



SWIMMING PARENTS

By Wayne Goldsmith



Wayne Goldsmith has been a leading influence in swimming around the world for over 25 years. He's delivered swimming parent education lectures, workshops and seminars in over 30 countries and worked with swimmers, coaches and teams in the USA, Australia, England, Scotland, Spain, Canada, South Korea, South Africa, New Zealand and the Philippines.

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Design by Emma O'Sullivan; eosullivan.nz@gmail.com

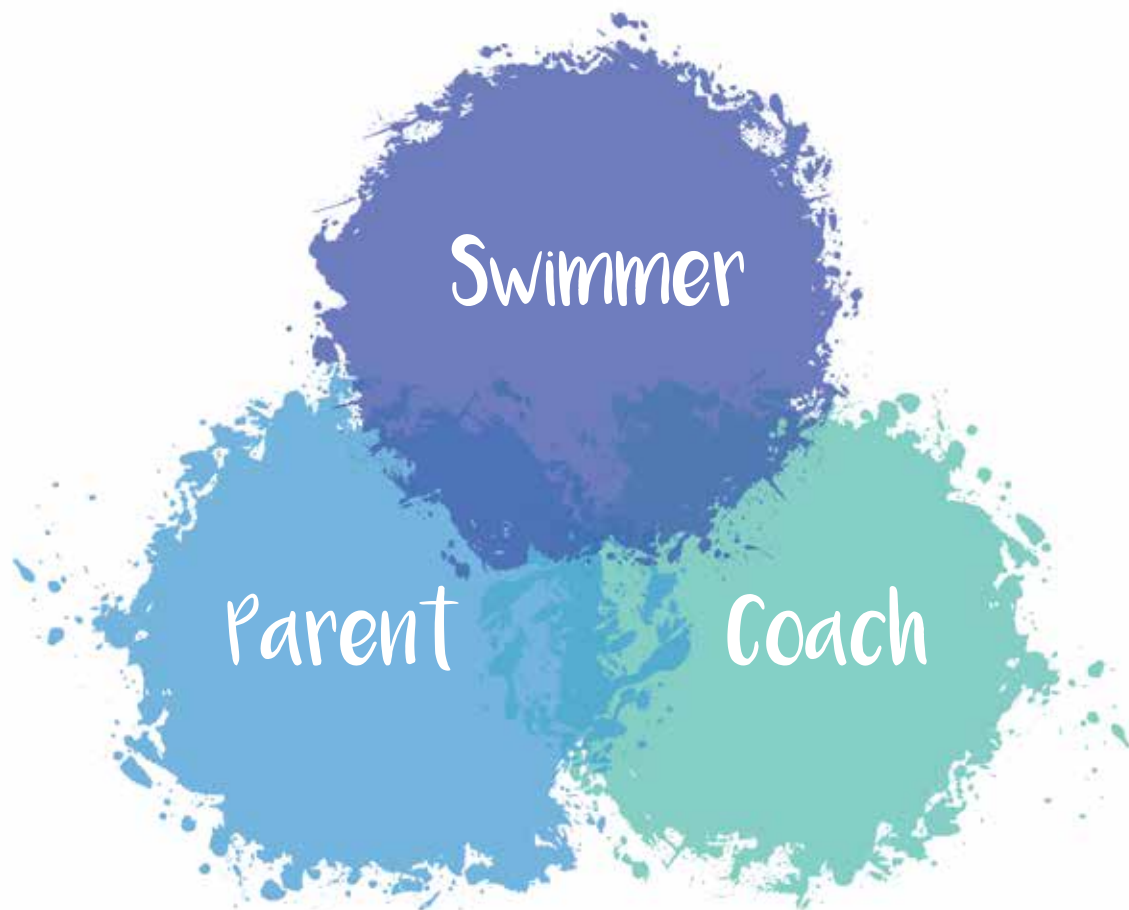
Swimmers, Coaches and Parents: The Performance Partnership

It takes **three people** to swim fast:

- A talented, committed, hardworking and dedicated swimmer.
- A passionate, experienced, innovative, engaging and enthusiastic coach.
- A supportive, loving, caring and believing parent.

These three people – these “partners” - each play an important role in helping the swimmer to achieve swimming performance success.

As Partners in the swimmer’s Performance, each person – the swimmer, the coach and the parent has a role to play and a clear set of responsibilities to ensure they perform their role to the best of their ability.



