



Scottish
Swimming



Developing Talent in Swimmers — A Parent's Guide





This booklet is designed to help parents support the learning of young swimmers who are committed to reach their potential. It builds on the parents workshop being delivered throughout the District Regional Programme (DRP) and is designed to give you some further tips and ideas on how you can help.

Understanding what can happen

Before you can help young swimmers make the most of key learning situations it's important to understand the kind of things they might go through. Some parents may be familiar with these but we have included below some of the key things we feel you need to be aware of...

Before training



Training week has been very tough and they don't feel 'up' for the next session

Feeling nervous as they know today is a really tough physical session

Training with a new squad and worried they may be 'left out' or are 'not really part' of the training group

Worried because they are going to arrive a bit late and will feel embarrassed walking into a session when others are already there

At training



Struggling with the set compared to others

Feel they are working hard but not improving

A new technique is hard to master

Their ability is criticised by another swimmer

Not really understanding what's required but too afraid to ask their coach

At competitions



Feel confident but don't swim well

Win easily

Worried what their parents will say if they don't get a PB

Feeling so nervous and pressured on the blocks

They can't think or focus on what key things the coach has asked them to work on

A previous experience of not swimming well at this venue

Everyone has arrived before them and they don't want to go in on their own

At camps



Not getting on well with others

A bit nervous about going and wanting parents to be there

Worried who they will be rooming with

Not sleeping well

Unsure of what's actually required and too embarrassed to ask

Worried about not liking the food and constantly feeling hungry

At school



Missing out on social activities

Struggling to find time and energy to do homework

Pressure from friends who don't understand the time and rest needed to commit

Feeling really tired and hungry by 12noon and lunch isn't for another hour

This is not an exhaustive list but it hopefully gets you thinking about what can happen.

The next step is to understand how swimmers respond to these types of situations.



Behaviours — what would you see?

Those who have been to the presentation will recognise the table below but for those who haven't this is based on the work of Stanford Psychologist, Carol Dweck and helps understand the behaviours you might see from young swimmers and how these behaviours will impact on what they achieve.



What we see in swimmers who underachieve...

What we see in swimmers who reach their potential...

Effort

Expect things to come easily

Work hard in areas that make the biggest difference

Challenges

Avoid challenges they struggle with

Embrace challenges – they sometimes can't do it YET!

Setbacks

Let setbacks confirm they're not good at something

See setbacks as part of the learning process

Feedback

Ignore useful feedback and do what they've always done

Ask questions and use feedback to improve

Ownership

Feel that if things don't work out... it's not their fault!

Understand they need to take responsibility for what happens

To help make this real for you as a parent we have included below some of the behaviours we see regularly in swimming...



What we see in swimmers who underachieve...

What we see in swimmers who reach their potential...

Effort

Finish the set short, giving the impression they have done the same amount as the others. Push themselves at the end of the session having only done just enough in the main part of the set.

Use a warm-up to work on an area the coach has asked them all to focus on, i.e. underwater. Do extra land work at home focused in specific areas, i.e. leg power.

Challenges

Hold back at the beginning of a max set and achieve the times towards the end. Ask for 6 kicks off every turn but only do this when at the coaches' end of the pool. Stop for drinks when the set gets really tough. Hate land training, especially anything to do with running, so either arrive late, miss the session and/or do the absolute minimum.

Setbacks

A lack of full commitment to the training sets as times have plateaued a bit and motivation seems to have dropped. They are disqualified at a race and now wait way too long on the blocks and consistently get really slow starts.

Feedback

Work with a coach on a new technique and try it at a competition and swim poorly – at the next session they go back to the old technique.

Ownership

Haven't got their fins because "mum didn't pack them". Just making it to the marshalling area before a race because "their coach didn't remind them". Only swim the targeted times on a set when a coach is standing over them.

Even if max sets are tough there is full commitment from the very first rep. When given an option they choose to work on something they have been finding tough rather than something they can do easily.

Times have plateaued even though they are working really hard so they set up a meeting with their coach to make sure they are still working on the right things. Have picked up an injury and can't swim so use the time to do some additional work on their core and land training programme.

Stay committed to a new technique and ask a coach after competition how they feel the new technique is holding up under competition conditions.

Arrive early to do their own warm-up. Ask their coach to help them review their race performance. Can swim consistent training sets without coach supervision.

The important thing to know about the above behaviours and many others we see in young swimmers is that they can be changed and this is where parents play a key role by asking great questions.

Asking great questions

Now we understand what can happen and how a young swimmer might respond in terms of their behaviours, we need to think about the role of the parent in supporting their learning and we want you to focus on asking great questions.

Avoid the temptation to tell them what to do!

Asking them questions will help find out what they currently understand about their own development and how they can take responsibility to find out more. You will find questions that work for you and don't be afraid to use 'guided' questions (see below) to focus attention on key areas.

