**PARENTS ARE IMPORTANT TOO**

**Why a Parent’s Guide?**

Today more children than ever before are taking part in swimming. Some do so just for fun, other children take the sport more seriously and spend many hours every week training to perfect skills and increase fitness. Whatever the level of participation parents play an important role. They are naturally interested and want to help out as much as possible. Indeed, in many cases the support and interest of one or more parents is crucial to a child’s participation.

Some mums and dads help by taking their child to and from training or competition, others by coping with extra washing, irregular meal times and so on. Sometimes though a mother or father can become over involved and inadvertently put pressure on the child to train harder than they may want to, or to win at the expenses of enjoying taking part in galas

Watching your child compete can be an emotionally draining experience. You may however be taking your child’s sport more seriously that he or she is. Most parents of course are only trying to help, but it is important that the young athlete learns to see training and competition not as a threat, but as a healthy, enjoyable challenge. It is very important the child knows that effort as well as success will be rewarded. Over-emphases on winning by one or other parent can result in fear of failure – with your love and respect being seen by your child as contingent upon winning.

It seems that much of the problem may be that parents are not sure how they can best help their child. This guide is aimed at the swimming parents who want to learn to maximise that they as well as their child enjoy their involvement in swimming.

*Remember – your child needs roots to grow – and then wings to fly*

**Some questions**

Before reading on think for a moment about how much your child’s sports means to you. Now gauge your involvement in your son or daughter’s sport by reading through the questions listed below:

* Do you want your child to win competitions more than he or she does?
* Do you show your disappointment if he or she has a poor result?
* Do you feel that you have to “psyche” your child up before a competition?
* Do you feel that your child can only enjoy sport if he or she wins?
* Do you conduct “port mortems” immediately after competitions or training?
* Do you feel that you have to force you child to go training?
* Do you find yourself frequently wanting to interfere during training or competitions think that you could do better?

If you have answered “yes” to any of these questions you may be putting unnecessary pressure on your child, which in turn could very well lead to his or her eventual rejection of the sport or even lasting damage to your parent/child relationship.

The Do’s and Don’ts which follow will help you maximise your contribution to your child’s sport whilst minimising any adverse effects

**How you can Help**

**Some Do’s**

**Do get to know your child’s swimming coach** – after all he or she can play an important role in your child’s general development.

**Do respect the coach’s opinion** – he or she should be more knowledgeable than you – both about swimming and the development of young swimmers

**Do assess your child’s progress** – don’t be afraid to ask the coach what plans or objectives he or she may have for your child. Ask the coach to explain to you the reasons for any decisions you don’t understand or agree with. It is important for your child so that you can assess progress (perhaps every few months)

**Do talk to other parents** – it is often a good idea to get to know other parents so that you can share problems or car-taking duties

**Do establish clear lines of communication** – in case you need to speak to the coach regarding training or a competition find out when it is convenient and appropriate to contact him or her, and the best way of doing so. Don’t ever address a criticism to or of your child or the coach in front of other parents or swimmers

**Do encourage effort as well as results** – don’t assess your child’s progress by how may galas or competitions they may win. It is important to recognise and reward effort.

**Do be generous in your applause** – it is import during competition that you applaud all swimmers efforts. Not only does this set a good example, but it will also reduce the pressure on all competitors.

**Some don’ts**

**Don’t respond to a bad result or mistake with punishment or criticism** – give your child time to work out for him or herself why things went wrong. If they ask your advice, first compliment them for something he or she did right, then give the advice emphasising the positive results if the instruction is followed rather that the negative consequences of a mistake. It is VITAL for a parent to avoid giving the impression that they do not still value a child who loses.

**Don’t turn a blind eye to any bad behaviour, cheating or bad manners by your child** – in such instances reasonably prompt action is appropriate. To do otherwise will infer that you condone such behaviour or at least do not consider personal standards and respect of people and rules important to the sport

**Don’t forget that your child is still growing** – training which may be appropriate for an adult (e.g. prolonged repetitive activities and work with heavy weights) can have adverse long-term effect on the growth and development of a young child.

**Don’t coach from the poolside** – try to encourage your child to think for him or herself. A constant stream of instruction from you many only confuse the child, particularly if it is contrary to that of the coach

**Don’t ignore aches and pains** – children are after reticent to describe sports-related injuries, especially if it means missing training or competition, so keep an eye on persistent grumbles about health: it is important to take injuries seriously. Many injuries can be prevented but if your child does get injured get professional medical advice as soon as possible. You will find that many hospitals now run sports injury clinics, so it advisable to find out where yours is. If your child is taking part in intensive training, it is also advisable to get your GP to give him or her a check-up every year.

**Don’t ignore other children in the family** – sometimes brothers and sisters may feel left out or bored if the whole household revolves around the needs of the young athlete. It is important to try to keep a balance between swimming and the interest of other member of your family.

**Don’t allow the situation to develop where your child is frightened of losing because of the way you respond** – a fear of failure can often result in children feigning injury or avoiding certain galas

**Don’t force a young child to specialise entirely on swimming** – children should be allowed to develop their own preferences. In any case up to the age of 15/16 years a concentrated diet of swimming to the exclusion of all other physical activities, can well produce not only physical injury, but in the long term a declining enthusiasm for the sport.

**Don’t always greet your child with** “did you win?” why not start with did you enjoy it?

**Don’t attend throughout every lesson and every competition** – it is important for your child’ future development in the sport that he or she is trusted to make the correct decisions during either training or competition. This is the first stage in the development of self-motivation and self-reliance. Constant supervision, by the parent can easily result in the young swimmers becoming emotionally, and otherwise over-dependent on your presence and advice.

**Don’t say** “we won” or “we lost” – it is important that you don’t become so involved in your child’s swimming that you find yourself saying “we” won or “we” lost. Remember it is your child who is participating – you are there to support and encourage, not competing.

Providing the child is face with realistic challenges, swimming should be fun at whatever level it is swam. With the right parental support, not only will your child be able to develop his or her athletic potential in an enjoyable rather than a stressful sports environment but you will also be providing him or her with the opportunity to obtain a senses of achievement, competence and self-worth.

**Parental example is so important**

**After all if YOU cannot cope with the ups and downs of your children’s swimming life – how can you expect THEM to?**