

A WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT FOR PARENTS AND SWIMMERS

Competitive swimming is a whole new world, with a language of its own which comes in time with experience and exposure. Patience and perseverance, more than anything else, are two of the most important traits both competitive swimmers and their parents need to develop.

It takes time to build the stamina necessary for sustained speed in races. It takes time to acquire the stroke and turn skills essential for speed. This means lots of daily repetitive practice before a new swimmer should even be thinking about entering meets. It also means new swimmers may become unnecessarily discouraged.

Any child can learn to be a good competitive swimmer given time and determination. The fact that this process is usually a slow one can be very frustrating if, at the offset, parental and swimmer expectations are unrealistically high. Even the best swimmers inevitably reach time plateaus that can last for months. They and their parents have to grit their teeth and just hang on when this occurs. So the best way you can help your swimmer succeed is for the whole family to acquire both of those "P" traits--patience and perseverance.

Parents should avoid trying to "coach" their children. Encourage them to do their best, congratulate them when they do well, and console them when they do not. Leave the technical work to the "pro." It will help make swimming an enjoyable family activity.

Another important thing to keep in mind is that swimmers at the beginning are competing not so much against other swimmers as they are against their own times. Thus if 9 year old Susie goes from a 47.6 in the 50 yd free to 38.9, this is a cause for real rejoicing, even if she hasn't gotten an "A" time or won a ribbon. And, if 12 year old Billy chops three seconds off his 100 yd butterfly, that, too, is cause for pride.

One of the easiest, but most deadly traps parents new to competitive swimming fall into is that of encouraging their child to beat another teammate, i.e., setting up Susie against Sally. This creates team divisiveness and causes interpersonal problems between teammates. Susie should be setting herself up against her own times and Sally against hers. With an emphasis on individual time improvement, every swimmer can be successful. After awhile you would be surprised how naturally a friendly rivalry will spring up between the girls. They're all out to win or place but they remain friendly and supportive despite their competition, and that's the way it should be. Most parents are aware of progress made by other team members and are genuinely pleased when another child's efforts have been rewarded by a sudden burst forward.

Swimming is fun and well worth the effort for most kids. Team members have great rapport and esprit de corps and they are proud of the fact that swimming keeps them in top physical condition the year round. The discipline of daily practice cements a pretty firm bond.

If you have any questions, remember that the coaches, team admin, other "seasoned" parents and officers of the Council are all willing to speak with you.