

SWIM PARENTS

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Swimming Is An Investment

With time at a premium in the two-career family, many parents are now asking "Is it the sacrifice and expense of joining an age group program worth it?" Here are some thoughts on why it is from Coach Cindy Anderson, head age group coach of the Reno Aquatic Club in Reno, Nevada.

"Age group swimming is much more than just swimming back and forth, day in and day out - the occasional swim meet and winning ribbon. Of course the swimmer gains from the physical activity of swimming, by becoming more fit...and there is involvement in an after-school activity at a time when working parents can't be with their kids. But age group swimming is an investment in the health, fitness, and overall growth and development of the youngster.

From the physical standpoint, swimming helps improve cardiovascular fitness, strength, flexibility, and neuromuscular coordination. In addition, swimming is a lifelong fitness activity that is relatively easy to pursue, low in injury risk, and helps reduce stress. It can be enjoyed recreationally long after it has ceased competitively.

Beyond the physical benefits, swimming in both practice and meets contributes greatly to the psychological and emotional development of the young athlete. As an activity, swimming requires the development of specific and complex motor patterns.

Swimming well requires not only hard physical work, but also intelligent application of learned skills and the ability to THINK while performing. From concentration on performing stroke skills correctly to executing race strategies, the athlete learns early to concentrate and perform under pressure. In addition nutrition education is an ongoing and essential part of the athlete's overall development and success.

Age group swimming also requires consistent dedication, discipline and long-term commitment to goals, learning the habit of persistent application of lifestyle adaptations for goal achievement. Young

swimmers also learn to accept success and failure with equal grace. In life as in swimming, one often fails several times on the way to a success, and it is an essential and difficult life-lesson to learn. The ups and downs of competition and training expose the young athlete to the realities of success and failure and force them to deal with the living experience.

Age group swimming, both directly and indirectly, teaches the athlete to develop: goal-setting strategies, time management skills, relaxation and imagery techniques, positive attitudes, and generally enhances the athletes overall self-image. Competitive swimming is both social and fun, and by virtue of the athletic nature of the activity, reinforces positive social values and beliefs. Athletes are taught to value their hard work in training and steer clear of drug and alcohol abuses.

To be an athlete is a very special and wonderful thing. To be a competitive swimmer is special, wonderful, and difficult; but the benefits of the persistent dedication and application of efforts, along with the benefits of facing and dealing with the emotional and psychological experiences associated with the demands of training and competing for success, are well worth whatever personal and/or financial investments are required. Age group swimming is much more than it first appears.