

# ***A GUIDE FOR NEW PARENTS***

## ***Meet Etiquette***

1. There are two basic meet formats: timed finals format and prelims/finals format. The format will be specified in the meet announcement. In a timed finals format (most of our meets fall in this category), swimmers are seeded from slowest to fastest for each event with NT swimmers (swimmers who have not swum the event in competition before) swimming first. You swim the event once; your finish is based on your time.
2. In a prelims/finals format, there are one or more sessions of preliminaries during the morning/early afternoon and a finals session in the evening. The fastest swimmers at preliminaries return to swim at night. (There is no additional fee for swimming the event again at finals.) Preliminaries are often seeded a little differently from timed finals meets. The slower heats are seeded normally, but the fastest two or three heats are seeded with the #1 seed in the last heat, the #2 seed in the second-to-last heat, etc. The top seeds therefore end up in middle lanes (preferred) in one of the fastest heats. Regardless of which heat your child swims, the fastest swimmers in preliminaries return to finals. The numbers of swimmers who return is specified in the meet announcement. It is dependent of the number of lanes in the pool (enough swimmers to fill one heat) and whether or not there are one or more consolation finals (a second or third heat of swimmers). For example, a meet could offer eight-lane championship finals for 11-12 and 13-14 swimmers and a consolation final and championship final for 15-18. Those placing first through eighth in prelims in the younger age groups would return. In the 15-18 age group, ninth through sixteenth would swim in consolation finals, and first through eighth would swim in championship finals. The prelims time is used for seeding the swimmers at finals. Where you finish in your finals heat is your place. An interesting note: The top finisher in consolation finals in the above example is in ninth place, even if he/she swims faster than the last place finisher in the championship finals (eighth place). Once a swimmer has made championship finals in this example, he/she is assured of at least eighth place assuming it's a legal swim. You will see the most experienced competitors swimming well enough in preliminaries to make finals but saving their best swims for that evening. If your swimmer is disqualified at finals, they do not place.

3. As you can imagine from the above description, swimming at finals is fun for the swimmers. If you are attending a prelims/finals format meet, you should plan for the possibility that your swimmer will make finals. If you know he/she cannot swim that evening, you should inform the coach in advance. Otherwise, swimmers who make finals are expected to swim. During the prelims sessions, those who are swimming at finals plus a few (usually two) alternates are announced. Unless the swimmer follows the proper "scratch" procedures (see meet announcement and coach for details), finalists and alternates are expected to return for finals. The team is fined if someone who was supposed to swim does not show up. This is a big no-no!! Also, in the prelims/finals format, relays are usually swum during the evening finals session.
4. If you are attending a multi-day and/or prelims/finals meet, be prepared to rest between sessions. Relaxing in a hotel room or spending the afternoon at the movie theater is much better than shopping at the mall.
5. Arrive at least 15 minutes prior to the warm-up time that is posted for your session at the meet. Young swimmers should come ready to swim by being in their suits. Locate a coach and check in. (Not all coaches go to every meet so learn the names of coaches other than your own.) Make sure your swimmer has his or her swim bag, snacks/drinks, and chair.
6. If your child is swimming an event requiring a "positive check-in" (specified in the meet announcement), he/she should verify with the coach that the check-in is done. Sometimes the swimmer does it, and sometimes the coach handles it for all swimmers. Positive check-in events are usually the long events (e.g., 400 IM, 500 free, 1000 free) or, at some meets, all events over 200 yards or meters. This eliminates heats with multiple no-shows, thus significantly shortening the meet for all swimmers and spectators. After the check-in period has elapsed, the heat and lane assignments for the event are posted.
7. Some of the meets will have Clerk of Courses set up for younger children (12 and younger). At these meets, the younger swimmers must report to the Clerk of Course before heading to the blocks for their events. Check with the coach about whether the meet you are attending will have a Clerk of Course.
8. Make sure your child knows not to leave the pool deck (for either a few minutes or the rest of the day) without telling the coach. Parents are not allowed on the pool deck. It is the coach's responsibility to get them to their event on time. This is much more likely to happen if the coach knows where your child is at all times.

9. USA Swimming is very serious about no parents on deck. If you feel that you really must be on deck, become trained as an official or volunteer as a timer. If you think that your child is not old enough to be there without you, maybe you should reconsider entering them in meets. Some of our meets can only be viewed from the deck in designated areas only. There will be signs indicating the viewing area and the areas designated for coaches and swimmers only.
10. Competition swimsuits should fit very snugly. Female swimmers need to pull their straps off of their shoulders except when they are swimming. If not, their back muscles may cramp up, making it difficult to swim. If you see your daughter walking around like this, there's a good reason!
11. If you are asked to be a timer, be sure that you show up on time. You should wear shoes that will not be ruined if they get wet. Be sure that you attend the timer's briefing at the beginning of the session.
12. Swim meets can be very long and very boring if you do not have something to do. Bring young siblings as a last resort. If you do bring young children, make sure you bring ample entertainment for them.
13. Indoor pools and surrounding decks are notoriously warm. Bring clothes to change into that would be appropriate for summer. Some are cool. Bottom line: be prepared either way.
14. Often there is an area where you can set up chairs or blankets outside of the pool area. You must bring your own. Do not bring items that you would be upset about if they go missing or if someone else walks on them.
15. Bring food. Most meets have concession stands, but the costs add up. Swimmers will already have their own coolers packed with nutritious snacks and plenty of drinks. Limit the amount of money per day your child gets to spend at the concession stand. Most pools allow small lunch bags or coolers for spectators as well. Remember that alcoholic beverages are not allowed.
16. This applies to both swimmers and spectators leaving the pool area. Make sure you leave your area cleaner than you found it. You will really appreciate those who pick up after themselves when we host a meet!
17. Pack a permanent marker and a highlighter pen.

18. Buy or borrow a heat sheet and write your child's event, heats, and lanes on their hand with a permanent marker. The host team usually has them for sale for about \$5-10. If your child is swimming at finals, heat sheets for those sessions are available that evening (usually \$1 or \$2).
19. Meets are opportunities to measure how your swimmer is doing in their training at that moment. Nearly every swimmer has a bad swim or meet occasionally. If your child is DQ'd (disqualified), it is not the end of the world. Almost every swimmer has been disqualified at least once. As a parent you must ensure that your child has a positive experience even if they do not swim well. Remember that our children learn values and sportsmanship from us. Coaches go to meets to coach and parents should go to meets to cheer, offer love, and encouragement.