



## **Understanding Swimmer Disqualification (DQs)**

Parents who are new to swimming often have questions about swimmer disqualification (or DQ slips).

Receiving a DQ is a part of the learning process and a standard aspect of the meet experience. Don't panic, and please do not coach or punish your swimmer. As we will explain below, we use the DQ process at meets to help teach the rules and reinforce the learning process!

Swimming is a technical sport. Developing the correct skills and movement patterns in each stroke takes time, practice, repetition, and coaching feedback. As a young or beginning swimmer develops, they will get stronger and more consistent with time.

### **DQs for Beginners**

Beginning swimmers are first able to perform the skills correctly for a shorter distance (a few strokes, a half lap, a single 25, etc.). These swimmers likely start out their race with a "legal" stroke, but lose that stroke as they start to get tired. A DQ slip will be filled out and submitted if there is even stroke infraction witnessed, so the first goals we are working towards are #1 - Know and understand the rules, #2 - Learn to perform the skill correctly once (then twice, then many times) #3 - Build strength and consistency in the movement and be able to continue the skill correctly even when tired.

In another case, the swimmer might perform 99% of race correctly, and make an infraction during a turn (example: touch with one hand), finish, or single stroke (example small flutter kick at the end of one of their breaststroke kicks).

There are also many cases where a swimmer has mastered a portion of the stroke while another portion of the stroke remains incorrect in practice. For example, a swimmer can do the breaststroke arms and breathing correctly, but when they complete the breaststroke kick their feet do not complete a fully symmetrical movement. It is required that both feet must be turned out during the breaststroke kick. This swimmer is still learning, and will benefit from practicing and racing breaststroke along with their peers even though their stroke is not "100% legal" yet.

### **DQs at the Next Level**

DQs also happen at the higher levels, often when a swimmer misjudges timing or makes a very small technical error. Higher level DQs sometimes reveal innovation or advancement in the sport (example - underwater video review at international meets have revealed the pervasiveness of multiple dolphin kicks during breaststroke pullouts and may eventually lead to rule changes!). Older swimmers are most often experts at responding to and moving on from DQs, and younger Alto swimmers can learn from seeing how our older athletes move forward after at DQ. Learning how to manage emotional ups and downs is an important foundation for high performance.



## **DQs Process**

At a meet, trained stroke and turn judges observe swimmers during each race. If the stroke and turn judge observes a stroke infraction, they will fill out a DQ slip. This DQ slip is reviewed by a higher level official, and if it is approved, the DQ is recorded and the DQ slip gets passed along to the swimmer's coach.

Often, the coaching staff has observed and already knows of the infraction before seeing the DQ slip. Sometimes, because of the angle they observe from, a stroke and turn judge positioned at another part of the pool may notice something that the cannot see from the coaching tent. In every case, the coach has already given their athletes feedback and instruction about the correct technical skills during practice and the DQ slip is a good opportunity to reinforce a skill we are already working on.

## **Learning from the DQ**

From our youngest athletes up to the elite level, our coaching staff uses each race as a learning experience. The "learning" might come from a DQ, or from other technical observations. Or, from a conversation about race preparation, focus during practice, or making a specific stroke change. We might use the post-race conversation as a moment to talk about better warm up, or highlight how a swimmer's improvements in workout have translated to specific and observable improvements in their race. With any older or more experienced swimmers who has received a DQ, we review the slip and often ask the swimmer to describe when or how they believe the mistake was made.

With our younger and more beginning swimmers, the coach will make a decision about whether to mention the specific DQ slip if a DQ is called. Here is why a coach might choose not to focus on or talk about the DQ slip. Breaking a legal stroke rule only emphasizes what not to do. This can be confusing. A 7-year-old will not benefit from hearing the following feedback on their breaststroke "All movements of the arms shall be simultaneous and in the same horizontal plane without alternating movement." Instead, the coach will decide how to recap the race and talk about skill development in terms of an active stroke focus point. For example:

A Breaststroke Rule: The hands shall not be brought back beyond the hip line, except during the first stroke after the start and each turn.

