



Guidelines for Swimming Parents

Swimming parents all have one thing in common – they want the best for their children. Your child's swimming experience should be an enjoyable one, which builds confidence and self-esteem. Your involvement is vital to this experience, and can be enhanced by observing the following guidelines:

1. The Parent/Athlete/Coach Team

Each person within this 'team' has a specific role to play. Overlapping the roles becomes confusing and often detrimental to the swimmer.

- The parent provides emotional and practical support for the athlete.
- The coach provides technical expertise, and motivation in the form of structure, vision and challenge.
- The athlete brings the raw material and the desire to succeed.

Allow the coach to do the job you pay them to do. Realise what is being done with your child now is part of a plan for the long-term development of your child's swimming career.

Swimming is something your child chooses to do

- There is nothing heavier than great potential' – avoid putting expectations on your children (even in the form of 'motivation').
- Separate your child's achievements from their value as a person (and your value as a parent) – love the person, not the swimmer.
- Measure performances against your child's personal goals.
- Allow your child to take responsibility for their swimming involvement, their 'successes' and their 'failures'.

What can you do?

- You are a role model for your children – your behaviour in the swimming environment never goes unnoticed. Deal with outcomes and experiences in a mature, controlled manner.
- Show your support for your children's choice of sport by becoming involved in the running of the club and of competitions you attend.
- Allow motivation to come from the enjoyment – extrinsic rewards (e.g. payment) are always detrimental in the long run.

2. Parent – Coach Liaison

It is important for coaches and parents to be in regular contact regarding the swimmers progress. All coaches are available to talk with parents – this could be an informal chat following training or you may prefer to contact the coach by phone or arrange a suitable meeting time.



If you have concerns regarding your child's progress or the manner in which your child is being coached then initially you should take up the matter with your child's coach at a mutually convenient time. Please allow a few weeks and dialogue between the two of you to assist the coach to address your concern. If you still have major concerns then you may like to contact Centre Management.

3. Observation of Training

We request that parents wishing to remain at or observe their children training remain on the grandstand side of the pool. It is important that parents are seated beyond eye contact with their children while they are training to avoid distraction by the parent's presence.

4. Swimming for Parents by Gary Barclay

Gary Barclay has written an excellent book for parents of swimmers. More information on the book can be found at [Swimming for Parents](#).

An extract from the Chapter on 'The Swimming Parent' is provided below.

Parents play a very important role in support of their child, particularly if their child chooses to swim competitively. Parents provide transport, clothing, equipment and funding for the athlete. Swimming parents also have the opportunity to develop as an official or donate time towards the club committee or for the club generally. These roles are all a part of being involved in sport.

So, what are the key responsibilities of a parent who has a child who is participating in swimming? To assist you, I have listed a number of these below.

- Ensure that swimmers arrive for their training session on time every time.
- Ensure you arrive and collect your child from training on time every time so that the coach does not have to wait back.
- Ensure swimmers arrive at each session with all their swimming equipment that they have packed!
- Advise your child's coach of any non-attendance at training or a competition due to injury or illness.
- Communicate with your child's coach when your child is ill, unfit or injured.
- Provide your full support to the coaching staff at all times.
- Be polite to all venue staff at each pool your child trains in.
- Do not come onto pool deck during a training session to talk with the coach. Speak to the coach either before or after the session, or better still encourage your child to communicate as much as possible with the coach.
- Do not coach your own child at training or at a competition. This is what the coach is appointed to do.
- Limit telephoning coaches as much as possible and never phone the coach after an afternoon/evening session workout. They need some time to themselves to focus on their own life and are often weary after a training session.



- Be proactive in your support of the Club's committees and their efforts to assist all children in the Club.
- Check your Club's website, emails, newsletters and notice boards for all current information on the Club and its activities.
- Remain aware of the Club's policies including Member Welfare and Child Welfare Policies. These are normally found on your Club's website.
- Promptly pay your child's annual Club membership fee.
- Always pay your squad training fees and any other expenses on time.
- Always ensure your Club has your current contact details.
- Provide unconditional love and support for your child at all times, regardless of performance.

Parenting is the most difficult and challenging job in the world. We need a lot of skills as a parent which no one can really teach us, as every child is an individual and has their own idiosyncrasies. Sometimes, the experience we get at the time is too late.

As parents we are expected to be experts however we are provided with no formal training. Once you have children, you are committed forever. Part of parenting is making mistakes and you can't beat yourself up about any mistakes you make because you will make some.

A small percentage of parents don't know any better and treat their child the same way they were treated when they were young. It is all they know. You still see some parents berating their child after a poor performance or talking to their child prior to a race, providing them with race instructions that conflict with the message being provided by the coach. These mixed messages often lead to poor performances. Some parents may over-train their child by making them do additional sessions away from the team or participating in other dry land training that is not part of the formalised program.

These parents are either doing what they think is right, because they don't know any better or have chosen to increase the pressure on their own child by acting in this way. From my experience an overbearing parent who pushes their child to train and compete without giving thought to the child's own enjoyment and feelings will end up disappointed because it is most likely that their child will walk away from the sport. In many cases this could have been avoided if the parent had sought assistance or taken notice of feedback provided by the coach or parents around them. Their actions also place considerable pressure on their child.

If you are one of these parents, and deep down you will know it, make the change in your attitude and relieve the pressure now for the sake of your child and their enjoyment in the sport.

If you are struggling in a situation, seek some experienced and well-informed assistance. The coach is often a good port of call, especially if they have had experience with the development of teenagers. Other options may be to talk to the experienced Head Coach, a school teacher or counsellor, or parents of swimmers who may be slightly older and you see as well-balanced.



Being a parent of a swimmer can be a fantastic ride, particularly when your son or daughter is happy with their progress and enjoying their involvement in the sport. It can also be very challenging at times, particularly if you have expectations that your child has not met.

Dealing with teenagers is very similar. They are individuals and have their own thoughts on what they should be doing. They are growing to be adults and make decisions on the direction they take forward and that's what we want them to do. There are times however that we don't want them to do some of the things they do, and in many ways, that's our problem. There will be times when teenagers make their own decisions, that we may not agree with and this may lead to disagreements with them.

Swimmers are raised in a very disciplined and regulated environment and this is what many parents like about the sport of swimming. They know where their children are, they are participating in a sport that is healthy and they are being overseen by people with good character and ethics. They are enjoying a sport that also teaches them skills for life.

A bonus for competitive swimmers is the friendships they make and for many of them these friendships last for life.

Many parents see that swimmers, by their involvement in training and competitions, are not as exposed to many of the undesirable things happening in society today. This is another reason why swimming is so attractive to many families. The facts of the matter are that the temptations in life are out there anyway and it is your child's character and ability to make the right choices and not to be influenced adversely by their peers that is important.

Many of the lessons learnt in swimming, if supported appropriately with a child's upbringing will assist in their development and decision making.