

So Your Child is A Swimmer – The Role of a Swimming Parent

[September 15, 2013](#)[October 14, 2013](#) [Rick Madge](#)

Although we have only finished one week of the season, it's never too early to help parents understand the role they can play in helping their swimmer get the most out of the sport.

USA Swimming used to have a lengthy list of parent responsibilities on their site. It had about a dozen points on it, and really complicated the role of the parent. Their site now has 2 points, and only 2. I'll summarize them. (Comments on Swimming Canada's lack of contribution to this issue are at the end of this blog.)

1. Be your child's biggest fan, no matter what. Be positive and supportive, and help them feel better about themselves, especially after a poor swim.
2. Don't coach. USA Swimming correctly points out that coaching involves critiquing their performance, which implies criticism. And it's not only that you may not have the knowledge to coach, it's that your job is to support them. Let the coach do the coaching.

These are fantastic points. Your swimmer will feel enough pressure from their coach, their peers, and especially themselves that they don't need more pressure from their parents. In fact, swimmers perform best when they are relaxed. The perfect scenario is when they know that they can mess up in a race, and they will still be loved, supported and encouraged afterwards.

The second point is wonderful as well. I can't tell you how many times at meets I've overheard a parent in the stands tell their child how to swim the next race. I feel so sorry for the coach, mainly as the suggestions are not at all useful. But the key issue here is that the child now has to swim the race a certain way in order to please the parent. This pressure isn't helpful.

Swimming is an odd sport in that it uses muscles and coordination that are just not required for land-based sports – the most important of these being the core muscles. In fact, a well-trained 10-year old can usually out swim their parents. And this certainly isn't because the 10-year old is stronger, or in better shape, or has more knowledge. It's just that their bodies have been trained to do things that land-based athletes have trouble doing. Ultimately, this means that your vast knowledge of hockey, football and golf isn't going to help them.

I'm going to drift into the realm of the mundane here and add a few additional housekeeping issues to the 2 points USA Swimming makes.

3. You are probably driving your kids to practices and meets. So please be on time. In fact, please be 10 minutes early. Our team policy for swim meets is that swimmers should be on deck and ready to swim at least 10 minutes prior to the start of warmup.
4. Get involved! The team is run by volunteers, and we need some help. Many volunteer positions require very little time or are only required a few times a year. And many of you have expertise that would be an incredible help.
5. If you must cancel your swimmer from a meet, try to let us know as soon as possible **IN WRITING**. I just will not remember a casual comment made in a brief post-practice conversation. In fact, after a practice I can barely remember my name. Meets have scratch deadlines. If we scratch after that point, then we (you!) are paying the meet fees anyway.