The Performance Partnership: Swimmers, Coaches and Parents working together to help the swimmer realise their full potential. Where the Partnership intersects –
Excellence is the result.

Imagine if we invited all three “partners” to apply for a position in the Performance Partnership:

NOW HIRING

JOB ADVERTISEMENT:
WANTED: SWIMMER

Key attributes:

- Commitment
- Dedication
- Work ethic
- Ability to work as part of a team
- Ability to overcome difficulties, setbacks and tough times
- A love of the water
- A desire to learn and improve
- A strong desire to realise your full potential

Job roles and responsibilities:

- Must be prepared to work hard and to give completely and unconditionally to the achievement of your personal goals every day.
- Must be prepared to learn, to improve and to grow every day.
- Must be prepared to give your best to everything you do, every day – in and out of the water.

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JOB ADVERTISEMENT:
WANTED: SWIMMING PARENT

Key attributes:

- Unconditional love of your child
- Unconditional support of your child
- A caring nature
- A strong desire to see your child realise their full potential

Job roles and responsibilities:

- Must be prepared to support your child with important day to day personal management needs including healthy nutrition, getting adequate sleep, time management, managing school and non-swimming commitments, personal hygiene and recovery;
- Must be prepared to contribute to the education of your child in important values like honesty, integrity, humility, courage, discipline, commitment, dedication and the importance of hard work.
- Must love and care for your child at all times – regardless of their swimming performances - unconditionally and without limits.

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JOB ADVERTISEMENT:

WANTED: SWIMMING COACH

Key attributes:

- Passion
- Enthusiasm
- Commitment
- Dedication
- Selflessness
- Professionalism in attitude, preparation and appearance
- Sense of humour
- Knowledge of swimming skills, technique and training methods and competition strategies
- A love of the sport of swimming
- A strong desire to see every swimmer realise their full potential

Job roles and responsibilities:

- Must be prepared to work hard: tirelessly and relentlessly to help every swimmer in the team realise their full potential;
- Must be patient, tolerant and understanding;
- Must possess a willingness to teach and to learn from every swimmer you coach;
- Must create and sustain a swimming training environment which fosters learning, growth, development and improvement in every aspect of swimming;
- Must be engaging, entertaining and excellent in every regard on deck every day.

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Each partner in the Performance Partnership has an important role to play and it is essential that right from the commencement of the partnership that each partner clearly understands what it is they are expected to do, when they are expected to do it and to what standard it needs to be done.



Why Partnerships break down.

Like any partnership in life or in business, Performance Partnerships can and do break down.

The most ten common reasons for this are:

- 1. A lack of a clear vision and common commitment – where the partners want different things.** For example, the coach may want Olympic success for the swimmer but the swimmer may see swimming as something they just enjoy doing casually with friends and team mates;
- 2. A lack of common values and attitudes.** Where the partners don't share common views and beliefs about things like hard work, discipline, commitment and dedication, the partnership typically fails;
- 3. A lack of a shared understanding about time-frames.** It can take up to ten years for a swimmer to realise their potential in the water as a competitor. Where partners lack the patience for the development of complete swimming potential, problems will arise within the partnership;
- 4. A lack of communication.** Like all partnerships, regular, open, honest communication is the key to everything;
- 5. Personality conflicts between partners.** People working hard, who are often working under fatigue and pressure can often come into conflict. In the worst case, conflicts can lead to the breakdown of the partnership, e.g. swimmers and parents leaving the coaching program;
- 6. "Ownership" issues, i.e. over who owns the swimmer's performance.** Ultimately the swimmer's performance belongs to the swimmer. Whilst the coach and the parents help, guide, nurture and support the swimmer, the actual performance is largely the result of the talent, commitment, passion, drive and determination of the swimmer;
- 7. "Over-stepping", i.e. one partner taking on the roles and responsibilities of one or more of the other partners.** This is a common problem in all partnerships. In a large business for example, the company accountant does not build products on the production line. Similarly, the company engineer does not do the company accounts each month. Each partner needs to do their own job and do it well;
- 8. A lack of action by one or more of the partners, i.e. failing to meet their commitments to the Partnership.** When one or more of the partners does not deliver on their commitment, e.g. the swimmer skips workouts, the partnership becomes strained;
- 9. Changing goals, values, priorities within the partnership, e.g. the swimmer gets older and decides to pursue other sports, school studies, other relationships, music, "life" etc.** This is an unavoidable one in many cases. Sometimes the partnership ends because it is time for it to end. It's no one's fault – it's just time;
- 10. Unrealistic expectations of one or more of the partners about the outcome of the partnership.** A very common problem with Performance Partnerships is that parents will expect that their child will be a world record holder even when the swimmer and the coach have other expectations. This clash of expectations is usually the result of poor communication when the partnership was being formed and a failure to communicate during the partnership.

