

News For SWIM PARENTS

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Practice and Competition for 12 and Unders

“As Swimming Parents New To The Sport, What Is Best In Terms Of Practice and Competition For Our 10 And Under?”

Answered by Ira Klein, Level 5 Coach, President of ASCA

A wide variety of Age Group Swimming programs throughout the country. Each program functions with different goals and purposes and each operates under different conditions. Therefore, it is important that a young swimmer participate in a program that is compatible with his or her goals and desires. Above all, each Age Group program should be enjoyable and satisfying!

Programs for 12 & Under Swimmers should always stress satisfaction and enjoyment, never records and awards. Swimmers who are pressured to break records (whether it is a team, local or national record) will not get full pleasure and enjoyment from his or her achievement. Instead, he or she will feel the mental stress of being pressured. This is an easy way for a swimmer to lose interest at an early age.

For younger swimmers, emphasis should be placed on proper stroke mechanics. It is much easier to learn how to swim correctly at a young age than it is to correct bad habits years later. For actual training, four-six hours per week is sufficient. All four strokes should be taught and practiced and the drills need to be repeated often. Intervals should generally be kept short so that a swimmer can concentrate on proper stroke techniques and demanding at too early age or too repetitive, the swimmer most likely will end up leaving the sport.

Using kickboards and fins for drills is beneficial but they should be used moderately. This is also a good age to introduce flexibility and conditioning exercises – but not strength or weight training. Swimmers will naturally gain strength, coordination and agility with games and activities such as relays, Sharks and Minnows and other fun activities. Especially at this age, the swimmers should be encouraged to participate in other activities (i.e. soccer, gymnastics, music or scout programs).

Competition should not be pressured and self - improvement should be stressed. Meets should be held to a one and at most two-day affair lasting no longer than four hours. Parents need to be very supportive of their child and the coach. Try not to second guess the coach, but work on maintaining an open dialogue between you and the coach to learn more about what your child is doing and how you can help.

Finally, always remember that they are a child first, last and foremost. Every child should leave the practice and each meet with a smile on their face wanting to come back to the next practice and next meet for more enjoyment