

What to Expect When They Swim...

There are lots of information pieces about what to expect as a new swim parent, but these two are my favourites. They come complete with the new swim parent anxiety and fears.... plus they are entertaining. At the end of the day, we were all new parents at one time, so if you have a question feel free to approach the crusty old swim parents that look like they've been around the block, they'll be the ones with the glossed over look in their eyes! Ironically their kids will have the biggest smiles :)

How to Survive Your Child's First Year as a Competitive Swimmer

<http://eisutton.hubpages.com/hub/How-to-Survive-Your-Childs-First-Year-as-a-Competitive-Swimmer>

(with some cost estimate changes and cdn edits :)

Tonight I found myself in a parent meeting for first year swim parents. This is actually my daughter's second year, but the swim team she was on last year did not have parent meetings, so I wanted to see what I could learn. I was impressed. If our team last year had provided this type of forum, I would have enjoyed my daughter's new sport much more. Last year swim team was some new brand of hell that I found myself in. I was completely lost. As I looked around the room this evening, I saw the shell shocked faces of parents around me who were also lost. Before, my brain could stop my mouth, I heard myself volunteering to write this hub for them. So here it is; a survival manual for parents of new competitive swimmers. What does all the swim slang really mean? What is proper etiquette at practices and meets? How do I avoid embarrassing the day lights out of my child while I sort through this maze? How much money should I expect this sport to cost me this first year?

Meet Terminology

You have entered a realm of new language. You will hear terms bantered about by veteran parents who assume that you have some basic idea of what they are talking about. You will probably smile and nod, then walk away wondering what on earth that person just said. I was fortunate; I made friends with a veteran who translated for me. Here are some of the terms that puzzled me, before you know it, you will be speaking swim slang yourself:

Meet: A meet is not something that you eat, or when you say hello to a new friend. A meet is an adventure in confusion and anarchy. A meet is a competitive swimming event. This is where competitive swimmers race each other. Swimmers are paired for races based on age groups established by Swimming Canada. The National Age Group divisions are: 10-under, 11-12, 13-14, 15-16,17-18. At your first meet, you will want to run screaming in to the night. Don't despair, it gets easier. I promise.

Practice: A practice is the location where you take your child to prepare for a meet. At practice, you do not exist. You are a chauffeur. Once at practice it is a violation of protocol to communicate with the child you labored with, feed, and clothe. Don't take this personally. If your child was on the football field, you would not want a parent running around on the field with water bottles, towels, and snacks. It would prevent the team from practicing as a team. Swimming is a team sport. Do not run out beside the pool to talk, encourage, scold, or provide for your child. They are just fine, the coach has it all under control. Bring your child, sit down, read or leave. They will be just fine.

Items to bring to practice:

The exception to your chauffeur status at practice is ensuring that your child has everything that they need at practice:

- A water bottle containing WATER not juice, soda, or drink mixes. Only exception might be a sport drink if you feel it is necessary.
- Swim goggles plus an extra pair in their swim bag.
- A swim bag to hold their stuff
- A towel
- An extra swim suit, clothing malfunctions happen just ask Janet Jackson.
- Swim cap and an extra one.

Coach: This is the person who will drive your child to victory. He or she is usually busy. He needs to focus on the swimmers not the parents. It is a violation of protocol to interrupt the coach during a practice. Email your coach, talk to him before or after practice, but do not distract him from the swimmers during practice. If you want everyone including the other parents (sitting politely on the designated bleachers) to look at you as if horns are sprouting from the top of your head: Approach the coach while he is on the deck.

Deck: The area surrounding the pool. This is the area that is around three feet around the pool, sometimes more, sometimes less. Parents are not allowed on the deck during practice or meets. In fact, one of the biggest faux pas committed by families at meets is assuming that it is OK to allow younger brothers and sisters to “play on the steps” of the pool during a meet. It is not. It is dangerous for the small ones and distracting to the swimmers. You and your child will most likely be publicly humiliated on a loud speaker if you allow your child into the pool. The only persons allowed in the pool or on the deck are the swimmers at the time of their races. They start their races on the block.