It all comes down to one thing...

what's right for the swimmer.

In the end, what does every partner really want from the Performance Partnership?

Simple. Everyone wants what's right for the swimmer.

It's not about the coach's ego, their level of certification or their standing in the swimming community.

It's not about mom and dad's bragging rights, their pride in their kids or them living out their athletic fantasies through the performances of their children.

It's all about the swimmer. It begins and ends with what's right for the swimmer.

In short, what *everyone* wants is:

1. To provide the swimmer with the opportunity and the environment to realise their full potential;
2. To provide the swimmer with a safe, nurturing, stimulating, engaging, enjoyable environment to learn, to grow and to flourish as a human being;
3. To provide the swimmer with the opportunity to learn to love the sport of swimming – to develop a life-long love affair with the water through great experiences, strong friendships and the support of people who love and care for them.

Summary:

1. Swimmers, coaches and parents can, by working together as partners, help swimmers to achieve their full performance potential as athletes and as people;
2. The success of this "Performance Partnership" is dependent on all three partners knowing, understanding and accepting their roles and responsibilities and the clear lines and boundaries that exist between them;
3. If all three "partners" remain focused on the potential of the swimmer as the priority, the swimming experience is enhanced for everyone and success for the swimmer is inevitable.

The Top Ten Questions Every Swimming Parent Wants to Ask

You see them every day. They are everywhere. At every pool. Every swim meet. Every school swimming practice.

There they are. Sitting at the side of the pool. Watching every lap. Counting every breath. Analysing every stroke. Studying every move you make.

Coaches? No.

Swimming media? Uh-uh.

Officials? No way.

Who are these people who go to the pool and watch you swim laps day after day after day?

Who are these folk sitting there in the wind and rain for hours and hours watching you practice?

Who are these strange humans who love nothing more than getting out of bed at 4 am just to sit in the cold and watch you train?

Your Parents!

Ever wondered what they are thinking sitting there at the side of the pool studying every stroke and counting every kick?

They are desperate to find out the answers to these important questions...



1.

How many training sessions should my child do each week?

There is [no magic number of training sessions for every swimmer](#). Even at elite level, some swimmers swim 7 sessions a week, some do nine, others 11...there is no magic number.

It all comes down to the **FLAG principle**:

- **Fatigue** – if a swimmer is swimming 3 sessions a week and as a result is always tired, irritable and their grades are falling, then doing **more** swimming does not make sense. So the optimal number of sessions for any individual swimmer is largely based on their ability to adapt to and recover from their training load.
- **Level of performance** – training sessions should also be based on the level of performance being targeted. Chances are swimming two sessions a week will not get you selected on the next Olympic team and similarly 14 sessions a week is a little too much just to achieve a PB time at the under 9 state championships meet. As a broad benchmark, [world class swimmers](#) spend one day per week, i.e. **24 hours per week** training and the rest of the time eating and sleeping so the higher you want to go, the harder you have to work.
- **Available time** – if your child is in junior high, playing basketball, learning piano, doing special projects on weekends for extra credits, playing tennis and in the school choir... and.....swimming five sessions each week, then it is safe to say, adding more swimming sessions is not going to do anything other than make them tired and fatigued. Keep in mind your child's total commitments across all areas of their life before adding more training time. And – never, ever forget that some days they need to just hang out with their friends, play and enjoy life. They are only kids once!
- **Goals** – if your child sets high swimming goals, then naturally the time, effort and energy to achieve them must also be high. As a general rule, as kids progress through each level of swimming they need to add an extra pool session or gym workout to learn the skills, develop the fitness and build the technical abilities to be successful at the next level. For example (Note: this is a guide only):

Swimmer level	Sessions per week
Water safety / Learn to swim	1-2
Mini squads / School swimming programs	2-3
District / Country Swimming Championships level	3-4
State Swimming Championships level	4-6
National Swimming Championships level	6-8
International Swimming level	8 plus



2.

