

Ten Commandments for Parents of Child-Athletes
Or
SUSA Guide to Parenting Young Swimmers

The “parent job” of a child-athlete is a tough one, and it takes a lot of effort to do it well. We feel strongly that a swimmer will do his best when a healthy relationship exists between parent, coach, athlete and peer group.

Here are a few guidelines to help you:

1. Make sure your child knows that, win or lose, scared or heroic, you love him, appreciate his efforts, and are not disappointed in him. This will allow him to do his best without fear or failure. Be the person in his life that he can look to for consistent positive reinforcement.
2. Try your best to be completely honest about your child’s athletic ability, her competitive attitude, her sportsmanship and her actual skill.
3. Be helpful -- but don’t coach your child on the way to the pool or on the way back, 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 your child to enjoy the thrill of competition, to be “out there trying,” to be working to improve his skills and attitude. Help your child develop the feel for competing, for trying hard and for having fun doing it.
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 her because of your lost pride.
6. Don’t compete with the coach. The coach-athlete relationship is like any human relationship. It will have its ups and downs and run from enchantment to disenchantment.
7. Don’t compare the skill, courage or attitudes of your child with other members of the team (at least not in front of him).
8. Get to know the coach so that you can be assured that his/her attitudes, ethics are in accordance with yours, and that his/her knowledge is such that you are happy to have your child under his/her leadership. Your child will spend a great deal of time with this person in her formative years.
9. Always remember that children tend to exaggerate, both when praised and when criticized. Temper your reaction and investigate before reacting to a situation.
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 will fight but turn to jelly at the sight of a bee. Everyone is frightened in certain areas. Explain that courage is not the absence of fear; it is doing something in spite of feeling fear or discomfort.