

## **NEW ENGLAND COACHES SPEAK TO PARENTS:**

Whether you are new to the sport of swimming, or are an experience swim parent, there is always a time when you don't know what coaches are thinking. We recently surveyed several New England Swimming coaches and asked them two questions. Their answers are summarized below. Obviously not all coaches work the same way, but their answers show that many of them agree on the same things when it comes to your swimmer.

**PARENTS:** If you would like to speak out and communicate some thoughts or feelings with the coaches, feel free to write to [parent@neswim.com](mailto:parent@neswim.com) with your thoughts and suggestions. All responses will remain anonymous and will be posted here on our website.

### **.1. HOW WOULD YOU RECOMMEND A PARENT BEST COMMUNICATE WITH THEIR CHILD'S COACH?**

- Parents should do their best to have an open communication with their child's coach. It is helpful to have clearly stated means of communication on a team. Obviously, speaking with a coach in person is always the best means of communication, but it is not always possible. A parent should never interrupt a practice or expect a coach should talk with them during a practice (unless there is an emergency). In addition, parents should try not to ask the coach questions right before practice. The coach needs to be focused on getting ready for the practice. The most accessible means of communication is email. It is private and can be used at all hours of the day and night. If you have a concern as a parent, you should share that concern before that concern becomes a bigger problem. Coaches would rather answer questions than have misinformation out there! Make sure your questions cannot be answered by simply checking previous emails and schedules. For example, do not email a coach and ask "Where is the meet?" if the meet information is posted on the team's website along with the all of the important details. Email the coach with significant questions or information that can help him or her better understand your child.
- 1<sup>st</sup> step is to go to the parent meeting and visit the team's website and read all related emails before asking questions that could be answered within those settings. Email the coach about administrative questions, but set up a meeting to discuss performance or concerns. Do not approach the coach at a swim meet.
- Set up a meeting at the beginning of the season to talk about expectations and get on the same page regarding the program and the training. Communicate with the coach after practice on a regular basis if you have questions about your swimmer's progress.
- Talk to the coach in person. No gossip or talking amongst other parents. Don't compare swimmers as everyone is different.
- Find out how the coach prefers to talk – set up a meeting . Don't do your communication in the bleachers with the other parents.

- Send the coach an email stating that you would like to set up a meeting with them at their earliest convenience. Also, it would be a good idea, in the email, to list the points you would like to discuss so we can be prepared.
- Call or email with specific questions or set up a time to meet about more involved issues. Don't catch the coach off guard by asking questions at practice or meets. Plan ahead for a meeting.
- Meet with the coach and then follow the coach's recommendations (he/she is an expert)

## **2. WHAT WOULD YOU SUGGEST TO PARENTS ON HOW TO HELP THEIR CHILD BE SUCCESSFUL IN THE SPORT OF SWIMMING FOR THE LONG RUN?**

- One of the best ways to help your child be successful in the sport for many years is to encourage and foster the trust relationship with their coach. In order to take on new challenges, technique and goals, a young athlete must trust and believe that their coach is there to help them make the steps to the next level in their development. Parents should stay away from comparisons with other swimmers. Everyone develops at their own pace. Stay away from bribes of all kinds. In order to swim and be successful over the years, a swimmer must be intrinsically motivated and not externally motivated. Remember that set-backs and plateaus are a part of every athlete's road to success. Encourage your child to understand that we all learn from our mistakes. Swimmers stay in the sport because they enjoy the sport, they thrive on being able to work towards goals and can see tangible results and probably most important...they make good friends along the way. The most important role that parents play is the role of giving their child unconditional love and support no matter what the results!
- To not let success go to the head. Be upbeat with them, but do not coach them. Encourage them before/during/after practice and meets. Do not let technology coach the swimmer; let them learn from the coach.
- Don't make a big deal about trophies or ribbons. Be very supportive and motivating about their participation. Make sure they have good attendance and a positive attitude.
- Have your swimmer develop a long term goal that is realistic and rewarding. NEVER ever give rewards or money for a good swim or cut time.
- Drop them at the door on time for practice and pick them up on time. Just ask them if they are having fun.
- Understand the level of commitment involved in this sport. Support the coach and their philosophy. If you are going to play other sports, understand that this will affect their performance of older swimmers. Follow the schedule and attend as many practices and meets that you can. Do not reward kids with money or big incentives for performances. Love your kids unconditionally. Don't compare them to others, and don't encourage them to "beat" their teammate, we are a TEAM sport.
- Teach them that this is a sport where it is very important to be the best they can be whenever they participate, whether it is at practice or at a swim meet. Parents need to step in step in the child's shoes, and then step out.

- Teach them responsibility, good eating habits and how to learn from failure. Failure is not a bad thing as they can learn to build on a failure and strive to do better.
- Don't emphasize one stroke or event
- Allow time for mental and physical breaks 1 or 2 times a year. Give swimmers time to learn the sport and don't start them late in the season due to football, soccer etc...
- It sounds cliché, but swimmers must enjoy the sport to have staying power. Parents need to be supportive without becoming overbearing. For a child to do well in the long run, they must learn to be self-motivated so a parent must recognize that they cannot inflict motivation, they must just encourage it.
- Parents need to understand the commitment they are making when they join. They need to get them to practice and focus on and praise the progress. Praise kids for being committed and staying positive. For performance, unconditional love and support. Your swimmer wants to go fast just as much as you want them to so be supportive and stay positive no matter what the performance.
- Praise: be only positive. Support and back up what the coach says and recommends and plan for the long run weekly, monthly, yearly with money, vacations and other activities.
- Support your children's goals, not your own.