My child is 10 and is a great freestyler. What does she have to do to make it to the top?

The first thing to accept is that **there is no such thing as a champion ten year old freestyler**. Swimmers who experience success pre-teenage years generally do so because of accelerated growth, i.e. they are bigger and stronger than the other kids!

Another common situation is that as kids grow, change and develop, their ability to swim the [competitive swimming strokes](#) also changes – this year's backstroker could be next year's freestyler and then the following year they are great at [swimming fly](#).

In the long term, the factors which determine success as a senior swimmer are the **5 Ps**:

- **Perseverance** – the ability to try and try and try and try – and to never give up;
- **Patience** – it takes time to become a great swimmer – about ten years of consistent hard work;
- **Physical training** – great swimmers are usually the best prepared. It takes a high level of [physical fitness, technical development and skills refinement](#) to make it to the top;
- **Personality** – world class swimmers demonstrate some common personality traits – none the least being determination, commitment, the ability to overcome adversity and the capacity for accelerated learning;
- **Passion** – Swimming is like anything else in life: you have to love it to do it well!



3.

When should my child specialise in a stroke?

Kids need to grow into their specialist stroke! That is, when swimmers grow and develop physically and mentally, they will be naturally drawn to a particular stroke.

It is common for a [child's best stroke](#) to change from year to year but once they hit middle to late teens, the nature of specific events will become more appealing. **Real talent in any one stroke is harder to hide than it is to find!** There is no need to encourage kids into one stroke or another – [it will just happen!](#)

4.

Do swimmers need a special diet?

No. Not unless they have a medical problem or diet related condition that has been diagnosed by nutrition professional. As a general rule, top swimmers follow a “4 more 4 less 4 me” diet:

More complex carbohydrates like rice, bread, and pasta

More lean quality protein like chicken, meat, fish

More water, fresh juices

More fresh fruit, nuts and vegetables

Less take away food.

Less saturated fats and oils.

Less processed and pre-packaged foods

Less sodas.

Lots of parents want to know about supplements like vitamins, minerals and special substances like Creatine, Glucose and so on.

The five golden rules about these products are:

1. They may be of some use to some swimmers in some situations and on some occasions but consult a sports nutrition professional to help determine what might work for your child;
2. **Nothing takes the place of consistent hard work, good technique and a great attitude;**
3. If something sounds too good to be true, “Miracle Sports Performance Powder – Improves Endurance by up to 60%...” it probably is too good to be true!
4. **Never introduce a new product – no matter what it is promising – within 7 days of an important meet.** Many parents have fallen for the trap of giving kids a “special” breakfast or all new “miracle” supplement on the morning of a big meet only to find their kids spend more time in the toilet than in the pool.
5. Read rule 2 again – no supplement can turn mediocrity into magnificence. Teach kids to believe in themselves and to take responsibility for their own swimming performances rather than to rely on the promises of a supplement advertising campaign.



5.

How do I find the best coach for my child?

The best swimming coaches demonstrate the **FIVE Cs**:

- **Calm** – they remain calm and composed on and off deck and set a great example for the kids they coach;
- **Confident** – they display a “humble confidence” – they believe in themselves and coach because they love coaching – not for any ego stroking reason;
- **Close** – the pool where they coach is close to home or at least on the after school “route” – e.g. pick up the kids from school, drop them to basketball practice, pick them up and take them to swimming, pick them up and drop them to music lessons.....
- **Caring** – they are interested in kids becoming great human beings – not just fast swimmers.
- **Credible** – they have the appropriate experience, qualifications and understanding of swimming.

There is an old saying in coaching...

*Kids don't care how much you know,
they want to know how much you care!*

In swimming, this means asking the coach four questions:

- Will you inspire a lifelong passion for the sport of swimming in my child?
- Will you engage my child's heart and mind and respect them as an individual?
- Will you teach my child the importance of swimming skills and technique?
- Will you encourage my child to learn, be patient with them when they fail and above all help them to develop a real sense of self confidence and self-belief?

Think about your own sporting career. Remember that coach who took a real interest in you as a human being and changed your life – whose lessons you still remember even now 20 years later? That's the type of coach you want to find for your kids!

6.

