

**A Few Suggestion on How to be a Better Swimming Parent
(North Baltimore Aquatic Club - one of the best team in the country)
By Michael Brooks of NBAC**

You are the key to your child's swimming

A parent's attitude toward swimming, the program, the coach, and their child's participation is key towards the child's attitude and success. The young swimmer takes cues from his parent. If the parent shows by word, deed, facial expression, etc., that they do not value swimming, that they don't appreciate having to drive to practice or sit in the stands during meets, that "it's not going to matter" if the child skips practice, that morning practices are just "optional" and that the child would be better off with extra sleep, then the chances are very good that the child will lack commitment, have little success, then lose interest in swimming. Support your child's interest in swimming by being positively interested.

Allow your swimmer to be resilient

Failure and facing that failure doesn't cause the kids to melt. Failure isn't such an evil thing that the parents should try to shield their kids from it. Allow them to fail, then teach them to get up off the canvas and try harder to succeed next time. If parents are continually sheltering their swimmers from the storm, cushioning every fall, making excuses for them, finding someone else to blame, the children never learn anything. Even worse, they never learn that they are responsible for the failures and for the successes. Allow them to stand on their own, and you will be helping them immeasurably down the road.

Teach them to dream big – a world of infinite possibilities

If you try to temper your child's dreams, if you teach them to settle for the ordinary, you may indeed save them from many heartaches and many a failure. But you also rob them of the opportunity of achieving great things, and the opportunity to plumb their depths and realize their potential. Winning big means failing many times along the way. Each failure hurts, but these temporary setbacks create strength for the final push. Instead of having children avoid failure by never taking risks, teach them how to think correctly about failing: risk taking and failure are necessary for improvement, development, motivation feedback and long term success.

What success is

Only one swimmer can win the race. Often in the younger age groups, the winner will be the one that bloomed early, not necessarily the swimmer with the most talent or the most potential to succeed in senior swimming. It is expected that every parent wants their child to succeed, wants their child to have a good and learning and valuable experience with swimming. Every child can succeed – only make sure that you define success correctly: being the best you can be, striving for improvement in every aspect of swimming. That leads to lasting success. And lasting enjoyment.

Fun, fun, fun

If "fun" means mindless entertainment and sensory bombardment, then wasting hours

playing Nintendo is loads of fun, and swimming is by definition “not fun”. If “fun” means working hard and challenging yourself, taking pride in accomplishing difficult goals, and discovering talents you didn’t know you had, then swimming is fun and Nintendo by definition is “not fun”. The meaning of fun is very much an open question for children and one where parents and coaches have much influence over their charges. Are we building a nation of energized achievers or lifeless couch potatoes?

Work, work, work

Persistence and work ethic are the most important qualities leading to success in swimming and everything else. And if a work ethic is not created and cultivated when a swimmer is young, it very likely will never appear. It is so rare as not to be an option that a kid who is a slacker from ages seven to fourteen will suddenly change his spots and become a hard worker. Love for and pride in hard work must be instilled early on, and again parents and coaches have much influence in creating this attitude.

Burnout is over-rated

So many times parents and kids will say, “I don’t want to commit to swimming because I don’t want to get burned out.” But for every one true case of “burnout” caused by a swimmer’s spending too much time in the water and working too hard, we see a hundred cases of “pre-emptive burnout”: in order not to be burned out, the swimmer comes to practice only when they feel like it, doesn’t work out very hard, skips team meets with regularity, and generally makes no commitment to the program or to the sport. Not surprisingly, the swimmer swim slow, makes little or no improvement, and sees her formerly slower competitors whiz right by them. Then we wonder why they “just can’t get jazzed about swimming.”

Sitting on the fence and remaining lukewarm on principle has nothing to recommend it

Discipline and commitment are good things, not things we should downplay, hide apologize for, or –worst of all- stop demanding because it may be unpopular. If you want to enjoy swimming even more, commit more of yourself and swim fast! You do not become excited about an activity you don’t do well.

Home and pool must dovetail

Traits of discipline, respect, high expectations and commitment at home directly relate to the child’s characteristics at practices and meets. This is yet another area where family support is crucial to the success of the swimmer. Parents should review carefully the Credo and other formative memos about the value the team advocates. If the current at home is flowing in the opposite direction from the current in the pool, there will be a big problem. If the family does not buy into the program 100%, they will be very unhappy.