

THE SPORT OF SWIMMING

The sport of swimming has many benefits, including the people the parent and child will meet. The camaraderie among swimmers is unique; many swimming buddies become life-long friends. In addition to being around fine people, swimming provides one of the most beneficial forms of exercise for cardiovascular and overall fitness. This exercise can be enjoyed throughout one's entire life. For example, we have had swimmers in their nineties setting "masters" world records.

Possibly the greatest benefits of participating in an organized swim program are the life skills your child will develop. These skills include time management, self discipline and sportsmanship. Your child will reap the benefits of swimming long after his/her participation ends. Most swimmers go on to be very successful and productive adults largely due to what they gained from swimming.

Age group swimming can be fun, exciting and rewarding. Many children improve rapidly and it is not unusual to see big time drops during this phase. Children are learning and growing at a greater rate than any other time in their careers. It is difficult to avoid the tendency to push young athletes at his stage. Although a child of eleven or twelve can handle the physical demands of serious water training, most coaches feel that the workload should not be great until a child reaches puberty. The emphasis should be placed on improving stroke technique. It is strongly recommended that these young athletes participate in other sports during this period. Participating in other sporting activities provides children with a variety and can help prevent "burnout". Many swimmers train for more than ten years during their careers. Swimming, especially at the youngest levels, should be fun and relatively pressure free.

After a child reaches puberty, scientists and coaches feel serious training can begin. This can be a particularly frustrating time for swimmers. During this transition from age group swimming to senior swimming an athlete may experience a plateau or what appears to be a "setback". Chunks of time are no longer being dropped, and the training requires more time and dedication. Many parents begin to question whether a child's swimming career is over at this point. This, coupled with the normal demands of teenage life, causes many swimmers to leave the sport prematurely. It is critical that parents and coaches be very supportive during this period of adjustment, realizing that it will pass. Future performance improvements generally follow.

The above is designed to help you help your child succeed in swimming. Remember, not every swimmer becomes a world record holder, but everyone gains from their swimming experience. Supporting your child in swimming can be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life. You will soon find yourself cheering at competitions, timing during the meets (*the best place to see the meet*) or even going on to become a US Swimming certified official. Whatever your role, your child's experience in swimming has much to do with your positive support. Please ask questions of your coaches, officials and fellow parents, we all have the same goal; to provide the children with the best possible experience in swimming.

The Parents' Role

Competitive swimming allows the swimmer to experience success and to learn how to deal with defeat, while becoming healthy and physically fit. As a parent, your major responsibility is to provide a stable, loving and supportive environment. This positive environment will encourage your child to continue. Show your interest by ensuring your child's attendance at practices and coming to the meets.

Parents are not participants on their child's team but contribute to the success experienced by the child and his/her team. Parents serve as role models and their attitudes are often emulated by their children. Be aware of this and strive to be positive role models by showing good sportsmanship at all times towards coaches, officials, opponents and teammates.

Be enthusiastic and supportive - Remember that your child is the swimmer. Children need to establish their own goals and make their own progress towards them. Be careful not to impose your own standards and goals.

Do not over burden your child with winning or achieving best times. The most important part of your child's swimming experience is that he/she learn about him/herself while enjoying the sport. This healthy environment encourages learning and fun which will develop a positive self-image within your child.

Let the Coach, coach - The best way to help a child achieve his/her goals and reduce the natural fear of failure is through positive reinforcement. No one likes to make a mistake. If your child does make one, remember that he/she is still learning. Encourage his/her efforts and point the things he/she did well. As long as he/she gave their best effort, you should make him/her feel like a winner.