

THE SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR THE NEW SWIMMING PARENT

Congratulations! You just joined a swim team. The following are some observations from a former new swimming parent. With luck, some of these musings might make some sense.

Necessary Stuff: Suit and Goggles

The basic items needed are a **racing suit** and a pair of **competition goggles**. Going to your local spoiling goods store or paying the equivalent per inch of fabric as Tokyo real estate for a first suit is not the way to start. Your team usually will sell you a team suit at cost, or you can check out invitational meets where vendors are set up with reasonable prices. Also, don't be afraid to ask a returning parent - they are a source of good tips.

It's best to have two suits. One to wear at practice and one to wear at meets. The practice suit will get worn out and become slow, but the meet suit will stay snug and fast. When the meet suit wears out, it can be used as the practice suit.

You must have goggles for practice and meets! Two or three pairs are important because they tend to break at the wrong time.

Goggles protect the eyes from chlorine and help your child see underwater. There are many types and styles. It tends to be a matter of personal choice. The longest lasting goggles are those with rubber-like gaskets. A good pair has soft gaskets that conform around the eye sockets. "Swedish" style goggles (a hard plastic goggle that sits inside the eye socket) are not recommended for beginners. For first time swimmers who have difficulty with rubber gaskets, a pair with foam gaskets might work. Anti-Fog goggles have a coating that reduce fogging. The coating degrades with time, but your child will have lost his goggles way before then. For those goggles without the coating try dipping them in water or applying a little saliva before putting them on.

Other Stuff

Get a **swim cap** for long hair, a swim bag and chlorine shampoo. A latex cap is the cheapest though the most difficult to put on for the new swimmer. A lycra cap is softer and easier to use. A silicon cap is easy to pull on and gives more protection than a latex cap, but is much more expensive than either the latex . **Swim bags** have lots of mesh compartments to separate the wet from the dry items. **Chlorine shampoo** helps to remove the chlorine from your swimmer when their hair starts to look like Tina Turner's and they begin to smell like a swamp creature. Using it on suits also helps.

The First Meet

Start with a swim bag the size of your child, stuff it with everything you normally would take to practice and then double this. Also include warm clothing for your child. Pack light snacks and drinks for your swimmer. Your coach will probably have more to say about eating on the day of a meet. Don't forget a change of clothing for yourself, indoor pools can be extremely warm. Arrive 15 minutes before warm-up to allow time to change and find a home base. Give yourself plenty of time and take a map.

If you have non-swimming brothers and sisters going, pack some creative fun things for them. Remember a pool can be a dangerous place, so keep an eye on them at all times. Don't forget snacks. Otherwise, after numerous trips to the snack bar for candy, you will have to detox your child after the meet.

Still There?

Can't stop without a message. Good sportsmanship starts with you; cheer your child and your team. Remember that improvement and personal accomplishments are more important than winning.

Parents' Role

Competitive swimming programs provide many benefits to young athletes. They develop self-discipline, good sportsmanship and time management skills. Competition allows the swimmer to experience success and to learn how to deal with defeat, while becoming healthy and physically fit.

As a parent, your major responsibility is to provide a stable, loving and supportive environment. This positive environment will encourage your child to continue. Show your interest by ensuring your child's attendance at practices, and by coming to meets.

Parents are not participants on their child's team, but contribute to the success experienced by the child and his/her team. Parents serve as role models and their attitudes are often emulated by their children. Be aware of this and strive to be positive models. Most importantly, show good sportsmanship at all times toward coaches, officials, opponents and teammates.

Be Enthusiastic and Supportive

Remember that your child is the swimmer. Children need to establish their own goals, and make their own progress towards them. Be careful not to impose your own standards and goals.

Do not over-burden your child with winning or achieving best times. The most important part of your child's swimming experience is that he/she learns about himself/herself while enjoying the sport. This healthy environment encourages learning and fun which will develop a positive self-image within your child.

