

## An Open Letter to Every Swimming Parent in the World

By Wayne Goldsmith

Dear Swimming Parent,

Firstly let me thank you for being a swimming parent.

Without you – we have no sport. There is no swimming without you. Clubs and coaches could not exist without your support.

I appreciate everything you do – the early mornings, the late afternoons, the rush to get dinner ready at night for hungry, tired kids, the long weekends of time keeping and team support. For everything you do, I thank you.

I wanted to write and show my appreciation by giving you something in return; to thank you for all you give the sport.

I am going to give you some ideas and advice to help you be the best swimming parent you can be and to help you help your kids enjoy their swimming to the extent of the talent and to the limits of their dreams.

### Your child.

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Your child is *not* a swimmer. They are a *person* who swims. And as a person, *who they are* impacts on every aspect of their swimming. Real progress in swimming comes not from size, strength, speed and hard training – it comes from the development of the whole person: the character, their values, their personality AND of course their speed, strength, endurance etc etc. The training alone is not enough – the development of the person is far more important and far more enduring.

Speed, strength, endurance, power, flexibility and technique are all important.

But not as important as integrity. Or honesty. Or sincerity. Or humility. Or courage. Or a strong work ethic. Or the ability to accept responsibility for their own actions. Or the ability to work cohesively with others to achieve a common goal. Or self discipline. Or the ability to maintain a sense of humour under pressure and stress.

These things not only impact positively on your child's swimming but on every aspect of their life. And not just now, but for the rest of their life and in everything they do.

I love swimming. And I would love your child to be a world record holder and Olympic champion. But I would prefer that your kids become better people through the experience of being involved in this great sport. If they happen to also swim fast.....that is a bonus.

### Your child's coach

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Coaching is a tough business. Early mornings. Long weekends. Late evenings writing programs and developing coaching strategies.

Coaches are passionate souls who live for the opportunity to work with like minded swimmers and families intent on achieving success and enjoying involvement in a great sport.

Coaches want to change lives – swimming is just the avenue. Great coaches possess the communication skills, empathy and compassion to change people – they just chose to use swimming as the vehicle to do it.

You, your child and your coach form a team. A team with a single goal – to provide the opportunity for your child to enjoy all the sport of swimming has to offer.

And as with any team, achieving this goal is dependent on all members of the team working cohesively, honestly and with unconditional trust.

Chose your coach carefully. Meet with them. Talk with them. Regularly communicate with them (away from the pool and outside of training times). And once you have made the decision to entrust the development of your child to a particular coach, give that coach 100% total commitment, dedication and support. If you can't...find another coach. Partial support will not withstand the ups and downs of competitive swimming. 100% committed support – the same support you give your child and the same 100% committed support you want *FROM* the coach must also given by you *TO* the coach.

### Your role as a swimming parent – how you can help.

Let the coach do their job but there are some things you can do to help your child that only you can do.

Let me tell you a story about a swimming family I know.

I was asked to stay with the family and enjoy a few days with them. The kids both swam and asked me if I would be interested in getting up early with them the next morning for practice. Of course I said "yes".

I set my alarm for 5 am, got up and dressed.

It was then the strangest thing happened.

Another alarm went off.....in the mother's room.

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Mom got up. Got dressed. Rushed into the kitchen and made a cup of coffee for herself and two mugs of hot chocolate for the children. She then rushed around the house gathering up swim gear, towels, swim suits, goggles and filled water bottles. She then put all of these things in the kids' swim bags and put the bags near the front door.

She then tapped gently on the kids' bedroom doors and said, "Darling, it is time to go to swimming".

The kids responded, "I'm not going. I hate swimming. It's too cold" and some other stuff.

Mom then reversed the car out of the garage, carried both swim bags out to the car. Meanwhile one of kids was still in bed and had rolled over and gone back to sleep. The other was sitting on their bed saying "I'm tired. I'm tired" over and over again.

Mom helped both kids out of bed, helped them put on their track suits and warm shoes and helped them out to the kitchen table. The kids weren't even drinking their hot chocolate....they were sitting and moaning and groaning and complaining about swimming and being cold and how it was "too early".

Mom then helped the kids into the car – one laid down in the back seat and went to sleep while the other put his head on the car window and fell asleep.

Mom and I talked about this and that on the way to the pool.

When we got there, Mom jumped out, helped the kids out of the car and carried their bags to the front entrance of the pool.

The kids trained ok and I enjoyed watching the practice while Mom went off doing something else.

After training, Mom came back, embraced the kids with "Hi my angels. How was practice?" The kids answered, "OK" and then sat quietly all the way home listening to Eminem on their CD players.

When they got home, the kids went in to shower, while Mom emptied their swim bags, made their breakfast and ironed their clothes for school. I was a bit surprised she didn't also do their homework!!!!

Sound familiar? I suspect these scenes or something very similar were also played out in your own home this morning.

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You don't swim. Your kids do. Don't do it all for them. If people get opportunities easily they do not appreciate them and never take full advantage of them. "Holding the hand" of your kids may seem like the loving, caring parent thing to do but it isn't. It does not teach them self responsibility or self management or self discipline. All it does is teach them to expect life to be unrealistically easy.

The most important thing you can do to help your child achieve their swimming goals is to help them develop as a person with real independence and self management skills. You prepare them for life.....let the coach prepare them to swim fast. The three of you – parent, coach and child – working together is an unstoppable force!!!

Once again sincere thanks for your involvement in this great sport and on behalf of everyone in swimming, my appreciation for your contribution and ongoing support.

Yours faithfully,

Wayne Goldsmith

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