

WATCHING A MANTA RAY PRACTICE

In our swim program, we want the child's attention focused on the coach and the tasks at hand. Occasionally children miss an instruction, or have a goggle problem, or are involved in some other distraction, or are simply playing and having fun – which is all normal behavior for young children. We view these little difficulties as part of the learning process and we allow the children an opportunity to develop the self-discipline and self-reliance needed to overcome these difficulties without the help of moms or dads.

We know it is common in many other youth sports for parents to stand at the sidelines and shout instructions or encouragements and sometimes admonishments to their children. However, in our swim program we ask you not to signal them to swim faster, or to tell them to try a certain technique, or to offer to fix a goggle problem, or to move away for some other “menacing” swimmer, or even to remind them to listen to the coach. In fact, just as you would never interrupt a school classroom to talk your child, you should not interrupt a swim practice by attempting to communicate directly with your child.

What's wrong with encouraging your child during practice? There are two issues. First we want your child to focus on the coach and to learn the skill for their personal satisfaction rather than learning it to please their parents. Secondly, parental encouragement often gets translated into a command to swim faster and swimming faster may be the exact opposite of what the coach is trying to accomplish. In most stroke skill development we first slow the swimmers down so that they can think through the stroke motions. Save encouragements and praise for after the practice session! This is the time when you have your child's full attention to tell them how proud you are of them.

What's wrong with shouting or signaling instructions to your children? When I watch my 9 year old niece play in a basketball league I understand the overwhelming desire of parents to shout instructions to their children because that is what I want to do. But those instructions might be different from the coach's instructions and then you have a confused child. Sometimes you might think the child did not hear the coach's instruction and you want to help. Most of us do not want to see our own kids make a mistake. The fact is that children miss instructions all the time. Part of the learning process is learning how to listen to instructions. When children learn to rely on a backup they will have more difficulty learning how to listen better the first time.

As parents, many of us want our children protected from discomfort and adversity and we will attempt to create or place them in an environment free from distress. So, what's wrong with helping your child fix their goggles during practice time? Quite simply, we want to encourage the children to become self-reliant and learn to take care of and be responsible for themselves and their own equipment. Swimming practice is a terrific place to learn these life skills. Yes, even beginning at age 6 or 7.

If you need to speak to your child regarding a family issue or a transportation issue or to take your child from practice early you are certainly welcome to do so, but please send a note or approach the coach directly with your request and we will immediately get your child out of the water. If you need to speak to the coach for other reasons please wait until the end of practice or email the coach.

Thank you for bringing your children to practice as we both teach and direct them to become more responsible and confident young people!

We would like to use this opportunity to remind parents of the “DO’S” and “DON’TS” that govern parents watching practice. We sincerely appreciate your cooperation with regard to these policies.

DO’S

- 1) Please do watch practice from bleachers in the natatorium.
- 2) Do understand that your child will excel in practice some days and perform quite poorly on others. This is natural. In each case, try to say something positive to them about every practice you watch.
- 3) Do realize that every individual learns at a different rate and responds differently to instruction. The ultimate potential of the slower learner can be equal to or greater than that of the fast learner. Be patient!
- 4) Do understand that parents’ attitudes and actions often dictate those of their children. For example, be enthusiastic about taking your child to practice. Send a positive message about practice.
- 5) Do watch practices periodically. The more you understand about what your child does at practice, the easier it will be to support his/her effort.

DON’TS

- 1) Don’t compare your child with or “play” them against other swimmers. Because of different levels of physical and mental maturity, the “pecking order” in meets may not always be the same as it is in practice. Likewise, don’t expect your child’s stroke to look just like the first place finisher in an event. Every swimmer has a style that is unique to himself/herself.
- 2) Don’t bring your stopwatch to practice. How fast a youngster is swimming is not necessarily a true measure of performance or effort and may not be important in an assigned drill.
- 3) Don’t talk to the coaches during practice. Allow them to devote their full time and attention to the swimmers. Our coaches want to communicate with parents, but only before and after practice, or, best of all, during a personal meeting.
- 4) Don’t try to communicate with your child or let them talk to you during practice. Your swimmer will get more out of practice if the coach has their complete and undivided attention. If an emergency arises in which case you must speak with your youngster, please approach the coach first.
- 5) Don’t try to make stroke corrections or coach the swimmer. When parents interfere with opinions as to how the swimmer should swim, it causes considerable, and often times insurmountable, confusion as to whom the swimmer should listen to and respect. If you differ with something, please confer with the coach.

We have found, after many years of coaching, that these “DO’S” and “DON’TS” have an effect on your child’s swimming. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to speak with your child’s coach. We must work together to maximize each child’s potential.