



Guidelines for Swimming Parents/ Carers Promoting and supporting positive parental and family involvement

Swimming parents and carers 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 for which the club pays from your monthly fees. Coaches have professional qualifications and experience that take years to build. 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
- 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. Control your emotions.
- 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 found to be unhelpful and detrimental in the long run.

2. Parent – Coach Liaison

- If parents have any questions the squad reps will be able to help with day to day things. If you require a meeting with the squad coach (please see Communication guidelines document) then please email the squad rep and if needed a face to face meeting can be arranged.
- Help the coaches understand your child better and raise any concerns early in a calm manner, so the coaches can act on them.
- The coaches will also contact parents by email if there is any feedback. Once again, a face to face meeting can be arranged at a mutually convenient time if required.
- Work with the coaches to create an enjoyable and safe place for your child to enjoy swimming.

3. Parental responsibility

- Ensure you arrive and collect your child from training on time every time so that the coach does not have to wait.
- Ensure swimmers arrive at each session with all their swimming equipment that they have packed themselves.
- Advise your child's coach via the squad rep of any non-attendance at training or a competition due to injury or illness.
- Communicate with your child's coach via the squad rep 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 contradict coaches' advice or instructions, encourage rule breaking or challenge event or team selection
- Do not come onto the pool deck during a training session to talk with the coach unless invited. 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 and/ or use stopwatches at training or at a competition.
- Help your child cope with winning, losing and injuries.
- Be a good role model with other parents, gossiping can be very damaging, especially if it is directed at coaches.
- Display respect and sporting etiquette to referees, coaches, volunteers and opposition.
- Encourage and support the whole team, while maintaining control of emotions.
- Be proactive in your support of the Club's committees and their efforts to assist the membership.
- Check the club's website, emails, newsletters and notice boards for all current information on the Club and its activities.
- Check the competition calendar and ensure entries are submitted on time.
- Remain aware of the Club's policies including Member Welfare and Child Welfare Policies. These are found on the Club's website.
- Always pay your squad training fees and any other expenses on time.
- Keep the Club updated with your current contact details.
- Provide unconditional love and support for your child at all times, regardless of performance.

4. General Observations With Relation To Performance

For many reasons performances of individuals will vary over a career and within a season. Swimmers performance may plateau, regress or improve. Every swimmer's journey will be different so try not to draw comparisons with other swimmers.

As swimmers go through puberty & growth spurts they may experience changes in mood, confidence, self-esteem, power, flexibility & co-ordination all of which may affect their performances in training and at competitions.

Injuries may have an effect on swimmers performance, in most cases they will be able to continue training, adjustments may be required during the rehabilitation process.

Illness can have an obvious effect on a swimmer's performance. On return to the pool, adjustments may be required to the intensity of work in training to assist the recovery process.

Lack of interest and enthusiasm will also result in waning performances. Often swimmers in this state will not want to take on the responsibility of making the decision to withdraw from training and will develop many reasons as to why they are not swimming well. It is difficult to admit that your heart is no longer in it, or that you may not be able to swim any faster.

5. General observations with relation to mistakes

Mistakes happen. Then what?

Many people involved in club swimming are doing a job that is largely thankless, with many of them being volunteers, such as officials, referees and team managers.

Talk to your children that sometimes people make mistakes and when they do, you may want to point it out to them, but you do it in ways that are generous and constructive and not looking for public humiliation.

You should let your children know that a referee, coach, team manager isn't trying to make a mistake deliberately. You need to be a good role model for your child/ children.

Help your child understand that openness about mistakes is important to be able to fix them and learn from them. In fact, many organisations with high performing cultures see mistakes as opportunities to learn and build stronger relationships. Talk to your child that:

- Mistakes help us to learn
- Mistakes are often part of change
- Mistakes give rise to healthy self-compassion

6. Parental emotional support – quick tips

- **Turn off as a swimming parent.** Don't make swimming the one and only topic of conversation in the car, at the dinner table etc.
- **Praise qualities like effort, hard work and attempting new things.** Don't dwell on the winning. Praising other qualities of the swim will help ease pressure on your child and ensure they are focused on the process rather than the outcome.

- **Encourage good role models.** These are not necessarily based solely on success. Promote people who show values of integrity, humility, honesty and responsibility, as well as good sportsmanship. This will help influence your young swimmer to strive for excellence in the best possible way.
- **Accept that they can't win all the time.** Remind them that they cannot win every time they compete, and as in any sport, it can and will take years to reach their full potential as a swimmer.
- **Don't compare your child's performance against others.** Whether good or bad, a performance needs to be about the child only. Comparing the performance with other swimmers' is likely to lead to an increase in anxiety and stress levels, and this will impact on future performance. Instead try encouraging them to focus on their individual goals and achievements.
- **Support your child to achieve the goals they set.** And make sure you all take time to relax and enjoy any celebration of achievements together. Remember, this is not just winning. It could be any small goal such as technique improvement.
- **Stay calm, positive, dignified, and cheer appropriately.** There's nothing more off-putting and stressful for a swimmer than a crazed parent barking criticism from the balcony. If it were you in the pool how would you feel?
- **Most importantly, allow them to be a kid and have fun.** Yes, they may be good at swimming, but it's a hobby and so the key should be enjoyment. You want your kids to look back at that time with fond memories, not a painful soap opera of drudgery, feelings of uselessness, and being criticised all the time.

5. General advice

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.

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 many life skills. A bonus is the friendships that are made, for many these friendships last a lifetime.

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.

Parents and carers play a vital role in encouraging, enabling and supporting children's participation in swimming.

Age group swimming would not exist without you!