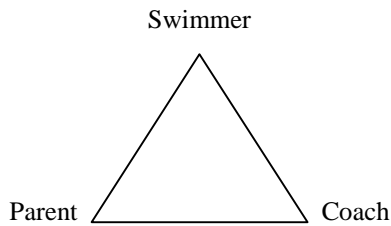


# Parent, Swimmer, Coach; A Triangular Relationship

The most fundamental concept in swimming, or in any sport, is the relationship between the coach, parent and athlete. A strong "triangular" relationship produces the best results in the swimmer's development and overall maturity.



The triangle is symbolic of this relationship as the swimmer is at the peak because they are trying to meet their highest chosen potential. Parents and coaches form the base of the triangle because they represent the support needed for the swimmer to reach their highest level. For each swimmer to have a steady experience in swimming, the lines between each point need to be held as true and straight as possible. The triangle collapses when one of the parties fails to fulfill its responsibilities, or when one party attempts, usually with good intentions, to take over the responsibility of the other party.

To have a successful program, there must be complete understanding and cooperation among parents, swimmers and coaches. The progress a swimmer makes depends to a large degree on this triangular relationship. Communications and understanding are the actions that produce success within this triangular relationship—just as in any relationship. It is with this in mind that this handout was developed and should be carefully considered by all families of GPAC swimmers.

## Keeping the Proper Perspective

Parents do a great deal in raising a child, especially through the environment that is created as they grow up. A child is a product of their parent's values, the structure of life they have provided, and the model they have been. Human nature, however, is such that a person may lose some of their ability to remain detached and objective in matters concerning their children. The following guidelines will help parents keep their children's development in the proper perspective.

1. Individuals learn at different rates and respond differently to the various methods of presenting skills (think potty training). Some children obviously take more time to learn than others. These different rates of learning require more patience on the part of the parents and coaches, who must remember that these children's ultimate swimming potential may be as great or greater than the potential of the faster learners / swimmers in their age group.
2. When athletes first try out for the team and later start practicing, it is possible that they may worsen (swim slower) rather than improve. In the case of younger swimmers this is most likely due to the emphasis that is placed on stroke technique. It takes a great deal of the swimmer's attention to master these skills. These new sets of habits, however, are the basis/building blocks for later and greater improvement. As the swimmer matures, the emphasis of training is on muscular development therefore additional stress is placed on the muscles. The muscles will at first fail to respond adequately to the demand of the additional work, explaining the lack of initial improvement. The muscles will gradually strengthen and the swimmers performances will improve. Often older swimmers will only prepare (rest, taper, shave) for two or three meets each year.
3. Plateaus can occur at one time or another in every swimmer's career. Plateaus can occur both in competition and in training. A plateau signifies that the swimmer has mastered lower-order skills, but the skills are not yet sufficiently automatic to allow an attack on newer, high-order skills. It is important to explain to the athlete that plateaus occur in all fields of physical learning. The more successful athletes are those who work through this delay in improvement and go on to achieve greater performance and approach their personal potential.

4. All swimmers suffer inconsistencies in performance for a variety of reasons, and there is never a definitive “ONE” reason for a “poor” performance. This can be frustrating for parent, coaches and swimmers alike. Be supportive during these “poor” meets. Be patient and permit swimmers to learn to love the sport.
5. Parents must realize that slow development of competitive drive at an early age is normal and perhaps more desirable than precocious or forced early development. It is important that everyone learn to compete and develop some competitive spirit. It is also important for children to learn to adapt to reasonable levels of emotional stress. The small disappointments they must learn to handle as youngsters prepare them for the larger ones that they are certain to experience as adults.
6. The true rewards of sport are gained over time with most coming during the teens and early twenties. For a child to truly benefit from their efforts in swimming, it is necessary to remain involved in the sport during those years. Pressure to perform is one of the primary factors cited by those who have quit the sport at an early age. Most children have the innate desire to please their parents, teachers and coaches and we may inadvertently add to this pressure in our deeds or words in response to those young swimmers effort. Parent’s attitudes and models often dictate those of their children. A child might not be consciously aware of what is taking place while subconsciously absorbing powerful messages about their parents’ desires. For example, parent should be enthusiastic about taking their children to practice and meets, participating in fundraising projects and attending meetings. If the parent looks at these as they are a chore so to will the swimmer and that will diminish the fun of swimming.
7. It is the coaches’ duty to offer constructive criticism of a swimmer’s performance. It is the parent’s job to supply love, recognition, and encouragement to help athletes feel good about themselves. It is best for parents to refrain from making stroke corrections or trying to coach their swimmer. When parents interject their opinions about how a swimmer should train or compete, it causes considerable and often insurmountable confusion as to whom they should listen.
8. If parents have any questions about their child’s training or team policies, the coach should be contacted. Criticizing the coach in front of the youngster undermines the coach’s authority and breaks the swimmer-coach support necessary for maximum success. Parents should behave in such a way as to bring credit to the swimmer, the team, and competitive swimming. Likewise, any disagreement with a meet official should be brought to the attention of the coach and handled by the coach.
9. Parents should be certain that their youngsters swim because they want to swim. People tend to resist anything that they “have to do”. Self motivation is the core stimulus of all successful swimmers. By the same token, deciding to participate in a certain organized sport such as swimming carries with it certain commitments on the part of the athlete. Occasionally, athletes lose sight of these commitments and it then falls to the parent to help them live up/follow through with them. The important thing is a good balance.
10. The roots of the word “competition” can be traced to two Latin words, “com” and “petere”, which mean together “they strive.” Parents should avoid “playing” their children against their nearest competitors, thereby creating vendettas within the team and swimming community. Close competition provides two great services for the athlete: it brings out the best in the swimmers and shows where improvement is needed.
11. Communication between the coach and the swimmer is very important. A two-way relationship must exist daily at practice and at meets. It is imperative that the coach have the swimmer’s full attention at these times. One of the ways that this is accomplished is by encouraging parent not to attend practice or participate in coaching. If the parent is watching practice, there is a possibility that the swimmer’s full attention is not on the coach or the exercise being performed. If it is necessary to be at practice, parents should be neutral observers. They should love and support their swimmers, but let the coach do the training and discipline in regard to the sport of competitive swimming.

