

"The Ten Commandments for Swimming Parents" Adapted by Rose Snyder

1. Thou shalt not impose ambitions on thy child.
 - Remember that swimming is the child's activity. The child will progress at his own speed. Nothing is worse than a parent forcing a child to do something he does not want to do. This nice thing about swimming is each person can strive to do his or her personal best. It doesn't matter whether they come in first or last, they can all improve themselves.
2. Thou shalt be supportive no matter what.
 - There is only one question to ask the child "Did you have fun"? If meets and practices aren't fun, the child should not be forced to participate.
3. Thou shalt not coach your child.
 - You have taken your child to a professional coach; do not undermine that coach by trying to coach your child on the side. Your job is to support, love and hug your child no matter what. The coach is responsible for the technical part of the job. You should not offer advice on technique or race strategy. That is not your area. This will only serve to confuse your child and prevent that swimmer/coach bond from forming.
4. Thou shalt only have positive things to say at a swimming meet.
 - If you are going to show up at swimming meet, you should cheer and applaud, but never criticize your child or the coach.
5. Thou shalt acknowledge thy child's fears.
 - It is totally appropriate for a child to be scared to death at his first swimming meet, or her first 500 free, or 200 IM. Don't yell or belittle, just assure your child that the coach would not have put her in that event if she did not feel she were ready.
6. Thou shalt not criticize the officials or coaches.
 - If you do not have the time or the desire to volunteer as an official, don't criticize those who are doing the best they can.
7. The bond between coach and swimmer is a special one, and one that contributes to your child's success as well as fun. Do not criticize the coach in the presence of your child; it will only serve to hurt your child's swimming.
8. Thou shalt not jump from team to team.
 - The water is always bluer at the other team's pool. This is not necessarily true. Every team has its own internal problems, even teams that build champions. Children who switch from team to team are often ostracized by the teammates they leave behind for a long, long time. Often swimmers who do switch teams never do better than they did before they sought the bluer water.

9. Thou shalt have goals besides winning.
 - Encourage your child to do her best. Giving an honest effort no matter what the outcome is much more important than winning. One Olympian said, "My goal was to set a World Record. Well, I did that, but someone else did it too, just a little faster than I did. I achieved my goal and I lost. This does not make me a failure, in fact, I was very proud of that swim".
10. Thou shalt not expect thy child to become an Olympian.
 - There are 225,000 athletes in United States Swimming. There are only 52 spots available for the Olympic Team every four years. Your child's odds of becoming an Olympian are 1 in about 4,300. Swimming is much more than just the Olympics. Ask your coach why he coaches, chances are, he was not an Olympian, but still got enough out of swimming that he wants to pass that love for the sport on to others. Swimming teaches self-discipline and sportsmanship; it builds self-esteem and fitness; it provides lifelong friendships and much more. Most Olympians will tell you that these intangibles far outweigh any medal they may have won. Swimming just builds good people and you should be happy your child wants to participate.

Role of Parents in Swimming Success

Hints on Helping Your Swimmer Be More Successful

BE SUPPORTIVE. Both the swimmer and coach are likely to have a list of criticisms for performance, no matter how good it might have been, so what the swimmer needs is love and support. On the other hand, don't try to provide excuses for poor performances. As mentioned above, most athletes try to give their best performances in every competition, but sometimes the results are disappointing. When that happens, the less said, the better. The old adage, "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all," would probably be a good one to follow. A swimmer is generally quite perceptive about performances, and is, after all, the only one who really knows how much effort went into it. The parent and the coach only know what it looked like.

AVOID PRESSURING THE SWIMMER. The swimmer already has enough problems: trying to go fast, keep the start, stroke and turns legal; execute proper technique; impress teammates, friends and/or enemies; place; improve a time; score points; please the coach; please himself and so on. Don't add additional pressure. Most athletes at all levels are already trying to reach their best performances in every competition, and do not really need parents to remind them to do their best.

AVOID CRITICISM OF THE COACH IN FRONT OF THE SWIMMER. The role of the coach is to provide a progressive training situation in which the swimmer can develop skills and speed. Placing the obstacle of criticism between coach and

swimmer creates an additional pressure on the swimmer, which can further impair performances. The swimmer needs to trust the coach in order to get the most benefit. **The best bet if the parent doesn't like what the coach is doing is to make an appointment to discuss the situation.** If unable to talk with the coach, then perhaps try a different approach.

LET THE COACH COACH. Regardless of how much the parent may know about swimming, the coach is employed to coach the child. Parents are paying someone else to do it, so let the coach do it. The child needs a parent; he already has a coach. When the child is swimming is the time to be coached. When he is out of the water, he needs your support. Keep remembering how difficult it is just to grow up, and then figure how much added pressure there is in a competitive sport. Help your swimmer by not being the source of more pressure.

REMEMBER THAT SWIMMING SHOULD BE FUN. As long as kids enjoy swimming, they will have a healthy, productive activity in which to be involved. When swimming becomes a negative experience, the swimmer is likely to want to stop. All athletes need motivation to attain their ultimate goals. When a swimmer fails to reach a goal, encourage him to keep on trying, rather than get discouraged by being shown a parent's disappointment. When a goal is achieved, let him know how proud you are and stress the fun aspect of the sport.

WHOSE GOALS ARE THEY? The swimmer's performance is not a reflection on the parents. (Manners may be, but not swimming.) Don't let ego be caught up in the reaction to the child's swims. If the swimmer eventually reaches national or international prominence, it will be because of hard work, not because parents wanted the vicarious success.

BE ENTHUSIASTIC AND SUPPORTIVE. Remember that the child is the swimmer. Children need to establish their own goals, and make their own progress towards them. Be careful not to impose standards and goals. Do not over burden the child with winning or achieving best times. The most important part of the child's swimming experience is to learn about himself while enjoying the sport. This healthy environment encourages learning and fun that will develop a positive self-image within the child.

PHYSICAL GROWTH AND MATURATION

During childhood kids grow on average 2.5 inches in a year and gain five pounds per year. Athletes of the same chronological age can vary by as much as five years in biological maturation! So, with two 13 year old swimmers, biologically one may be 10 years and the other 16 years - - what a huge difference.

Girls generally reach peak growth around 11-13 years old, and boys generally reach peak growth around 13-15 years old. Hormonal changes in males and females cause different and often drastic changes in body composition. Once a child reaches puberty, scientists and coaches feel more serious training can begin. This can be a

particularly frustrating time for swimmers. During this transition from age group to senior swimming and from childhood to young adulthood, an athlete may experience a plateau in performance. Best times can be few and far between, while training commitments increase, requiring more time and dedication. Hopefully the coaches have prepared swimmers for this change, but many parents and swimmers may begin to question whether a swimmer's career is over at this point. It most certainly is not. Male and female swimmers continue to improve through the college years and beyond. It is critical that parents and coaches be cooperative and very supportive during this period of adjustment, realizing that it will pass and the rewards will be even better.