

# THE SURVIVAL GUIDE FOR THE NEW SWIMMING PARENT

(Excerpted from Emmaus Aquatic Club, Allentown, PA)

The following are some observations from a former new swimming parent. With luck, some of these musings might make some sense.

## Necessary Stuff: Suit and Goggles

The basic items needed are a **racng suit** and a pair of **competition goggles**. Going to your local spoiling goods store or paying the equivalent per inch of fabric as Tokyo real estate for a first suit is not the way to start. Your team usually will sell you a team suit at cost, Also, don't be afraid to ask a returning parent - they are a source of good tips.

It's best to have two suits. One to wear at practice and one to wear at meets. The practice suit will get worn out and become slow, but the meet suit will stay snug and fast. When the meet suit wears out, it can be used as the practice suit.

You must have goggles for practice and meets! Two or three pairs are important because they tend to break at the wrong time. Goggles protect the eyes from chlorine and help your child see underwater. There are many types and styles. It tends to be a matter of personal choice. The longest lasting goggles are those with rubber-like gaskets. A good pair has soft gaskets that conform around the eye sockets. "Swedish" style goggles (a hard plastic goggle that sits inside the eye socket) are not recommended for beginners. For first time swimmers who have difficulty with rubber gaskets, a pair with foam gaskets might work. Anti-Fog goggles have a coating that reduces fogging. The coating degrades with time, but your child will have lost his goggles way before then. For those goggles without the coating try dipping them in water or applying a little saliva before putting them on.

## Other Stuff

Get a **swim cap** for long hair, a swim bag and chlorine shampoo. A latex cap is the cheapest though the most difficult to put on for the new swimmer. A Lycra cap is softer and easier to use. A silicon cap is easy to pull on and gives more protection than a Lycra cap, but is much more expensive than either the latex or Lycra. **Swim bags** have lots of mesh compartments to separate the wet from the dry items. **Chlorine shampoo** helps to remove the chlorine from your swimmer when their hair starts to look like Tina Turner's and they begin to smell like a swamp creature. Using it on suits also helps.

## **The First Meet**

Start with a swim bag the size of your child, stuff it with everything you normally would take to practice and then double this. Also include warm clothing for your child. Pack light snacks and drinks for your swimmer. Your coach will probably have more to say about eating on the day of a meet.

If you have non-swimming brothers and sisters going, pack some creative fun things for them. Remember a pool can be a dangerous place, so keep an eye on them at all times. Don't forget snacks. Otherwise, after numerous trips to the snack bar for candy, you will have to detox your child after the meet.

## **Parents' Role**

Competitive swimming programs provide many benefits to young athletes. They develop self-discipline, good sportsmanship and time management skills. Competition allows the swimmer to experience success and to learn how to deal with defeat, while becoming healthy and physically fit.

As a parent, your major responsibility is to provide a stable, loving and supportive environment. This positive environment will encourage your child to continue. Show your interest by ensuring your child's attendance at practices, and by coming to meets.

Parents are not participants on their child's team, but contribute to the success experienced by the child and his/her team. Parents serve as role models and their attitudes are often emulated by their children. Be aware of this and strive to be positive models. Most importantly, show good sportsmanship at all times toward coaches, officials, opponents and teammates.

## **Be Enthusiastic and Supportive**

Remember that your child is the swimmer. Children need to establish their own goals, and make their own progress towards them. Be careful not to impose your own standards and goals.

Do not over-burden your child with winning or achieving best times. The most important part of your child's swimming experience is that he/she learns about himself/herself while enjoying the sport. This healthy environment encourages learning and fun which will develop a positive self-image within your child. Cheer your child and your team. Remember that improvement and personal accomplishments are more important than winning.

## **Let the Coach Coach**

The best way to help a child achieve his/her goals and reduce the natural fear of failure is through positive reinforcement. No one likes to make a mistake. If your child does make one, remember that he/she is still learning. Encourage his/her efforts and point out the things he did well. As long as he gave his best effort, you should make him/her feel like a winner.