

Ten Commandments for Swimming Parents

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

I. Thou shall not impose thy ambitions on thy child. Remember that swimming is your child's activity. Improvements and progress occur at different rates for each individual.

II. Thou shall be supportive no matter what. There is only one question to ask your child after a practice or a competition – "Did you have fun?"

III. Thou shall not coach thy child. Do not undermine the professional coach by trying to coach your child on the side. Your job is to provide love and support. The coach is responsible for the technical part of the job.

IV. Thou shall only have positive things to say 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.

V. Thou shall acknowledge thy child's fears. New experiences can be stressful situations. It is totally appropriate for your child to be scared. Your job is to encourage and assure the child that they can do it.

VI. Thou shall not criticize the officials. Please don't criticize those who are doing the best they can in purely voluntary positions.

VII. Honor thy child's coach. The bond between coach and swimmer is special. It contributes to your child's success as well as fun. Do not criticize the coach in the presence of your child.

VIII. Thou shall be loyal and supportive of thy team. A summer swim team consists of members from ages 6-18, like no other sports team. One of the most fun parts is to see the young age groups cheering for the older age groups and vice versa.

IX. Thy child shall have goals besides winning. Most successful swimmers 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.

X. Thou shall not expect thy child to become an Olympian. There are 250,000 athletes in USA Swimming. There are only 52 spots available for the Olympic Team every four years. Your child's odds of becoming an Olympian are about .0002%.

What to Watch at a Swimming Meet

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Skills

The four competitive swimming strokes are freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke and butterfly. The combination of all four strokes is called individual medley.

Competition

Each swim meet offers a variety of events and distances, depending on the age group and classification. Each swimmer will have a limit to the number of events he or she may swim each day, depending on the meet rules. In freestyle events, the competitor may swim any stroke. The stroke most commonly used is sometimes called the crawl, which is characterized by the alternate stroking of the arms over the surface of the water surface and an alternating (up-and-down) flutter kick. On turns and finishes, some part of the swimmer must touch the wall. Most swimmers do a flip turn.

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 and some part of the swimmer must touch the wall. The swimmer must finish on the back. 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 from 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 recovery of the arms over the water 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. Both hands must touch the wall simultaneously on the turns and the finish. (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.)

The individual medley, commonly referred to as the IM, features all four strokes. In the IM, the swimmer begins with the butterfly, then changes after one-fourth of the race to backstroke, then breaststroke and finally freestyle.

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

In 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 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.

Getting “DQ'd” doesn't always mean you are going to Dairy Queen!

To insure fairness in the competition, swim meets are governed by trained officials (many started out as parents, just like you). They are charged with the job of enforcing the rules laid out by US Swimming and FINA.

Officials hate having to “DQ” a swimmer, but they understand that their efforts not only insure a fair “playing field” for everyone, but it actually *helps* our young athletes learn the sport, too. Every swimmer involved in the sport for any length of time has been “DQ'd”, **even at the national and international (Olympic) levels.**

It is important that parents respect the training and knowledge of the officials and support swimmers by encouraging them to talk to their coaches and work hard in the week following an event where they were “DQ'd”. By taking this approach, you are teaching your swimmer that meets and practices are learning experiences and more importantly, **one they can overcome.** Sometimes getting DQ'd is the one thing that helps the swimmer realize they are in fact needing to concentrate more in practice or that the coach is telling them things because they matter.

Reinforce to your swimmers that getting DQ'd is part of the learning process; everyone gets “DQ'd” sometimes. With effort, being coachable, and attending practices consistently, they WILL get better! Learn more about how to help your swimmer understand [what mistakes will get a DQ slip](#) and how parents can help make a [disqualification](#) part of learning to be a better swimmer.

DQ = 'Don't Quit'!