Let the Coach Coach

The best way to help a child achieve his/her goals and reduce the natural fear of failure is through positive reinforcement. No one likes to make a mistake. If your child does make one, remember that he/she is still learning. Encourage his/her efforts and point out the things he did well. As long as he gave his best effort, you should make him/her feel like a winner.

Ten Commandments for Parents with Athletic Children

1. Make sure your child knows that, win or lose, scared or heroic, you love him/her, appreciate his/her efforts, and are not disappointed in him/her. This will allow him to do his best without fear of failure. Be the person in his or her life he can look to for constant positive reinforcement.
2. Try your best to be completely honest about your child's athletic ability, his competitive attitude, his/her sportsmanship and his/her actual skill level.
3. Be helpful but don't coach you child on the way to the pool or on the way back, or at breakfast, and so on. It's tough not to, but it's a lot tougher for the child to be inundated with advice, pep talks, and often critical instruction.
4. Teach you child to enjoy the thrill of competition, to be "out there trying," to be working to improve his/her skills and attitude. Help your child to develop the feel f or competing, for trying hard, for having fun.
5. Try not to re-live your athletic life through your child in a way that creates pressure; you fumbled, too, you lost as well as won. You were frightened, you backed off at times, and you were not always heroic. Don't pressure him/her because of your lost pride.
6. Don't compete with the coach. If the coach becomes an authority figure, it will run from enchantment to disenchantment, etc. with your athletes.
7. Don't compare the skill, courage, or attitudes of your child with other members of the team, at least not within his/her hearing.
8. Get to know the coach so that you can be assured that his/her philosophy, attitudes, ethics and knowledge are such that you are happy to have your child under his/her leadership.
9. Always remember that children tend to exaggerate, both when praised and when criticized. Temper your reaction and investigate before over-reacting.
10. Make a point of understanding courage, and the fact that it is relative. Some of us can climb mountains, and are afraid to fight. Some of us will fight, but turn to jelly if a bee approaches. Everyone is frightened in certain areas. Explain that courage is not the absence of fear, but a means of doing something in spite of fear or discomfort. The job of a parent of an athletic child is a tough one, and it takes a lot of effort to do it well. It is worth all the effort when you hear your youngster say, "My parents really helped."

THE OFFICIALS

Officials are present at all competitions to implement the technical rule of swimming and to ensure that the competition is fair and equitable. Officials attend clinics, pass a written test and work meets before being certified. All parents are encouraged to get involved with some form of officiating.

Timers — operate timing devices (watches or automatic timing systems) and record the official time for the swimmer in his lane.

Turn Judges — observe from each end of the pool and ensure that the turns and finishes comply with the rules applicable to each stroke.

Stroke Judges - observe from both sides of the pool, walking abreast of the swimmers, to ensure that the rules relating to each stroke are being followed. The positions of Stroke Judge and Turn Judge may be combined into one position called the Stroke and Turn Judge.

Relay Takeoff Judges - stand beside the starting blocks to observe the relay exchange, ensuring that the feet of the departing swimmer have not lost contact with the block before the incoming swimmer touches the end of the pool.

Clerk of the Course — arranges the swimmers in their proper heats and lanes.

Starter — assumes control of the swimmers from the Referee, directs them to "take your mark" and sees that no swimmer is in motion prior to giving the start signal.

Referee — has overall authority and control of the competition, ensuring that all the rules are followed; assigns and instructs all officials, and decides all questions relating to the conduct of the meet.

If your child is disqualified (DQ'd) in an event, be supportive rather than critical. For beginning swimmers, a disqualification should be treated as a learning experience, not as punishment. A DQ alerts the swimmer and the coach to what portions of the swimmer's stroke need to be corrected. They should be considered in the same light as an incorrect answer in schoolwork. They point out areas which need further practice. The DQ is necessary to keep the competition fair and equitable for all other competitors. A supportive attitude on the part of the official, the coach, and the parent can also keep it a positive experience for the DQ'd swimmer.