



ADVICE FOR PARENTS

SPORTING PARENTS

Support, Smiles, and Swimming

Wayne Goldsmith

Parents love their children and want nothing but the best for them. Behaviours that others may see as “pushy”, sporting parents see as “lovingly supportive”. What a coach may interpret as “sticking their noses in,” sporting parents see only a genuine interest in their child’s development. This difference in perspective and the difficulty in being able to be objective where their kids are concerned often lead parents into a conflict situation with coaches, other parents, officials and eventually their own children.

I have done hundreds of talks to sporting parents around the world.

Many times parents have approached me after a talk and said “I hear what you say, but you don’t know my child. He is different”.

While every child is indeed an individual, what all children have in common are parents who have high opinions of their child’s ability to do everything.

It starts early—the first day home from the hospital.

“Here is a picture of my baby. He is the most beautiful baby I have ever seen and I am not just saying that because he is mine”.

Then around two years of age:

“My child is much more advanced than the other children – talking and walking before other kids, and I am not just saying that because he is mine”.

Then at school.

“He is well advanced for his age. He can do things that most five year olds can’t. I’m not just saying that because he is my son”.

Then naturally at sport.

“He is the best backstroke swimmer in the district. He really is. I’m not just saying that because he is my son”.

The swimming parent is merely extending their natural feelings of love and support for their child into the sporting environment.

This article aims to help parents of young swimmers (and the coaches who have to manage those parents) deal with some of the critical issues in sport and parenting.

Five things all parents have in common

- They love their children
- They want the best for their children

- They are incapable of being objective about their children

- They believe there is something special or unique about their children (that no one else can see)

- They don’t believe me when I tell them every parent has the first four things in common

Things aren’t what they used to be and they never were.

Kids today are different (but so were we).

- They want it all
- They want it now
- They want it to be fun
- If they can’t have it all, have it now and if it is not fun they don’t want it.

Kids don’t care how much you know, they want to know how much you care.

Why swimming sometimes struggles!

Swimming is often seen as focusing on traditional values of dedication, work ethic, commitment, team work, learning to deal with adversity and pressure.

These values are (unfortunately) out of step with many of the “fast food” attitudes of today’s kids.

Why are swimming coaches in the “firing line”?

The three most important things to a parent are their:

- KIDS
- TIME
- MONEY

In other words they give coaches MONEY to coach their KIDS at inconvenient TIMES!!!!!! No wonder it is often a volatile environment.

The Swimming Coaches Dilemma

The challenge for all of us is to use swimming to teach and enhance the traditional values which apply to all people in all walks of life, but. . . .encourage kids to take part in swimming and “sell” swimming in a way

which appeals to their world – where entertainment is as important as education.

Education of parents is the key!

Swimming clubs and coaches should schedule time to hold parent education sessions on a regular basis to inform and educate parents about the key elements and philosophies of their program. Success comes when:

The vision of the coach and,

The commitment of the swimmers and,

The support of the parents all come together focused towards achieving a common goal.

Sporting Parents are keen to learn as much as they can to help their kids achieve their sporting goals.

These are the 10 most common questions asked by sporting parents:

1 How many times should a child train each week?

- As many as they can recover from
- As many as their goals determine
- As many as they enjoy
- As many as their coach deems necessary

There is no magic number of sessions that determines success in swimming.

Key comment – It is an individual thing!

2. When should a child specialise in a stroke or event?

There is no such thing as a ten year old champion whatever. This year’s champ is often next year’s chump. As kids grow, change and develop their co-ordination, balance and motor control can all change. This means that a child who may be an outstanding breaststroke swimmer this year, may not be able to swim that stroke well following periods of growth and development.

Key comment: Long Term Athlete Development is the key to success

3. Do swimming kids need a special diet?

No. Unless they have special needs or health issues, eg juvenile onset diabetes.

Providing they eat a balanced diet of carbohydrates, proteins and fats, drink plenty of water, minimise processed foods and take aways and decrease their intake of sugar and salt, generally sporting kids do not need special diets.

