

“Ten Commandments for Swim Team Parents”

By Rose Snyder

(Adapted from Ed Clendaniel's “Ten Commandments for Little League Parents”)

1. Thou shalt not impose your ambition on thy child. Remember that swimming is the child's activity. Improvements and progress occur at different rates for each individual. Don't judge your child's progress based on the performance of other swimmers or based on what you think should be achieved. The best thing about swimming is that everyone can strive to be his or her personal best, regardless of age or ability.
2. Thou shalt be supportive no matter what. There is only one question to ask your child: “Did you have fun?” If meets and practices are not fun, your child should not be forced to participate.
3. Thou shalt not coach your child. You have taken your child to a professional coach. Do not undermine that coach by trying to instruct your child on the side. Your job is to support, love and hug your child no matter what. The coach is responsible for the technical part of the job. You should not offer advice on technique or race strategy. That is not your area. This will only serve to confuse your child and prevent that swimmer/coach bond from forming.
4. Thou shalt only have positive things to say at a swimming meet. If you are going to show up at a meet, you should cheer and applaud, but never criticize your child or the coach.
5. Thou shalt acknowledge thy child's fears. A first meet, or first 1650-yard freestyle, can be a stressful situation. It is totally understandable for your child to have apprehension. Don't yell or belittle; just assure the child that the coach would not have suggested an event or situation if the child was not ready.
6. Thou shalt not criticize the officials or other volunteers. If you do not have the time or desire to volunteer, don't criticize those who are doing the best they can.
7. Honor thy child's coach. The bond between coach and swimmer is special, contributing to your child's success as well as enjoyment. Do not criticize the coach in your child's presence. It will only serve to hurt the child, in and out of the water.
8. Thou shalt not jump from team to team. The water is not necessarily bluer at the other team's pool. Every team has its own internal problems, even championship-winning teams. Better to teach children loyalty and responsibility in helping to solve problems than run from them.
9. Thy child shalt have goals besides winning. Giving an honest effort, regardless of outcome, is 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, just a little faster. I achieved my goal and I lost. This does not make me a failure. In fact, I am very proud of that swim.”

10. Thou shalt not expect thy child to become an Olympian. Of the over 200,000 registered swimmers, only 52 make the Olympic Team every four years. Be realistic in goal setting, but nurture the child's dreams as well.