

# News For

# SWIM PARENTS

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## Moving Up to a New Workout Group

by Cindy Anderson, Head age group coach of the Reno Aquatic Club, Reno, Nevada.

“Our daughter will be swimming in a new practice group with a different coach in a few weeks. As parents, we are a little confused by this move because she has been swimming very well with her current group and coach. Is it necessary for our daughter to change her practice environment?”

Group placement and advancement are major concerns of the swimming family. Usually these concerns arise from a combine motive of: (1) wanting what’s best for the child and (2) logistical conveniences such as practice time and location. From a coach’s perspective, the placement and advancement of swimmers is also of great importance, but for somewhat a different reason.

The goal of a coach and the swim program is to provide the swimmer with the best possible opportunity to develop his or her fullest swimming potential. Also, given the diverse age and ability levels on most teams, athletes must be grouped to facilitate maximum benefit from the practice environment.

During the past three years, the Reno Aquatic Club has grown from 90 to more than 260 swimmers. The number of groups has increased from four to eleven. Because of this rapid growth, we have had to change the structure of our group with increasing frequency, as well as update and develop specific guidelines, criteria and procedures.

As stated, the goal of any grouping of swimmers is to provide the best possible practice environment. To achieve this goal, our coaching staff tries to arrange a homogeneous practice group. Every swimmer and group is evaluated four times a year. During the evaluation period, we review each swimmer’s progress and consider the swimmer’s advancement. Swimmer advancement is based on the following:

- 1- Ability, technique, and performance of a swimmer. (We are fortunate to have all of our swimmers ranking based on best times for each age group via a computer rankings program. The coach and swimmers can review rankings in relation to the swimmer’s peers.)
- 2- Age and maturity of a swimmer. (Physical and emotional maturity are subjectively considered by the coaching staff.)
- 3- Size of the group and the coach/swimmer ratio
- 4- Coach’s discretion.

Following this procedure, the head age group coach will send a letter to the swimmer and parents notifying them of a “group move up.” This letter contains information relating to the swimmer’s new group assignment, coach, practice time, location, and the exact date the change is to be effective. The letters are mailed out approximately two weeks in advance of the proposed move up date. This allow the swimmers and parents sufficient time to adjust schedules and carpools to the new practice.

The move up letters are scheduled to arrive at the swimmer's home to coincide with swim meets or clinics, when the coaches are out of town and unavailable. This may seem a bit odd; however, it serves a very good purpose. It is a basic human trait that, when faced with a change (or in some cases the lack of changes) we tend to react first emotionally and second logically. As a head age group coach responsible for a staff of five, I try to spare my staff and myself from the initial emotional onslaught of a swim parent's reaction. Those parents who are truly interested in pursuing the matter will have the opportunity to discuss the issue with a coach. By then, usually a parent will interact with the coach in a logical and rational manner.

This lengthy and involved process is detailed here to impress the swim parent with the importance of team grouping from the perspective of the swim coach. The group structure of a team and the swimmers who make up these groups are very important to the overall success of the program, and are of obvious importance to the individual swimmers and their families. Your home club may or may not follow a similar procedure for structuring swim groups, but regardless of the "dressing" the message to the swim parents is the same:

- 1- The success of any swim program relies on the individual successes of its athletes.
- 2- The ability to provide a quality practice environment is essential for team and individual success.
- 3- The decision to assign swimmers to specific practice groups is far from arbitrary. Although the coach tries to be sensitive to the logistical concerns of the swim family, these concerns must be secondary to the overriding goal of providing a quality practice environment for swimmers of all ages and abilities.
- 4- The coach truly does guard the best interest of your child, as a swimmer and an individual.
- 5- Ultimately, coach, swimmer, and parents are working together toward the same goal.