



## Understanding Swimmer Disqualification (DQs)

Parents new to swimming often have questions about swimmer disqualification (or DQ). DQs are a part of the learning process and a standard aspect of the meet experience.

Swimming is a technical sport. Developing the skills 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. Sometimes, swimmers are able to perform the skills correctly first for short distances (a few strokes, a half lap, a single 25, etc.), and may start out a race with a "legal" stroke, but lose that stroke as they start to tire. Or, the swimmer might perform most of race correctly, and make an infraction during a turn, finish, or single stroke.

Trained officials observe the swimmers during each event. If they observe a stroke infraction, they will fill out a DQ card, which gets passed along to the coach. Often, the coaching staff observes and already knows of the infraction before seeing the card. Sometimes, because of the angle they observe from, an official may notice something that we cannot see from the coaching tent.

Almost always, we have already given the athlete feedback about this specific issue during practice and the DQ slip is a good opportunity to reinforce a skill we are already working on.

From our youngest athletes up to the elite level, the 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.

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.

### **How should parents respond?**

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 show support regardless of the swimmer's performance.

### **How to support your swimmer:**

The list below includes important information about how to be a supportive swimming parent. We are working together to develop swimmers who will stay excited about and motivated in the sport for a long time! We know that parents play an important role.

We believe that swimming is the best youth sport in the world! Through the relationships that swimmers develop with each other, their hard work & training, and the life skills they learn in the process, swimmers will continue to benefit from their involvement in the sport throughout their lives.

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

1) Do not track the athlete'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 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 athlete performance, or make negative comments about officiating. Negative comments are not permitted in our practices and should not 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 an Official 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.