Block: This is the platform where the swimmer starts the race. It may be raised, or flat. Blocks can also be permanent or removable. Some pools have blocks only on one end, and others have them on both.

Heat: In most races, there are more competitors than there are lanes to swim in. That is when you have the race broken out into heats. A heat is an extension of the one race. Ultimately, the swimmer with the fastest time across all heats is the winner. Some meets will have heat winners as well. A heat winner will not usually receive a ribbon.

Proper Etiquette at Practices and Meets

This one really got me last year. There are certain unwritten rules to practices and meets that you are more often than not going to figure out by mistake. If you follow by example, you could very likely be grouping yourself and your child with the people who have no manners. At every meet you will see someone who is just plain rude. I find this to be truer during summer leagues when more neophytes are present. In the past year, I have been amazed more times than I can count by the behavior I have seen adults display at their child's sporting events. Everyone is there to see their swimmer swim. Be respectful and try not to block another parent's view. Let the shorter viewers get closer, if you are tall, you can see over them.

Basic etiquette applies first and foremost. If you would not do it in front of your Grandma, don't do it in public. Remember that there are children present and watch your language! In the sport of Swimming, it is the Judge and referee who determine if a disqualification has been made. There is no recourse if you disagree. Even if you see a swimmer commit a rules infraction, it doesn't matter unless the judge sees it. It is poor sportsmanship to make a scene about it.

Do not berate your child for getting a "DQ" (a disqualification i.e. an infraction of the swim association rules). Everyone learns more from their mistakes than they do their achievements. Every swimmer will at one time or another get DQ'd. It is not an embarrassment. It is a blessing. That is one mistake that they will never make again. It is beneficial to know the rules that you and your child will be performing under. These rules are located at Swimming Canada website at this link:
<https://www.swimming.ca/swimmingrules>

Knowing these rules will help you and your child as you advance in this sport. You are not only setting an example for your children, you are responsible for your children and their behavior.

What You Have to do to Make it all Run Smoothly?

Meet times are given well in advance. Plan to get to the meet at least one hour in advance. Don't panic when you walk into the facility. It can be daunting the first few times. Follow these little steps and stay calm, you will do just fine.

1. Arrive one hour early

- Bring a backup of everything that your child usually has in his/her swim bag.
- Goggles
- Towel

- Swim cap
- Swim suit
- Cover up
- Bring at minimum two Sharpie permanent markers (you will need to write your child's race number, heat number, lane number, and name on them somewhere visible to them)
- Pack a cooler with healthy snacks and water. Sometimes venues have snack bars. These do not provide the type of high quality nutrition that a swimmer needs to perform at their best.
- Lots of water. Keep your swimmer hydrated.
- Have chairs and towels or blankets for your swimmer to relax on in between events. (Races that your swimmer participates in)
- Cash to purchase t-shirts, snacks, heat sheets, etc. I usually have at least \$20 in cash on hand at a meet.
- Bring books, Gameboys, whatever that will keep your child occupied in between events.

2. Purchase a Heat Sheet (it is like a performance program, it tells you when each race is swum)

- Heat Sheets vary in price and can be shared
- They are usually under \$10.00

3. Locate your team

- Set up your cooler/blanket and chairs with the rest of your team
- Have your child check in with the coach
- Print your child's race number, lane number, heat number and name on their arm or leg where they can see it.
- Keep track of what race is swimming. This is easier if you are with the more experienced parents on your team.

4. Make sure that your child is lined up for their race about two races in advance of their scheduled event.

5. Once your child has completed swimming for that day you are clear to go. However, if you wait until the end, times are posted and you can see your child's placement in the races.

6. Your child's race times will also be listed on your team's website or you can check results online with your smart phone. Most meets will list live results on the APPS "Live Results" or "MeetMobile". You can also check your swimmers events and past results on Team Canada website

So How Much Does All This Cost?

So now you know how it all works, you have a list of the terminology. The overachievers will have flashcards of them. You are ready to take on the chaos of a meet, but first you have to pay for it all. Yes, children, swimming like every other sport is far from free. The cost starts to rack up with the swim team itself. All swim teams charge a fee. This is a quick tally of what I expect to pay this year:

My daughter's team fee for winter league is \$750.00.