The important issue is to encourage young swimmers to develop eating practices which become lifetime healthy lifestyle habits.

Importantly, kids should be educated on the key elements of a healthy, nutritious diet (i.e. low on salt, low on saturated fat, low on processed sugars) as early as possible.

Parents are often tempted to try short cuts like buying muscle building powders, high protein sports drinks and glucose tablets to help their child achieve their swimming goals. It must be said that none of these products are likely to make a difference to the child’s swimming and taking them may even



be counter productive.

Key comment: *Vitamins and minerals do not make champions.*

4. How do kids balance school and swimming?

School comes first. *No Brainer!*

Swimming kids usually are high achievers and good students as they learn time management skills, dealing with stress, team building, communication skills and other important skills.

Key comment: *School and swimming do mix.*

5. When should my kids start strength training?

Does not matter what age, depends on what they do.

Body weight exercises and light exercise with perfect technique are ok at most ages. Where young swimmers (and parents) get into trouble is when they start lifting heavy weights too early and with poor technique.

Weight training is a great way to get strong and help develop the power to swim fast in senior competition. However, the introduction of weight training should be systematic and done progressively with the development of perfect lifting techniques being the most important part of the process.

Key comment: *Technique before tonnes!*

6. What types of exercise are best for young (i.e. pre teen) athletes?

6-12 is the perfect time to learn techniques and skills — the foundations of sporting success in later years.

It is the perfect time for swimmer to learn and master their A — B — C' S (Agility, Balance, Co-ordination and Speed).

When a child attends school, they learn basic arithmetic, then progress to equations and eventually

to calculus.

The basics of swimming—dives, starts, turns, finishes, perfect techniques should all be learnt, refined and mastered by the young swimmer before they start the process of physical maturation.

Key comment: *Patience is a true virtue.*

7. How do I chose a good coach for my child?

Qualifications, experience and coaching record are all important when selecting a coach for the young swimmer. Younger coaches who may lack coaching experience but who have an infectious enthusiasm for the sport and a passion to succeed may also be a good option.

However, they key question for parents to ask is:

Can the coach provide a safe, ethical, positive, skills based, stimulating training environment?

The reality for most parents is that they will choose the coach who is best situated on their afternoon "drop off circuit," i.e. mum drops Julie to swimming, Billy to piano and Johnny to football, then goes back to pick up Julie to take her to netball etc etc.

Key comment: *Does your child like the coach and do you have faith in the coach—enough to give them 100% support.*

8. What are the common characteristics of champion athletes?

- Confidence / self esteem / self belief
- The ability to deal with tough times and adversity
- A love of what they are doing
- A positive attitude
- Strong core values: courage, discipline, humility, sincerity, honesty — these things make an impact on their playing career and their lives.

Key comment: *Champion athletes are champion people first.*

9. What can I do to help my child achieve

their swimming goals?

- Be patient with progress.
- Be tolerant of mistakes and poor performances.
- Be calm and dignified at swim meets.
- Learn to accept wins or losses graciously.
- Allow (the athletes) plenty of breathing space.
- Offer praise with success.
- Encourage involvement in other pursuits.
- Encourage independence and self-sufficiency.
- Above all, keep swimming in perspective.
- Be supportive rather than intrusive.

Key comment: *Love them.*

10. How can I tell if my child is doing too much?

- Tired all the time. Generally lethargic.
- Irritable, quiet, moody — maybe even sad
- Little illness or health issue that doesn't seem to go away.
- Doesn't sleep well.
- Social problems with school, friends and or family.

Key comment: *Just like you when you are tired!*

Summary

In this century, swimming can provide an opportunity for kids to learn important social and personal skills that they may not be able to learn in any other institution.

Health, fitness, movement and activity are life long habits and habits for a long life.

Kids don't care how much you know, they want to know how much you care. Coaches and parents play a vital role in the development of every swimmer.

The single most important thing parents can give their kids is unconditional love and support and the single most important thing coaches can give parents is education on how to be a better swimming parent.



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