

A Few Suggestions on How to be a Better Swimming Parent

Coach Michael Brooks

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Teaching Values

You are the key to your child's swimming. A parent's attitude toward swimming, the program, the coach, and his child's participation, is key towards the child's attitude and success. The young swimmer takes cues from his parent. If the parent shows by word, deed, facial expression, etc., that he does not value swimming, that he doesn't appreciate having to drive to practice or sit in the stands during meets, that "it's not going to matter" if the child skips practice, that morning practices are just "optional" and that the child would be better off with extra sleep, then the chances are very good that the child will lack commitment, have little success, then lose interest in swimming. Support your child's interest in swimming by being positively interested.

Allow your swimmer to be resilient. Failure, and facing that failure, doesn't cause kids to melt. Failure isn't such an evil thing that parents should try to shield their kids from it. Allow them to fail, and then teach them to get up off the canvas and try harder to succeed the next time. If parents are continually sheltering their swimmers from the storm, cushioning every fall, making excuses for them, finding someone else to blame, the children never learn anything. Even worse, they never learn that they are responsible both for their failures and for their successes. Allow them to stand on their own, and you will be helping them immeasurably down the road.

Teach them to dream big-a world of infinite possibilities. If you try to temper your child's dreams, if you teach her to settle for the ordinary, you may indeed save her from many a heartache and many a failure. But you also rob her of the opportunity of achieving great things, and the opportunity to plumb her depths and realize her potential. Winning big means failing many times along the way. Each failure hurts, but these temporary setbacks create the strength for the final push. Instead of having children avoid failure by never taking risks, teach them how to think correctly about failing: risk-taking and failure are necessary for improvement, development, motivation, feedback, and long-term success.

What success is. Only one swimmer can win the race. Often in the younger age groups, the winner will be the one who has bloomed early, not necessarily the swimmer with the most talent or the most potential to succeed in senior swimming. It is expected that every parent wants his child to succeed, wants his child to have a good and learning and valuable experience with swimming. Every child can succeed only make sure you define success correctly: being the best you can be, striving for improvement in every aspect of swimming. That leads to lasting success. And lasting enjoyment.

Fun, Fun, Fun. If "fun" means mindless entertainment and sensory bombardment, then wasting hours playing Nintendo is loads of fun, and swimming is by definition "not fun." If "fun" means working hard and challenging yourself, taking pride in accomplishing difficult goals, and

discovering talents you didn't know you had, then swimming is fun and Nintendo by definition is "not fun." The meaning of fun is very much an open question for children and one where parents can coaches have much influence over their charges. Are we building a nation of energized achievers or lifeless couch potatoes?

Work, Work, Work. Persistence and work ethic are the most important qualities leading to success in swimming and everything else. And if a work ethic is not created and cultivated when a swimmer is young, it very likely will never appear. It is so rare as not to be an option that a kid who is a slacker from ages seven to fourteen will suddenly change his spots and become a hard worker. Love for and pride in hard work **must** be developed early on, and again parents and coaches have much influence in creating this attitude.

Burnout is over-rated. So many times parents and kids will say, "I don't want to commit to swimming because I don't want to get burned out." But for every one case of "burnout" caused by a swimmer's spending too much time in the water and working too hard, we will see a hundred cases of "pre-emptive burnout": in order not to be burned out, the swimmer comes to practice only when she feels like it, doesn't work out very hard, skips team meets with regularity, and generally makes no commitment to the program or to the sport. Not surprisingly, the swimmer swims slow, makes little or no improvement, and sees her formerly slower competitors whiz right by her. Then we wonder why she "just can't get jazzed about swimming."

Sitting on the fence and remaining lukewarm on principle has nothing to recommend it. Discipline and commitment are good things, not things we should downplay, hide, apologize for, or –worst of all- stop demanding because it may be unpopular. If you want to enjoy swimming even more, commit more of yourself and swim fast! You do not become excited about an activity you don't do well at.

Home and pool must dovetail. Traits of discipline, respect, high expectations, and commitment at home directly relate to the child's characteristics at practices and meets. This is yet another area where family support is crucial to the success of the swimmer. Parents should review, carefully the Credo and other formative memos about the values the team espouses. If the current at home is flowing in the opposite direction from the current at the pool, there will be big problems. If the family does not buy into the program they will be very unhappy here.