

QUESTIONS FROM NEW SWIM PARENTS



“How do I motivate my child when she’s frustrated and doesn’t see progress—and her friends are getting ribbons?”

“My eight-year-old is talented but she doesn’t love swimming as much as she used to—what should I do?”

These two questions from newer swim parents have no right or wrong answers, but experienced swim parents and experts say to let kids take ownership of their sports. Parents can’t want it more than they do. Also, we can’t motivate them because motivation is intrinsic. Instead, we can encourage them along the journey.

Here are six ways to keep new swimmers wanting to stay in the pool:

ONE

Let them have some say so.

If kids are forced into a sport at an early age, and it’s not something they want to do, I wouldn’t expect a positive outcome. When kids are interested and enjoy an activity, parents will know it. If kids are in on the decision to commit for a season, they’ll feel ownership and want to be there, rather than feel it’s another thing they have to do.

TWO

Expose them to multiple sports.

For the parent of an eight-year-old who says her child doesn’t love it as much as she used to, this is the time to give children different experiences and see where they gravitate. Maybe it’s cold in the winter and they should try again in the spring. Or, maybe there’s too much pressure from their coach or parents. It’s okay to try another sport and come back to swimming later on.

THREE

How do you define progress?

Is a swimmer's definition of progress getting a medal or a ribbon? A mom said her child didn't feel she was making progress because her friends and siblings were getting ribbons and she wasn't. If that's the case, parents can point out all the ways their child is improving, by dropping time, learning new strokes, better streamlines, etc. Also, when the swimmer does earn a ribbon, the reward will be that much sweeter.

FOUR

Encourage hard work.

If we tell our kids we saw their effort and how much we appreciate it, we may help them through times when they're feeling discouraged. Imagine if a child only saw their parents focusing on performance. How dismal would it be if parents are upset when their swimmer didn't get a best time or win their heat—and didn't notice how hard they've tried?

FIVE

Is it fun?

Kids will be motivated to keep swimming if they're having fun with their friends and have a positive relationship with their coaches. Yes, practice can be tough, but camaraderie and a little fun will go a long way to keep kids in the pool. The number one reason why 70 percent of kids quit sports by age 13 is "it's just not fun anymore." Little things parents can do to make swimming more fun is having teammates over, or stopping with families on the way home from a meet for a treat together.

SIX

Six little words.

Be sure to let your kids know that "I love to watch you swim." When we're watching our kids race or show up to an occasional practice, our kids will know it's something we see as important. Our body language will tell them more than our words, but saying those six words will reinforce that we think swimming is a worthwhile activity and we want them to continue with it.

How would you answer the two questions from new swim parents about how to keep your children motivated and what to do if they no longer love swimming?