

*Developing true swimming potential through
Excellence, Team Work and Enthusiasm*

Guidance for Parents and Guardians

Children compete in sport for many reasons, including health and fitness, building friendships, and learning new skills. However, the main reason why children take up sport is because it's FUN. It is vitally important that parents never forget that enjoyment goes hand in hand with excellence in sport, not only in the early years.

The unconditional love and support of a parent is an important contributing factor in the development of young athletes in all sports.

Being a good swimming parent requires a bit of training, effort and education.

The behaviour of children up to age 10 is very much a reflection of behaviour taught and accepted by their parents. Successful sports behaviour – commitment to a task, self-discipline, determination, confidence and a work ethic – can be shaped early on by parents, and then developed by parents and coaches.

As a parent your major responsibility is to provide a stable, loving and supportive environment. This environment will encourage your child to continue swimming. Show your interest by facilitating your child's attendance at training, by supporting at meets, by volunteering to help out with the running of the Club and at our Open Meets (see below). Parents contribute to the success of their child and the Club as a whole, and they serve as role models for their children. Your children will emulate you so it's really important that you strive to be positive.

Let the Coach coach:

The best way to help your child achieve goals and reduce the natural fear of failure is through positive reinforcement. No one likes to make mistakes, and if your child makes one remember that this is a learning experience, not a life changing situation. Encourage your child's efforts and point out the positive things. The coach is the one you have entrusted to judge their performance and technique. Your role is to provide support regardless of outcome.

When asked about his world record time, Debbie Phelps, mother of Michael, famously responded, "I'm not sure, 1:50 something?"

While not necessarily advocating a total hands-off approach, parents need to find a healthy balance, and to stand back and let the coach do their job.

Process versus Outcome:

There are two types of goals that swimmers can set:

- Outcome Goals: focus on the end result of performance. "Win, make finals."
- Process Goals: relate to process of performance. "Breathe every 3rd stroke, streamline."

Swimmers have much more control over Process Goals. Outcome Goals are uncontrollable since they also involve the performance of other competitors. Swimmers and coaches, especially at the Age Group level, should concentrate on Process Goals.

The most successful swimmers and their parents have learned to focus on the process and not the outcome. Giving an honest effort regardless of 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. Does this make me a failure? No, in fact I am very proud of that swim." What a tremendous outlook to carry on through life.

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Positive Parenting Tips:

- Love your child unconditionally.
- Support their coach.
- Accept that they cannot win or PB every time they compete.
- Allow them to have fun.
- Help them to develop as a person with character and values.
- Turn off as a sporting parent; don't make sport the only topic of conversation at home.
- Don't do everything for them, teach them responsibility and self-management.
- Don't bribe or offer material rewards.
- Understand development, long-term development as an athlete, and the way individual growth and development impacts performance.
- Don't impose your ambitions on your child; swimming is their activity, not yours. Don't expect them to become an Olympian.
- Emphasize performance and effort, not just outcome.
- Be calm, relaxed and dignified at competitions.
- Provide great nutrition and don't reward championship performances with junk food.
- Don't play the guilt game: "Do you realise how much I've had to give up for your swimming."
- Encourage the occasional down-time, and encourage friendships and activities away from swimming: it's all about balance.
- Show interest in and support for your child's training effort; don't just show up at meets to watch the outcome.
- Get involved in the running of the Club and its meets.
- Don't ever coach your child, whatever your background. You have taken your child to a professional coach, don't undermine them and don't confuse your child.
- Accept the plateau. There will be times when your child does not seem to be improving. This is normal. Encourage focus on learning new skills, having fun, and help them to develop perseverance and patience.
- Don't compare your child with others. Children develop at different rates in terms of size, strength, co-ordination, emotional and intellectual maturity. Measure them only against their best efforts.
- Don't criticise the officials, and never criticise the coach in front of the swimmer.
- Work to form an effective coach-swimmer-parent triangle.
- To maintain good club morale and a positive culture, air any genuine grievances or concerns with the coach or the Management Committee rather than with other parents.

For an entertaining approach to the swimming parent debate, take a look at "Ten Ways for the Swim Parent to Sabotage Their Child's Swimming Career" written by John Leonard, and accessible on The American Swimming Coaches Association Online, www.swimmingcoach.org

Volunteering:

So you think that playing taxi service, getting up at ungodly hours to take your child to morning training, and sacrificing weekends of relaxation, home improvement or trips away for swimming meets in sweaty venues is enough? Not so, your Club needs you!

Parental involvement is crucial to Maxwell Swim Club. Without parent volunteers the Club would simply cease to function. Volunteers are needed on the Management Committee, in a variety of ongoing support roles, and at our Open meets in droves.

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No-one will be asked to do anything they are unqualified for or feel uncomfortable doing. Short training courses are available for some of the poolside roles such as timekeeping, and shadowing experienced volunteers is also a good way to develop skills and help out at the same time. Our Open Meets are ideal development meets for parents to acquire new skills.

As well as helping with the planning and preparation of the meets, there are plenty of backstage roles for those uninterested in or shy of the centre stage, including manning the door or helping to serve refreshments, operating the computer, etc. All of these roles are managed by the Volunteer Co-Coordinator.