

On Being an Age Group Swimming Parent

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Association.



What is the Purpose of This Presentation?

- To help swimming parents aid their child in enjoying the sport of swimming and to get the most out of the experience to enrich and enhance their experience.
- To help parents understand what creates good age group swimming and how to help their child assimilate those experiences.
- To help parents understand what the parental role is in the sport.
- It is NOT to help parents figure out how to make their child an Olympian. For starters, No One Knows and second, you'll do a huge amount of damage to your child and your relationship with your child if you try. Its simple. Don't.



Lets Begin; what are the basics?

- The child needs to learn:
- 1) to swim correctly.
- 2) to train correctly and consistently.
- 3) to compete with joy, determination and competitiveness.



Naturally, each one of those gets harder!

- The first...learning to swim correctly, is about learning technique for the strokes, the starts and the turns.
- Swimming is a technique limited sport. If you have quality strokes, there is no limitation to how far you can go in the sport. If you have poor stroke habits, you have nothing but limits.
- The Key: Find a coach who is technically sound and a great teacher.
- All beginning coaches should be focused exclusively on teaching skills in strokes, starts and turns.
- You as a parent, likely don't know correct technique. **LET THE COACH, DO THE COACHING.**



The second; learning to train consistently and well.

- Coaches call this “learning to train.” It must come after “learning to learn” good technique.
- IF there is training with poor technique, it imbeds in the nervous system, poor habits that then become impossible to break later on.
- So “learning technique” must come well before “Learning to train.”
- Coaches who are inexperienced, frequently reverse this order. Parents should be aware of, and work with a coach who does understand. This is an important parental role (and question to ask.)



Third, learning to Compete.

- This is a highly complex topic and many varying opinions exist as to “how”.
- A lot of the discussion is philosophical. In a few minutes, we’ll walk through a few principles that are well established.
- Competing with joy and excitement, is a wonder to behold.



Think of this a peeling the Onion, each topic has many layers to it. Lets begin Peeling1

- Topics in Learning to Learn. (good technique).
- There are lots of good teaching methods for each stroke. Coaches will use many “tools” from their toolbox. A tool is just a tool, neither good nor bad (no “good or bad drills”.) The consistent application of a quality teaching method is a hallmark of a good coach. (*and what my office teaches every day of the year!*)
- Learning physical skills is based around a simple physical/chemical process called the creation of a Myelin Sheath on the “most used” motor neurons. If you want to know how it works, just google it! It’s a fascinating topic.



Learning to Learn.

- The result of creation of a myelin sheath, is that practice makes HABIT, either good or bad, and it will be “in your system” forever, so be CAREFUL with what is taught/learned. “Unlearning bad habits” is close to impossible.
- Again, GOOD COACHING is paramount to the process!
- The goal of practice then for those learning to learn, is the maximum number of CORRECT repetitions of a movement in a given time frame. Poor practice will result in confused, non-functional skill sets.
- Reinforce with your child, that “doing things correctly” is what they will be praised for.



Next layer (part two) training.

- To begin, there is NO scientific evidence that one training method is “the Best.” (for athletes of any age.) What we do know is that certain principles have proven themselves over time and should be respected as your child trains.
- We’ll discuss five of those principles in next few slides. **MANY MORE EXIST!** These are the most commonly accepted ones.
- We recommend having your child with a coach with long term success in developing athletes of a similar age. Consistency comes from experience as well as education in the sport. Read that again, education **AND** experience are the key tools that allow coaches to succeed. Short term and long term success are two entirely different things and regularly work in opposition to each other.



Principles in training for age groupers.

- Increasing the child's CAPACITY to train is critical.
- Gradual improvement in CAPACITY is the ONLY way. (there are no quick results in our sport that will serve the child well in the long term.)
- THINGS TAKE TIME. (have patience, Mom and Dad)
- Time training is important. QUALITY of time training, (coaches call it training DENSITY) is more important. An hour with elevated heart rate has a lot more training result than 2 hours with non-elevated heart rate.
- Principle One – Increase capacity to train, gradually.



Principle Two – Aerobic gains matter most.

- Aerobic training is the type of training most suitable for age group athletes of 6-14 years.
- Aerobic training makes you physically better tomorrow, the next day and next week, as well as healthier for life.
- Young bodies do not have the chemical capacity to train effectively anaerobically. Hence limited use in doing so.
- You CAN get young athletes to swim fast with “sprint training” early in life, but it will severely limit their long term development and capacity. It’s a mistake. Short term gains HURT long term development.



Principle Three – Legs matter!

