

News For
SWIM PARENTS

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Are Swim Camps Worth the Money?

“We have a twelve year old son who is interested in going to a swim camp this summer. Camps are a considerable expense. Are they worth the money spent?”

This question is essentially about value. What value can be placed on the swim camp experience? The first question is why does the child want to attend a camp, and the second is will the camp experience match the needs of the child, both real and perceived.

Children sometimes wish to attend a swim camp for a variety of reasons. (Sometimes also parents want the child to attend a camp, with particular expectations of what will happen there) One reason may be that the child's friends are all going to a particular camp, and attending may be the “in” thing to do. Another may be that the child is on a bit of a plateau, and thinks that the different environment of the camp may help initiate that next performance to jump. Some children simply like the status of going to one of the prestigious camps. One of the very first things to do, as a parent, is to discuss the situation with the child's regular swim coach. Some coaches do not like their athletes to attend a camp, and others find it perfectly acceptable.

In the case of the coach who would prefer the athlete not to attend, the usual discussion is that the child will receive different stroke instruction that may be disruptive to the overall progress of the child. The differing view would hold that exposing the child to differing ideas on technique is an excellent way of stimulating intellectual interest in the sport, and will help the athlete grow. Another consideration is the time and type of camp that is being considered. Some camps are training-oriented, and the athlete will come back in wonderful condition. Others are technique-oriented, and the athlete may lose some conditioning during the time of the stay.

The parent should carefully consider the type of the camp that the child is interested in, and take the good look at the progress and happiness of the child. There are those children for whom a camp is not necessarily a productive experience and there are an equal number who come back from the camp excited, enthused and more knowledgeable than they left.

The second issue is in deciding on the camp that will best suit the needs of the athlete. The parents should look at a number of the factors based on why the athlete is going to attend camp:

1. Is it training or teaching camp, or a combination?
2. Who will work directly with your child? Many famous name camps do not always have the “names” on deck working with the child. Others do.
3. Where will the children live, and how will they be supervised?
4. What does the camp experience offer besides swimming? If it is purely a swimming camp, what is the daily schedule like?
5. How long does the staff at the camp recommend that the campers stay? What length of stay will accomplish the goals set in attending the camps?

Also consider the intangibles. Try to meet, or at least talk with the people who will be running the camp. How do they “fit” with the image of which you want your child to spend time with? Try to get independent references on each camp you consider from people who have been there in previous seasons. A summer with exceptional people can be rewarding in itself.

Swim camps come in every size, shape and description. If your child wants to attend one, and you and your coach think it is a good idea, you can find one that will give you a good value for your dollar spent. It will be necessary for you to do your homework and acquire objective information on which to base your decision. American Swimming has strength in diversity, and the swim camp opportunity is a perfect reflection of the multitude of chances available.