As a start point, here are some examples of questions you can ask:

What did you find most challenging at training tonight?

Why is working on that important in swimming?

What has the coach asked you to work on?

What can you do before the next session that will help you be better next time?

What did you do differently tonight that made the session go well/not so well?

How did you feel when you got disqualified?

I know you were disappointed, what will you do now?

If you're not comfortable speaking to your coach, who else could you get some advice from?



More 'guided' questions



We need to leave early tomorrow for the gala – when are you going to get everything ready?

If you're not sure, it sounds like it would be good to talk to your coach, when would be a good time for you to do that?

You've got a lot of races today – what do you find is the best thing to do between races so you are well prepared for the next one?

You told me last week your coach had asked you to push a bit harder on your training sets, how did that go at the session tonight?

Scenarios

Now you understand what can happen, how swimmers may respond and some great questions you can use to support their learning it's time to practise! We have included a couple of examples below of how to use great questions in practice and we have also included some scenarios for you to think about in terms of what you would do. There are no right or wrong answers, but remember this is about asking great questions so please avoid the temptation to tell!



A young swimmer hasn't been moved up a group and their friends have.

Parent How did that make you feel?

Swimmer I was embarrassed because everyone else got moved up except me

Parent (They seem to be focused on how they compare to others). Why do you think you weren't moved up this time?

Swimmer I don't know

Parent Why do you think the others were moved up?

Swimmer They've been doing it longer and have had more practice than me

Parent That make sense because remember people develop at different rates and it takes time to get good. What will you do now?

Swimmer I think I just need to keep working hard on what I'm doing. My coach says I'm nearly there and it won't take too long to move up

Parent Awesome, I'm so proud of the effort you are putting into this



A young Swimmer goes to a regional gala and easily wins all their events

Swimmer I'm really happy – look at all my medals. I was really tired in the last race but I still won easily

Parent Why do you think you were able to perform so well today?

Swimmer I don't know – I've just always been really good at swimming

Parent I know, I've taken you to a lot of galas! How old do you think you were when you started swimming?

Swimmer I think when I was 4 and then I joined the club when I was 8

Parent That's a long time – what have you worked on the most?

Swimmer My technique and endurance mostly – we spend ages on that

Parent Does that help you swim fast?

Swimmer Definitely

Parent Sounds like you're swimming well because of all the hard work you've done – I'm really glad it's paying off in the competitions. Well done, you should be proud

Swimmer Thanks Mum

These are just examples and how each swimmer responds will be very different but you get the idea... turn the page to see some more scenarios you might encounter.

More Scenarios

Have a look at the scenarios below and think about how you can use great questions to help make sure your son/daughter learns as much as possible from each situation.

Scenario 1:

A swimmer at your club has been selected for Youth Development Squad (YDS). Your son/daughter has predominately beaten them at Galas but hasn't been selected and feels it's really unfair.



Scenario 2:

A young swimmer is attending a gala and this is their last chance to gain a Scottish National Age Group consideration time. They are super nervous before the Gala and are really worried their nerves will make them swim poorly.



Scenario 3:

Your son/daughter has an opportunity to attend a warm weather training camp. This would be the first time they have been away from home for a week without you and although they know this is a great opportunity they don't want to go on the camp.



Scenario 4:

Your son/daughter has a lot going on at the moment including a ton of homework, a couple of parties and a big competition and they want to skip a few training sessions over the next couple of weeks.

The best way to develop your ability to ask great questions is to practise, reflect on how it went and then try again! The more you practise the more asking great questions becomes a habit which helps support your child to get the most from their experiences in swimming. If you are interested in this area we have included below some books which are easy to read and will help you understand more about ability and where it comes from:

Mindset: How you can fulfil your potential by Carol S. Dweck

Talent is overrated: What really separates world-class performers from everybody else by Geoff Colvin

Not in your genes: The real reason children are like their parents by Oliver James

The Talent Code: Unlocking the secret of skill in maths, art, music, sport and just about everything else by Daniel Coyle

The Gold Mine Effect: Crack the Secrets of High Performance by Rasmus Ankersen

The Genius in all of us: Why everything you've been told about genes, talent and intelligence is wrong by David Shenk

The Sports Gene: Talent, Practice and the Truth about Success by David Epstein

Bounce: How Champions are made by Matthew Syed

Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance by Angela Duckworth

Peak: Secrets from the new science of expertise by Anders Ericsson and Robert Pool

Keep practising and good luck!



Scottish Swimming

Young swimmers will face a range of different challenges as they progress through swimming and your role as a positive parent is vital. This booklet is designed to help you support their learning as they commit to reaching their potential. Understanding what to say and when to say it can significantly impact the swimmers' behaviour. Asking great questions helps the swimmers to understand what is happening and how to learn from their experiences. I would urge you to use this booklet as a resource to supplement the DRP parents workshop and revisit the content regularly to check for progress.

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