

Swim Meet Basics For Parents

Ideas to Help You and Your Child be Better Prepared and Happier at Swim Meets
By John Leonard, American Swim Coaches Association Director

1. Be on time. **On time means 15 minutes before warm-up begins.**
2. Know the seating arrangements. Bring folding chairs to most outdoor pools. Bring drinks and snacks as appropriate. Sit with your child if that's the team "thing." Sit in the stands if that's the way the team does it. Let the swimmers be with the swimmers. They don't want to be with you in most cases. They want to be with their friends.
3. Encourage your child to get immediately to the coach for warm-up. (See below about warm-ups.)
4. Be a parent. Help them keep track of heats, events, etc. But remember that the main idea is to teach them to handle the environment of a swim meet themselves. This helps them "grow up." It's never too early....
5. Cheer for other people's children on the team. Don't embarrass your own by standing behind their blocks screaming. Let other parents scream for your child.
6. Let the coach coach. Unless you're the coach. Then let someone else coach your child. So you can parent.
7. Sometimes a child will miss an event. This happens; it's a learning experience. Don't freak out. Don't handhold them to the next event. Expect responsibility. If they can't handle it, maybe they are too young to be there. Let them rely on teammates for help.
8. Sometimes a swimmer will false start and DQ a relay. Similarly, it's a learning experience. Don't freak out. The appropriate response by the swimmer to their teammates? "Sorry guys." Everyone does it. Everyone needs to forgive. See, "Everyone Does It." Reread that. Twice.
9. Sometimes a swimmer DQ's for swimming an event incorrectly. Do not address the official. Ask the coach what they did wrong. Make sure the swimmer understands how to do it correctly. End of story. It IS NOT a big deal. Learn from it.
10. The child should have a goal for every swim. Sometimes a time, sometimes a technique. Ask what their goal is. Don't help set it. That's for the coach and swimmer.
11. The coach will likely speak to your child before and after the event. The "before" is to remind them of their goals and needs, and the "after" is to review the successes and weak spots of the swim. Great feedback is great coaching.
12. Make sure they drink in hot weather. Drink in all weather. Water, Gatorade, etc. NO SUGAR. NO CANDY. NO SUGAR, NO CANDY.
13. If you have questions, ask the Coach. Try to do it when the Coach is not doing 12 other things. Get real answers. Asking another parent may not get you the right answer.
14. When the meet is over, the meet is over. Forget it on the way home. Help the swimmer remember the lessons for the next time, but don't dwell on the meet. Meet over....move on...next!
15. Most coaches will say "it's not about winning, it's about improvement." Know what is being improved, and measure it and help your child focus on the process and not "just" the result. What does it take to go faster?
16. Keep it light. Have a sense of humor. An age group swim meet, taken at face value, is a pretty silly thing.....don't overplay the "importance" of it ...it's just an opportunity to test what you've been learning in practice. We repeat experiences that are enjoyable and avoid experiences that are not.

There are thousands of other ideas to add to this list. This is "just the basics."



What is Warm-up?

Warm-up is what happens before a competition. Its purpose is several:

PHYSICAL

1. Literally warm and lubricate the muscles for action.
2. Increase the heart rate in preparation for race action.
3. Getting in touch with your feel for the water and ability to swim the strokes correctly.

MENTAL

1. Get into focus. We're at a swim meet to compete.
2. Get rid of distractions.
3. Focus on process and good technical swimming.
4. Prepare to race.

Most warm-ups at most meets are crowded and appear chaotic. Typically the coach will put all swimmers in one or two lanes, together:

- The swimmers will do an easy swim. ("easy 500 free")
- Then some gentle kicking. ("10 x 25 free kick on 30 seconds")
- Then some drills...("200 IM Drill")
- Then a "start your heart" set...("8 x 50 free, descend 1-4, 5-8")
- Then some pace work relating to the specific event....
- And a little more easy swimming.
- Warm-ups can vary from Senior Swimmers who take an hour or more, to eight and unders, who can warm-up in 20 minutes in some cases.

In every case, it's important to be **ON TIME**. **On time means 15 minutes before warm-up begins**. This allows time for the physical and the mental work to be done. The coach will commonly hold a short meeting to make sure all swimmers are accounted for, organized, know their events, and get last minute reminders.

Being LATE to warm-up means your child will be inadequately prepared for their competition. Not a good thing. You ask them and the coach asks them, to work hard to learn in practice every day. Then the day of the meet, you do things incorrectly. What does that teach the child?

Be On Time, Do Things Correctly. Have a Great Meet!