Competition swim suit \$ 80.00

Practice swim suits \$60.00

Goggles (2) \$ 50.00

Swim Caps \$ 35.00

Towels (2-3) \$ 50.00

Sub-Total: \$1025.00

Now let's talk about the meets. There are fees for each meet. Fees vary and are usually set by how many events (races) that your child will swim in. My daughter is just starting out so she doesn't usually swim in more than six events per meet. Generally, this fee is around \$8.00 per event. That means that I can expect each meet to cost me about \$48.00 in meet fees. Then I have to add in a heat sheet at about an average \$10.00. That means that each meet will cost me about \$60.00

We normally swim 5 Meets a winter season ,so that's 300 extra

The Good News

\$1325.00 is not cheap. I could let my child sit at home in front of the TV for free. No wait, then she would get obese and sick and I would have the additional expense of medicines and doctor co-pays. It might be cheaper, but is it better? NO. I could make her get outside and run. The downside to that is messed up joints, knee surgery, ankle braces, and more meds. Of all of the sports that your child can get

involved in, competitive swimming is the least likely to cause physical harm even over a lifetime. Swimming burns more calories than most other sports preventing obesity and juvenile diabetes. Team sports have been proven to build confidence and improve a child's chances for adjusting well as an

adult. The physical exertion of swimming helps to relieve stress which prevents having to pay those expensive Psychiatrist bills.

So get out there and learn the lingo. Study the rules. Use common sense when it comes to etiquette. You have taken the steps to learn how to maneuver the maze of the meets. You have cracked open your wallet. All you have to do now is remember that to your child and his/her future, Competitive Swimming is not cheap it is priceless.

Tips for your first swim meet...

- Arrive slightly early to get a seat. On my first time I arrived at the pool only to be greeted by "...sorry, someone is sitting there..... and there..... and there...."
- Always take a towel or a cushion to sit on....After 6 hours your butt goes numb on those hard stands (bleachers), seriously, I can still feel a dull ache in those cheeks just sitting here at the computer! At many meets there will be no stands or no free spaces so do yourself a favour and bring camping chairs.
- Wear summer attire, even if the weather is freezing outside. It is so hot and humid in those indoor pools, it can feel quite hard to breath!
- Bring a pair of summer flip flops to wear on the pool deck. Many pools will not allow you to wear outside shoes near the pool area, and if you haven't brought inside shoes, you will be expected to go barefoot, which can be a bit squishy! Yuck!
- Bring your own healthy food and water for you and your swimmers. The chips and other treats they serve from the pool canteens will do nothing but weigh down your kid with stodgy grease and won't even help cushion your butt either (well not immediately anyway).
- Pack an extra set of goggles and swim cap, in case there is an 'equipment malfunction'
- Bring pens to record times and write event numbers on the kids arms, Nervousness or excitement may cause young kids temporary forgetfulness whilst standing, exposed, on the starting blocks. You don't want them to start swimming the wrong stroke. My girls are comforted by having the information on their arm.
- Get the kids to drink plenty (even though mine don't feel like it after swimming) and make sure you drink plenty of water or less you will wind up with one thumping headache.
- Bring something for you and the kids to kill time, like iphone, itouch, DS or even books and magazines. Sometimes there can be long wait between events, for you and the kids!

- Remember, everyone is sitting in close proximity and may be able to hear what you say....so be nice.
- Don't tell your kids how to swim, or what they did wrong! Just leave that up to the coaches. Tell them instead how great, brave, persistent they were. Or concentrate on a thing that they did well like a great dive or turn. It's better for you and the kids in the long run...really it is.
- Concentrate on aiming to achieve personal best times rather than beating others. Sometimes it can help to set other goals like doing a good turn, or not looking around the pool whilst doing breaststroke.
- Occasionally you will see coaches standing on the edge of the pool, their hands up above their head, doing rather grotesque looking pelvic thrusts!!!...don't worry, they are simply demonstrating correct butterfly technique.