The Coach's Feedback: Take your breath right as your hands separate and quickly shoot your hands back into a streamline position. (This helps the swimmer focus on the right things and avoids the swimmer pulling their arms too far back during their pull or breath).

Our feedback teaches a swimmer the actions to take to avoid breaking the rules, and to learn how to perform the strokes with the best technique possible. Sometimes, the DQ slip is very helpful when discussed directly. For example, if a swimmer touches the wall with one hand in breaststroke or butterfly instead of a two-hand simultaneous touch, talking about the DQ directly is very helpful.



“Today you touched with one hand. The rules for butterfly require that you touch the wall with two hands together. Show me what that looks like. Remember, even if you do all of the other strokes correctly, if your vary last stroke is a one-handed touch the race time doesn’t count, so let’s keep focusing on those two-hand touches every wall in practice.”

This excerpt from an online article sums up our approach to swimmer disqualifications:

"Is a disqualification a failed attempt at something? Yes, it is, but it can be, it should be, a positive failure; one that will lead to future excellence. A part of becoming a better swimmer is testing limits and not being afraid of failing. Learning to accept the possibility of failing, overcoming a fear of failure, not letting the chance of failing stop attempts to do things, and allowing failure to inspire the desire to do things better, leads to DQs being useful, acceptable, positive moments."

Parents and swimmers can think about the parallels between swimming and other sports like basketball or soccer. In a basketball practice, an athlete might repeat taking a free-throw shot over and over, getting more consistent with time. The goal is to be able to perform just as consistently during a game or scrimmage, but we know that this is not always the case. A missed shot is part of the learning process, and with coaching feedback will lead to a better understanding of the game.

This highlights the importance of having our athletes check in with the coaches before and after every race. A disqualification is only helpful if the swimmer learns from it. The swimmer can only learn by receiving reminders before the race and feedback immediately after.

### **Parent Response**

It is our team policy that swimmers check in with their coach after the race before seeing or speaking with their parents, and parents are not permitted to give any kind of race feedback. It is the coach’s job to give specific swimming feedback, and the parent’s job to support the learning process. We are working together to develop swimmers who will stay excited about and motivated in the sport for a long time!

### **Parent Role at Meets**

This leads to a bigger overview of what the parent role looks like before, during, and after competition. Swimming will have a profound experience on your child and on their personal development across many years. Through the relationships that swimmers develop with each other, hard work, training, and the life skills learned through the process, swimmers will continue to benefit from their involvement in the sport throughout their lives. We know that parents play one of the most important roles in shaping how these important life lessons will be learned and internalized.

**Please do not do any of the following:**



1) Do not track your child's progress for them. Our staff encourages swimmers to learn and know their best times, that is the swimmer's job. If a swimmer gets a best time, they should either already know because they have memorized their times, or find out when they check in with their coach. Do not yell out "you got a best time" from across the pool deck!

Once a swimmer has checked in with the coach, you are welcome to give encouragement, but remember: part of learning to deal with disappointment appropriately is learning to deal appropriately with success. Gross displays of celebration only make it harder for swimmers to put future setbacks into perspective.

2) Do not put the swimmer down if they fall short of their (or your) expectations. If they stick with the sport long enough, all swimmers will experience setbacks. This is part of the learning process, and the swimmer and coach will work through it and problem solve together. The parent role is to provide emotional support through the ups and downs, and to encourage swimmers to communicate openly with their coach.

3) Do not question any disqualifications, make excuses for swimmer performance, or make negative comments about the stroke and turn judge or any judgment calls. Negative comments are not permitted in our practices and that behavior should never be modeled by our coaches or team parents.

**Please do the following:**

1) Show support for the team through cheering, volunteering, and supporting all swimmers on the team. One of the best ways you can show your athlete you support them is through involving yourself in the team experience. Cheer for more than just your swimmer's race, this will show your swimmer that you care about the team as much as they do! And, volunteering as a Timer or a Stroke and Turn Judge gives you a front row seat to show your support!

2) Encourage your swimmer to communicate with the coach directly. Swimmers may disclose feelings like disappointment or frustration to their parents. If your swimmer has a hard time communicating these feelings to the coach, support them in learning how to talk with their coach.