Remember, particularly in the case of younger swimmers, that attitude and behavior of the parents toward the sport has an important effect on the child. In swimming, as in life, nobody can win or succeed all the time; there will always be some disappointments. Youngsters can gain from the experience whether or not they ever win a single race. The important thing is to keep on striving to do better the next time. **The secret is not only to produce great swimmers but, rather, to produce great young people who swim.**

### Swimmer (Athlete) Guidelines

The swimmer's role is to maximize his or her efforts in the pursuit of peak performance and to be involved productively within the team setting. Swimmers need to determine his/ her personal swimming goals and then work toward those goals.

Athletes have a responsibility to:

- Treat his or her coach with respect at all times, and to use proper communication to address any problems or complaints that they may have.
- Adhere to the coach's rules governing practice sessions, and to focus on the training program.
- Arrive approximately 15 minutes prior to practice and meet warm ups in order to be ready at the scheduled workout/warm-up time.
- Take ownership of his or her commitment to swimming at whatever his or her training level may be.
- Support the Greater Pensacola Aquatic Club, fellow swimmers and the coach with encouragement and attendance at swim meets.
- Train and race as hard as he or she is able.
- Exhibit courtesy, respect and consideration for teammates and coaches
- Exhibit self control and discipline
- Demonstrate a positive attitude
- Show respect for the authority of his/her family and the team they represent
- Put forth an honest effort toward defined goals
- Attend the designated number of practices as determined by the coaching staff
- Listen to instructions attentively and follow all rules
- To arrive to practice on time and do all the required stretching and dry land exercises for their practice groups with appropriate workout apparel
- Participate in drills, relays and all aspects of swim related exercise.
- Exhibit good sportsmanship
- Treat the pool, building, and all equipment with care and respect
- Demonstrate diligence in working toward defined personal and team goals
- Check his/her email for announcements and changes to schedules
- Ask questions of their coach when they are not sure of what is expected of them.

Athletes have a right to:

- Be treated with respect and to be free from verbal or physical abuse from another swimmer or coach
- Expect that all practices, both in and out of the water, will be conducted in a safe manner so that the swimmer will not be exposed to injury or unnecessary risk.
- Be encouraged to improve, be congratulated on a good performance, and be critiqued in a constructive manner when improvement in an area is needed.
- Expect practice to be challenging and that, overall, competitive swimming will be rewarding.
- Expect that his or her coach, after being made aware of a limiting physical condition, will not ask the swimmer to perform or train in a manner that the coach knows will be harmful to the swimmer.
- Set his or her own swimming goals with the coach, and to change these goals as situations change.
- Know that his or her coach cares about them as a person as well as a swimmer.

## **Parent Guidelines:**

The role of parents is an extension of the parental role in the home. The primary role of the parent is to supply love, recognition and the encouragement necessary to help your young athlete(s) feel good about themselves. One of the most important things a parent can do is to provide strong emotional support for the swimmer. Swimmers' efforts should be encouraged and complimented as much as possible. Parents should provide the necessities of uniforms, caps, goggles, towels, etc., Parents should also invest their time to ensure a quality existence for the program. It is not the parent's role to coach their child. If your child is receiving criticism from both you and the coach, there is no one there to give them the encouragement and support which is vital in the development of a young athlete. The swimmers should feel safe and supported in their relationship with parents. Parents need to work with the coach to develop this strong, triangular relationship between the coach, parent and athlete. If there is confusion in this relationship and parents try to grapple with the issues themselves without guidance from a coach, some parents can jeopardize a good parent child relationship. Parents should establish a dialogue with their child's coach so that they can build this relationship.

