



# Marshfield Area YMCA Sharks Swim Team

## What to Expect

from your child, your team, and your coach

Welcome to the sport of swimming! As a swimming parent, you will probably not quite know what to expect during your first year. The roles of a swimmer, parent, and coach might seem a bit confusing initially, and as you and your swimmer gain experience, your expectations will likely evolve. As these expectations evolve, there are some traps to avoid that might hinder your experience and relationships in the sport. This little guide should help you get through those moments and help you make your experience worthwhile.

## What to Expect From Your Child

Remember, your child is just a child. All too often, parents might put too high of an expectation on their children to succeed right from the start. Even if this is not their first year in the sport, it will take time for them to become comfortable in their surroundings, learn all of the necessary skills, and be able to use those skills in competition and in life. They might struggle with certain skills early on in practice, or they might even master one in practice and completely fail on it in competition. Remember, we need to be patient and allow them to develop their skills at their own pace. If another swimmer seems to progress faster than your child, that is both beyond your control and the control of your child. Let your child know that he/she will get in time and not to worry.

In practice, your child may have more or less drive to succeed than others, and the same is true in competition. This drive can have a direct relationship with your child's performance, but it is not in the best interest of you or the coach to try to dictate your child's commitment. We can only guide our swimmers to the best route; it is up to the swimmers themselves to take that route. Keep that in mind at all times.

Give them the freedom to succeed or fail. If they succeed, that's great! If they fail, make sure they understand that failure is a reality when taking risks, but success is not possible without taking those risks in the first place. Over time, your child will learn better to calculate their risks and weigh the outcomes on their own – without an MBA or law degree! This is part of the natural process that will help them later succeed in life.

As for discipline, allow your coach to take the lead on this during practice. Your presence on the pool deck is appreciated, but don't feel the need to intervene whenever you feel your child's (or another child's for that matter) behavior is out of line. Coaches will do their best to keep the level of discipline appropriate for the training session at hand. Generally, coaches will try to maintain a positive, fun atmosphere as long as the time is productive. If the time becomes unproductive because one or more swimmers are pushing the limits, your coach will take whatever steps are necessary to keep things moving in the right direction. The coach will certainly notify you if your swimmer needs further guidance.



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## What to Expect from the Team

Your team has a mix of swimmers of all ages, ability levels, and experience. The same goes for the parents. There are parents of new swimmers who don't know what to expect, and there are even "veteran" parents who think they could run the team tomorrow. This is true at every team at every level in the country, and likely in the world. Where do you fit in? You'll find out in due time. Initially, be patient with your child and coach, and try to get to know some of the other parents. They will help you get through your first year, and some of these people can become valuable friends and mentors along the way. The expectations of the team naturally change from year to year, and different mixtures of swimmers, parents, and coaches can change those expectations quite greatly.

Your child might get drawn into cliques and feel different societal pressures within the team, and these pressures change with age and experience. Do your best to make your child feel comfortable and valued, and don't allow your child to worry too much about what someone said or did at practice or at a meet. In the greater scope of things, what happens in practice or at a meet is very small compared to one's overall life. They can only become problems if we dwell on them.

As a team, there are different values that need to be weighed from day to day. Swimming as a sport is unique in that races are very individual, but all of those individual performances add up to affect the team's overall performance and standing. There will be times when practices and meets will emphasize the role of the individual over that of the team, and vice versa. It can sometimes be confusing, but it is one of the unique aspects of the sport that develops our athletes to succeed later in life.

## What to Expect from the Coach

Your child's coach is there to develop your child as a competitive swimmer, and to teach your child how to use the tools learned in the sport to become a healthy, successful individual. Your child's coaches will do their best to balance a fun, productive environment with rigorous training and detailed instruction. This balance relies on the progress of individuals and that of the overall group. The overall environment and training plans are very flexible in order to accommodate everyone's needs as best as possible.

Regardless of the level of training and competition your swimmer is at, there is one role that is universal: **Parents need to be a source of unconditional love and support for their children.** Swimmers of all ages need support from somewhere. If the parents don't provide it, the coaches will feel obligated to, and will therefore not be able to effectively give the children the feedback they may need. Allow the coaches to be coaches: let them develop your child as a swimmer, and you can work on developing them in everything else. Allow your swimmer to experience everything there is, and you can both have fun along the way!