

# 10 COMMANDMENTS FOR SWIMMING PARENTS

by Rose Snyder, Managing Director Coaching Division, USOC Former Director of Club Services, USA Swimming  
(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. Try not to 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 their personal best and benefit from the process.

## **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 thy child.**

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

Try not to offer advice on technique or race strategy or any other area that is outside your expertise. 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 at a swim meet, you should be encouraging, but never criticizing your child or the coach. The coach will know when mistakes have been made. And remember that "yelling at" is not the same as "cheering for."

## **5. Thou shalt acknowledge thy child's fears.**

A first swim meet, 50 Fly or 100 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. Remember your job is to love and support your child through all of the swimming experience. Sometimes a swimmer's fears are one's you have given them.

## **6. Thou shalt not criticize the timers.**

If you do not devote the time or do not have the desire to volunteer as a timer, 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, it will only serve

to hurt your child's swimming. An open dialogue IS important to your child's coach however; and never feel wrong to ask questions.

#### **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 unique culture. Children who switch from team to team are often ostracized for a long, long time by the teammates they leave behind and are slow to be received by new teammates. Often times swimmers who do switch teams never do better than they did before they moved.

#### **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."

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

There are 300,000 athletes in USA Swimming. Only 2% of the swimmers listed in the 10 & Under age group make it to the Top 100 in the 17-18 age group and of those only a small percentage will become elite level, world class athletes. There are only 52 spots available for the Olympic Team every four years.

Your child's odds of becoming an Olympian is about .0002%. Swimming is about much more than just the Olympics. Ask your coaches why they coach. Chances are they were not an Olympian, but still got much out of swimming that they wanted to pass the 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 have won. Swimming builds good people, like you want your child to be, and you should be happy your child wants to participate.