

The Ten Commandments For Parents of Athletic Children

Reprinted from The Young Athlete by Bill Burgess included in "The Swim Parents Newsletter"

I. Make sure your child knows that win or lose, scared or heroic, you love him/her, appreciate their efforts, and are not disappointed in them. This will allow them to do their best without a fear of failure. Be the person in their life they can look to for constant positive reinforcement.

II. Try your best to be completely honest about your child's athletic ability, his/hers competitive attitude, their sportsmanship, and their actual skill level.

III. Be helpful, but don't coach him/her 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.

IV. Teach them to enjoy the thrill of competition, to be "out there trying," to be working to improve his/her swimming skills and attitudes. Help him/her to develop the feel for competing, for trying hard, for having fun.

V. Try not to relive your athletic life through your child in a way that creates pressure; you lost as well as won. You were frightened, you backed off at times, you were not always heroic. Don't pressure your child because of your pride. Athletic children need their parents so you must not withdraw. Just remember there is a thinking, feeling, sensitive free spirit out there in that uniform who needs a lot of understanding, especially when his/her world turns bad. If he/she is comfortable with you-win or lose- he/she is on their way to maximum achievement and enjoyment.

VI. Don't compete with the coach. If the coach becomes an authority figure, it will run from enchantment to disenchantment, etc..., with your athlete.

VII. Don't compare the skill, courage, or attitudes of your child with other members of the team, at least within his/her hearing.

VIII. 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.

IX. Always remember that children tend to exaggerate both when praised and when criticized. Temper your reaction and investigate before over-reacting.

X. 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 of discomfort.