Parents have a responsibility to:

- Support your child's efforts and achievements in a positive and loving way at all times.
- Be enthusiastic about your child's involvement in the Greater Pensacola Aquatic Club.
- Help their swimmer to understand and carry out their responsibilities
- Ensure proper rest and nutrition.
- Keep all fees up to date.
- Take all concerns or questions about your child's progress, program or performance directly to the child's coach.
- Avoid behaving in a manner which brings discredit to the child, coach, other parent or swimmer.
- Avoid disrupting practices or meets by interfering with an athlete or interrupting a coach on the pool deck.
- Participate in all team sponsored activities including GPAC sponsored meets.
- Volunteer time to help run GPAC (sponsored swim meets, committees, Board of Directors)
- Participate in all fundraising activities.
- Educate themselves about the sport of swimming – read magazines, books, attend coaches and goal meetings, read the GPAC and USA Swimming websites, etc.
- Be supportive of the coaching staff. The swimmer-coach relationship needs to be supported by the parents. When problems arise, discuss them with the swimmer's primary coach. If that does not resolve the situation, take the problem to the head coach. Parents should not discuss their complaints about the coaching staff or swim program with the swimmer or other members of the swim team.

Coaches communicate with their swimmers on a daily basis. However, swimmers are young and may not relay important information on the parents. Please ask your swimmer if their coach told them anything important each day. Similarly, parents are encouraged to have their children communicate important information with their coach but should follow up with an email to the coach to ensure they got the information. This will help with communication getting to parents, swimmers and coaches. Coaches will also communicate with parents through the bulletin board at each pool, the website, and emails.

### **What about a problem with the coach?**

One of the traditional swim team communication gaps is that some parents seem to feel more comfortable in discussing their disagreements over coaching philosophy with other parents rather than taking them directly to the coach. Not only is the problem never resolved that way, but in fact this approach often results in new problems being created. Listed below are some guidelines for a parent raising some difficult issues with a coach.

1. Try to keep foremost in your mind that you and the coach have the best interests of your child at heart. If you trust that the coach's goals match yours, even though his/her approach may be different, you are more likely to enjoy good rapport and a constructive dialogue.
2. Keep in mind that the coach must balance your perspective of what is best for your child with the needs of the team or a training group that can range in size from 2 to 30 members. On occasion, an individual child's interest may need to be subordinate to the interests of the group, but in the long run the benefits of membership in the group compensate for occasional short term inconvenience.
3. If another parent uses you as a sounding board for complaints about the coach's performance or policies, listen empathetically, but encourage the other parent to speak directly to the coach. He/she is the only one who can resolve the problem.

### **Coach Guidelines:**

The primary role of the Coach is to develop a training program that will help each swimmer to reach their stated goals. It is the Coach's responsibility to educate the swimmer and to provide constructive criticism of their performance. Coaches are teachers. Their role is to teach fundamental techniques and racing strategies. They offer feedback and judgment on performances. Coaches encourage risk-taking needed for higher levels of competition. They are responsible for the philosophical administration of the club and the details of practice and meet administration. Parents provide most of the practical details of club administration however coaches must have final responsibilities for team and swimming matters such as meet schedules, event choices, relay selections, attendance policies, and discipline.

Coaches have a responsibility to:

- Develop a training program that allows the team, and each swimmer, to achieve their goals.
- Provide stroke instruction to guide each swimmers technical improvement.
- Determine practice groupings based on the swimmer's age, ability, performances, work ethic and attitude. When it is in the best interest of the swimmer the coaches will advance the swimmer in a more challenging training group.
- Select the meets and events that the swimmer should enter.
- Select participants for any relay teams.
- Be responsible for any last minute instruction, when appropriate; prior to a swimmer's swim in a meet, and to be responsible for all post-performance critique.
- Conduct and supervise warm-ups for swimmers at all meets.
- Establish rules and regulation for the team
- Communicate changes in the practice and meet schedule

### **The Triangular Relationship in Brief.**

GPAC's Mission is to develop all levels of swimmers and instill values and life-skills that foster success in all aspects of life. Each person in the GPAC program has the swimmers and the team in mind. We all have the same basic goals for the swimmers. We want them to stay in our unique sport and we want them to develop and mature not only as swimmers but as people. Often goals and missions can be overlooked as they are not immediate and tangible but with solid relationships and communication the swimmers can reach for their dreams.

The GPAC coaching staff looks forward to working with your swimmer!