

## **Letting Your Swimmer Take Ownership: 7 Tips for Swim Parents**

Parents can serve as a helpful and encouraging support system when it comes to their son or daughter's swimming, or they can be their greatest obstacle to success in the sport. Make sure you're in the former category by giving your swimmer the space to succeed on their own terms. Check out these 7 tips for swim parents on letting your son or daughter take ownership of their swimming:

### **Leave the coaching to your swimmer's coach**

The role of a parent and the role of a coach are very distinct. Coaches are experienced and knowledgeable when it comes to swimming, and the truth is most parents are not. Make sure you're not one of those arrogant parents who believe they know better than their swimmer's coach.

While you should absolutely support your swimmer and even offer them gentle guidance at times, do not sit in the stands with a clipboard and stopwatch waiting to give your swimmer a post-race debrief after they're done talking to their real coach. You'll most likely give poor and even contradictory advice, which will only trouble your swimmer and cause animosity.

### **Give them encouragement, but don't burden them**

It's a great idea to give your swimmer support and encouragement. Tell them you enjoy watching them swim. Praise their efforts and comfort them when they have a bad swim.

Just make sure your encouragement doesn't cross the line and become a burden for your swimmer. You need to keep a level head and avoid tying your emotions to your swimmer's performances. If you put the weight of your own happiness on your swimmer's shoulders, they will begin to fear your anger or sadness if they don't swim well, and will feel an enormous amount of pressure for all the wrong reasons.

Encourage your swimmer, but don't let your emotions get too involved in their sport.

### **Have reasonable expectations**

Too many parents expect perfection from their swimmer. If you overestimate how much ability your swimmer has, they will most likely feel like a failure when they don't live up to your unreasonable expectations.

Everyone makes mistakes, and you should expect the same from your swimmer. You need to give them room to fail and they'll come back stronger and more determined. Every mistake is a learning experience.

Also, avoid comparing your swimmer to their teammates or competitors. If you only ever focus on times and obsess over their improvement, you'll crush their motivation. Make sure your expectations are reasonable and do not look for perfection.

### **Don't set goals for them**

It's okay to help guide your swimmer, encourage them, give them confidence by believing in them, and even suggest goal-setting as a valuable tool. However, you should never dictate your expectations or set standards for your swimmer.

If you want your swimmer to qualify for a meet or win a medal, that's your goal and not theirs. Setting goals for your swimmer is damaging to their independence and puts undue pressure on them. They need to have the room to adjust their own expectations and set their own goals in order to thrive in the sport.

### **Let them speak for themselves**

If you're always doing the talking for your swimmer, you will never get an accurate reflection of how they're feeling in the sport at any given time. Your swimmer needs to have the space to talk about swimming without you correcting them, speaking for them, or judging them based on their responses.

When an outsider asks your son or daughter about swimming, give them the floor to speak and reserve your own opinions for a later time. Speaking for them will only result in a loss of independence and control.

### **Don't put a price tag on swimming**

Yes, swimming is a big commitment in terms of both time and money. However, this should never be used as a mechanism for motivation because it will most certainly backfire.

Do not make your swimmer feel guilty or inadequate by telling them how much time or money you've spent on their swimming. The only payoff you can expect for an investment in your son or daughter's swimming is their well-being – not a university scholarship or any other type of monetary reward.

Make sure your incentives are in the right place. Your swimmer will appreciate your time and money without facing the pressure of trying to pay it back.

### **Give them room to breathe**

The pool should be a place where swimmers are free to hang out with their friends, have fun, and work hard toward their own goals. If you are constantly hovering over them, they won't have the space to enjoy the sport on their own terms.

Stay off your swimmer's back and give them the freedom to take ownership of their own swimming. If you're too involved, the sport won't be enjoyable or engaging. Give them room to breathe so that they can learn and grow in a healthy way while working hard toward their own goals!

