the coach; please himself and so on. Don't add additional pressure. Most athletes at all levels are already trying to reach their best performances in every competition and do not really need you to remind them that you want them to do their best.

Avoid criticism of the coach in front of your swimmer. (You can gripe all you want when he's not around.) The role of the coach is to provide a progressive training situation in which your swimmer can develop his skills and speed. Placing the obstacle of criticism between coach and swimmer creates an additional pressure on the swimmer which can further impair performances. Your swimmer needs to trust his coach in order to get the most benefit from him. Your best bet if you don't like what the coach is doing is to make an appointment with him to discuss the situation. If you feel unable to talk to the coach, then perhaps you should consider finding a different coaching situation.

Don't try to coach your swimmer. Regardless of how much you may know about swimming, you are not employed to coach your child. You are paying someone else to do it; so let him do it. Your child needs you as a parent; he already has a coach. When your child is swimming is the time for him to be coached. When he is out of the water, he needs your support. Keep remembering how difficult it is just to grow up, and then figure how much added pressure there is in a competitive sport. You can help your swimmer by not being the source of more pressure.

Remember that swimming should be fun. One of the most important functions of competitive swimming is keeping kids off the streets. As long as they enjoy it, they will have a healthy, productive activity in which to be involved. When swimming becomes a negative experience, the swimmer is likely to want to stop. All athletes need motivation to attain their ultimate goals. Your challenge is to avoid using behavior modification techniques to get your swimmer to achieve "A" or "AA" or whatever level times are desired. When a swimmer fails to reach his goal, he should be encouraged to keep on trying, rather than discouraged by being shown how disappointed you are. When he achieves a goal, let him know how proud you are and stress the fun aspect of the sport.

Whose goals are they, anyway? Your swimmer's performance is not a reflection on you. (His manners may be, but not his swimming.) Don't let your ego be caught up in your reaction to his swims. If your swimmer eventually reaches national or international prominence, it will be because he has worked for it, not because his parents wanted vicarious success.

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. The most important part of your child's swimming experience is that he learn about himself while enjoying the sport. This healthy environment encourages learning and fun which will develop a positive self-image within your child.

In the meantime, while your swimmer is working towards his goals, keep encouraging him to reach out and to strive towards excellence, and be sure to let him know you think he's pretty terrific!