

Ten Commandments for Swimming Parents

1. Thou shalt not impose your ambitions on your child.

Remember that swimming is your child's activity. Improvements and progress occur at different rates for each individual. Do not judge your child's progress based on the performance of other athletes and do not push them based on what you think they should be doing. The nice thing about swimming is that every person can strive to do his or her personal best and benefit from the process of competitive swimming.

2. Thou shalt be supportive no matter what.

There is only one question to ask your child after a practice or competition. "Did you have fun?" If meets and practices are not fun, your child should not be forced to participate.

3. Thou shalt not coach thy child.

You are involved in one of the few youth programs that offers professional coaching. Do not undermine the professional coach by trying to coach your child on the side. Your job is to provide love, support, and a safe place to return to at the end of the day. Love and hug your child no matter what. The coach is responsible for the technical part of the job. You should not offer advice on technique or race strategy or any other area that is not yours. Above all, never pay your child for a performance. This will only serve to confuse your child concerning the reason to strive for excellence and weaken the swimmer/coach bond.

4. Thou shalt only have positive things to say at a swimming meet.

If you are going to show up at a swimming meet, you should be encouraging and never criticize your child or the coach. Both of them know when mistakes have been made. Please remember that "yelling at" is not the same as "cheering for."

5. Thou shalt acknowledge thy child's fears.

Your child's first swimming meet, 500 free or 200 I.M. can be a stressful situation. It is totally appropriate for your child to be scared. Do not yell or belittle, just assure your child that the coach would not have suggested the event if your child were not ready to compete in it. Remember, your job is to love and support your child through the entire swimming experience.

6. Thou shalt not criticize the officials.

If you do not care to devote the time or do not have the desire to volunteer as an official, please do not criticize those who are doing the best they can.

7. Honor the child's coach.

The bond between coach and swimmer is a special one, and one that contributes to your child's success as well as fun. Do not criticize the coach in the presence of your child, as it will only serve to hurt your child's swimming.

8. Thou shalt be loyal and supportive of thy team.

It is not wise for parents to take their swimmers and jump from team to team. The water is not necessarily bluer in another team's pool. Every team has its own internal problems – even teams that build champions. Children who switch from team to team are often ostracized for a long time by the teammates they leave behind and are slowly received by new teammates. Often swimmers find that switching teams does not improve their performance.

9. Thy child shalt have goals besides swimming.

Most successful swimmers are those who have learned to focus on the process and not the outcome. Giving an honest effort regardless of the outcome is more important than winning. One Olympian said, "My goal was to set a world record. Well, I did just that, but someone else did it too, just a little faster than I did. I achieved my goal and I lost. Does this make me a failure? No, in fact I am very proud of that swim." What a tremendous outlook to carry on through life!

10. Thou shalt not expect thy child to become an Olympian.

There are 300,000 athletes in USA Swimming and they keep records of the Top 100 all time swimming performances by age group. Only 2 of the swimmers listed in the 10 & under age group made it to the Top 100 in the 17 - 18 age group. There are only 52 spots available for the Olympic Team every four years. Your child's odds of becoming an Olympian are about .0002%.

Swimming is much more than just the Olympics. Ask your coaches why they coach. Chances are, they were not Olympians, but still got so much out of swimming that they wanted to pass the love for the sport on to others. Swimming teaches self-discipline and sportsmanship; it builds self-esteem and fitness; it provides lifelong friendships and much more. Most Olympians will tell you that these intangibles far out weigh any medal they may have won. Swimming builds good people, like you want your child to be, and you should be happy your child wants to participate.

(Adapted from Ed Clendaniel's 10 Commandments for Little League Parents)