

The Ideal Swimming Parent

By Brent Ransom, head age group coach, Greater Toledo Aquatic Club

Some of you may not realize it, but you play a large part in the success of your child's swimming career. I don't care if your child is in it for recreation, or wants to become one of the best swimmers in the world. You are a very important part in setting his or her personal goals in this sport. "How is that?" you may ask. Well, I'm going to give you some examples and tips on how to be the ideal swimming parent.

Looking back on when I was a young, talented (yeah, right!), age-group swimmer, I remember being overjoyed when I had to go to the 111th Street YMCA in Chicago for swim practice. It was usually the highlight of my day after breakfast. One of the reasons I liked going to practice was the many friends that I had through swimming. We would fool around, sometimes get into trouble and work very hard when we were there. We weren't the best swimmers in the state of Illinois, but I bet we had the most fun.

Another reason I enjoyed going to practice was that it gave me a break from my loving parents (or was it that they got a break from their loving son...?).

My parents would drop me off and let the swim coaches deal with their holy terror of a son. There was a trust factor there between my parents and my coach. My parents trusted and believed in my coaches, so it made the coaches' job a lot easier. Even though I was young, I noticed that strong relationship. This made me a happier, better swimmer.

Swimming was such an enjoyable experience for my friends and me that we always looked forward to doing it. If we did something wrong at home or school, our punishment would be no swim practice, and for me, not going to swim practice was like getting a needle from the doctor in the rear end -- terrible! My parents wanted me to always do my best and have fun in swimming, but they made sure I had my priorities straight. My parents believed that respect, discipline and education were the keys to making me a good person -- NOT swimming. They believed if I had those three virtues instilled in my life, I would be a better person, and also, by the way, a better swimmer.

Those three things are all I learned from my parents about swimming. They never told me how I should swim a race. They never talked to me about my stroke technique. They NEVER tried to coach me through any part of swimming. Do you know why? It is because my parents are part of a group known as "dumb swimming parents."

This is one of the main ingredients in being an ideal swimming parent. Though my mom knew how to swim, she always acted like she knew nothing about the sport. And my dad actually did know nothing about the sport. He was a boxer when he was younger, and all he ever told me to do was "Attack!" just like any boxer would say. They never put any sort of pressure on me. All they did was support me, no matter how I performed. My dad would give me a kiss on the head and say, "Good job, peanut head." The unconditional love and positive support from my parents put me ahead of a lot of my competition. Though my competitors may have beaten me sometimes, I always knew I had my parents there to help me feel good about what I had tried to achieve, and I wouldn't give up.

Here at Greater Toledo Aquatic Club, we have a very good group of energetic children who want to learn how to become better competitive swimmers. As coaches, it is our job and our duty to help them to achieve their goals as only swim coaches can. Please trust us to do that job. By standing back and allowing us to do our job, you show your child that we are worthy of their trust and that they should be comfortable to form a solid coach/swimmer relationship with us. Only you can be the parent, giving that unconditional love and teaching them the virtues they need to be successful adults.

If you focus on that, and that alone, the swimming will come along, too.