- In every stroke, success comes from the ability to kick in a correct and sustained manner .
- Kicking makes successful swimming, period. Expect to see your child learning to kick well and in a sustained fashion.
- Coaches use various methods to coach kicking. If you have questions, ASK, don't wonder what is going on!
- The largest muscles in the body are in the legs. And with today's largely sedentary children, it takes TIME and EFFORT to develop this physical ability.



Principle Four – Breathing.

- Its hard to know whether to put this principle under stroke technique or under training, since it is part of each.
- But if your child can't breath successfully on each stroke, they'll never swim very well.
- Successful training programs emphasize both the physical act of blowing air out under water and the mechanisms/technique for doing so in each stroke.
- Poor breathing, poor swimming. Great breathing, great swimming.



Fifth principle: Specificity of Training.

- As young athletes learn to train, one of the key purposes is to prepare to race.
- In a race, you want to take every stroke perfectly (or as close to that as possible.)
- Doing so requires combinations of muscular strength, breathing, and attention to focus....keeping perfect body position.
- If you are to do your “best stroke” in a meet for 50, 100, 200 yards, you need to learn stroke specific training in practice. Not “surviving” 200 yard of butterfly, but doing 200 yards with excellent technique.



Next Layer of the Onion – Principles of Learning to Compete!

- The complexity of this topic keeps people in sport for life!
- It's never easy and can be improved FOREVER and in many different ways.
- Your Coach will have various ways to implement this. I recommend you buy the coach a cup of coffee and see what their way of doing it is, ask questions, make comments and communicate about the topic so when you go to a swim meet with your child, you and they know what is going on and why.
- Otherwise good swimming experiences can be ruined with poor swim meet communication and actions.



Principles of Competition experiences for Parents.

- 1. Your goal is for your child to have a successful LEARNING experience when they compete.
- 2. Learning can come from both “success” and “failure”, both cruel masters.
- 3. Did they learn? How do you know? ASK THEM what they learned.



Principles of competition, con't.

- 4. LET THE COACH, COACH.
- 5. IF you don't see the coach coaching, then ASK them how they are doing so. Maybe, their method is such that you don't see it!
- 6. If the coach DOESN'T COACH at swim meets, perhaps you need a new coach. (sorry to say)



Competition, con't.

- 7. Each swim should have a goal. The child may or may share with you what that is!
- 8. Goals should be short term, reasonable and achievable but still a “stretch”.
- 9. Praise should be real, **EARNED** and the child should learn to say **THANK YOU** for all feedback from the coach.



Competition, con't.

- 10. Parents should NEVER provide technical feedback. Don't mix the role of parent or coach. Confuses the child.
- 11. Parents PARENT. Your goal is the make a strong INDEPENDENT child.
- 12. Everything you do for your child that they can do for themselves makes them weaker. You are trying to make them stronger. Let them "do it".



Competition, con't.

Easy praise is highly damaging.

- You do more damage with incorrect praise than with “a critique”. It’s not the parent role to do either. Let the coach, Coach.
- Asking “what did your coach say about that swim?” is a good check on reality. (did they listen?)

Yes, there will be lots of mistakes.

- Mistakes are part of learning!
- Mistakes OFTEN are the best teacher.
- No one swim, day or swim meet is make it or break it for a swimmers career. Its just a time piece. Keep your (and their) perspective intact.



Last section...the Parents Role in Swimming.

- Parenting does not come with a manual.
- And if it did, no one manual would fit all children, as you likely already know.
- But after 80 years of age group swimming, we have pretty good ideas of what works well.
- Here are some of those suggestions:



At ages 6-10....

- You'll decide what the child NEEDS. (don't worry about what they WANT...they have no idea.)
- NEEDS are to learn to swim, to get more healthy and fit, and learn to learn skills.
- You'll set the tasks, you'll enforce the discipline.
- Just like you do in all forms of life.
- Consistency and Hard Work are life skills to be learned/taught by you and the coach.



At ages 11-14.....

- Children will begin to seek some independence. If you make it WE rather than “the child”, they’ll leave swimming for something where you are not around.
- LET THE CHILD OWN THEIR SPORT. You do as little as possible.
- At this age, its all about their PEERS, with parents as “necessary accessories”, not vital parts. Sit back and relax.
- Step in when real danger physical or emotional is at hand.
- They will be making CHOICES. Guide them. Talk to them A LOT, do not let them make choices based solely on peer “information.”



At ages 15 through college....

- You are a support person, engaged “as needed” for money, the car, etc.
- Accept it, you’ve earned it.
- When serious advice is needed, it probably will be asked for.
- Once again, TALK WITH (not at) your child about what you think are important issues in their lives.
- The most common and correct bit of parental advice given over the decades is...” ***You become what you hang around with.***” Completely true and 100% accurate. Influence that where you can!



THANKS FOR “Listening”.

- Happy to answer questions or receive comments anytime at:
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