

The Ten Commandments for swimming parents...

1. Thou shalt not impose thy ambitions on the child.

Remember that swimming is your youngsters' activity. Improvement occurs at different rates for each individual. Do not judge your child's progress on the performance of other athletes and don't push them based on what you think they should be doing. The nice thing about swimming is youngsters can strive to do their personal best and therefore benefit from the process of competitive swimming.

2. Thou shalt be supportive no matter what.

There is only one question to ask you youngster after a practice or a competition - "Did you enjoy it?" If competitions and practices are not fun, you youngster should not be forced to participate. Plus, your youngster should be praised and applauded for any good effort...2nd, 3rd, even 34th - they are all a case of "WELL DONE!"

3. Thou shalt not coach thy child.

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

4. Thou shalt say only positive things at a swim-meet.

If you are going to show up at a swimming meet, you should be encouraging, but never criticise your youngster or the coach. Both of them know if mistakes have been made. Remember "yelling at" is not the same as "cheering for".

5. Thou shalt acknowledge thy child's fears.

A first swimming competition, 1500m free, or 200IM can be a stressful situation. It is totally acceptable for you child to be scared. Do not shout or belittle, just assure your child that the coach would not have suggested the event if they were not ready to compete in it. Your job is to love and support your child.

6. Thou shalt not criticise the officials.

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

7. Honour thy child's coach.

The coach - swimmer bond is a special one, and one that contributes to your child's success as well as enjoyment. Do not criticise the coach in the presence of your child as this 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 move their children from club to club. The water is not necessarily bluer in another pool! Every team has its own internal problems, even teams that build champions. Children who switch from team to team are often ostracised for a long time by their team-mates they leave behind and are slowly received by new team-mates. Indeed, swimmers who switch teams often do no better than at their previous club.

9. Thy child shalt have goals besides winning.

Most successful swimmers are those who have learned to focus on the process not the outcome. Giving 100% effort is far more important than winning. One Olympian said "My goal was to set a world record. Well I did that, but someone else did it too - 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" - That is THE outlook to carry through life.

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

There are 250,000 registered competitive swimmers in GB and another 150,000 in learn-to-swim lessons. There are only a maximum of 52 places available for the Olympic squad...every four years. Your child's odds of becoming an Olympian are less than 0.04%.