School, swimming, social life.....what's the right balance for my child?

Your child is not a swimmer... they are a child first and foremost: a child who just happens to swim. But they are also a student, a brother or sister, a son or daughter, a member of a youth group, maybe someone who plays another sport – they are a young person who has the potential to be anything they choose to be.

Kids are drawn to the things that:

1. They **enjoy**;
2. They have **friends**;
3. They are **learning** by because their hearts and minds are engaged in the activity.

So if your kids are **having fun with their friends and love what they are doing**, chances are the balance is right. If your kids start finding excuses not to train, don't want to get out of bed to go to the pool, show poor training habits and want to avoid going to meets, they are telling you, *"mom and dad – the balance is not right and I want to change it"*. Listen to your kids.



7.

What should I expect in terms of results at Meets?

You should expect to see:

- Your child enjoying swimming with his / her friends;
- Your child **learning to love challenging him / herself and taking pleasure in competition**;
- Your child **demonstrating all they have learnt** in terms of swimming technique, dives, starts, turns, finishes, underwater kicking.
- Your child showing some **self-responsibility** in their warm up, recovery, meet day nutrition and personal management.
- Your child showing a **sense of "team"** by cheering for team mates and supporting other members of the squad.

In terms of results...**expect nothing**. Where kids are concerned... Medals are meaningless and times are tedious unless they are accompanied by LLL – a love of the sport, **learning new skills and life lessons**.



8.

Does my child need to be doing strength training in the gym?

No. Not unless they have an injury or weakness or imbalance or other physical condition that has been identified by a professional sports physical therapist / medical practitioner.

The three key areas – what we call the “**ABILITIES**” of non-pool training to focus on are:

FLEX - ability: Improving their **flexibility** in important swimming muscles and muscle groups;

MOB - ability (mobility): Improving their **mobility** around joints;

STAR - ability (stability): Developing a **strong stable “core”** – abs, back muscles and important stabilising muscles in their shoulders and hips.

Kids don’t need to lift heavy weights – work on the “abilities”, technique, skills, attitude and self-confidence and leave the lifting to the Governor of California!



9.

What can I do to be the best swimming parent I can be?

Give your child that which only you can give! Unconditional love, total support, compassion and unwavering belief in them as human beings. In the long term, whether your kids become world record holders in swimming, lawyers, doctors, teachers...it is not their talent that defines them or makes them successful – **it is who they are.**

And no one helps kids to develop [values](#), virtues and characteristics like their family.

6 feet tall 12 year old kids with large feet and strong muscles are great, but give me intelligent, honest, [hardworking kids](#) with a [real sense of self belief](#), courage and integrity any day! **Develop the person first – then the swimming power!**

10.

My son is 11 years old and wants to play basketball two afternoons a week? Is playing other sports OK?

Yep! Pre-teen kids should be out enjoying life, being fit, learning skills and being active. Sure – once they get to mid – late teens and make the commitment to be a great swimmer, then some of their other activities will need to be cut back but at 11 the “more the merrier”. A lot of sports have several cross over effects on swimming including:

- **Basketball** – leg power, co-ordination, speed, endurance.
- **Gymnastics** – balance, timing, flexibility, power, co-ordination.
- **Martial arts** – balance, timing, flexibility, power, co-ordination, self-confidence.
- **Running** – aerobic fitness, leg strength.
- **Rock climbing** – strength, balance, power, flexibility, self-confidence.
- **Soccer** – aerobic fitness, leg strength, co-ordination, speed.

Look at the obesity epidemic in kids in all developed nations. It would be great to have every kid in the world swimming laps, but just having them outside playing sport and moving their bodies instead of seeing them inside eating junk food while watching TV has got to be good!

So there they are [parents](#)... **the Top Ten Questions you always wanted to ask!** So now you know!



Fifty things you can do to help your child achieve in sport

By Wayne Goldsmith and Helen Morris

1. Love them unconditionally.
2. Support their coach.
3. Accept that they cannot win every time they compete.
4. Allow them to be a kid and to have fun.
5. Help them to develop as a person with character and values.
6. Turn off as a sporting parent – don't make sport the one and only topic of conversation at the dinner table, in the car, etc.
7. Don't introduce your child as "This is my son the swimmer or Rugby player" – their sport is just something they do – it does not define them.
8. Don't do everything for them – teach them responsibility and self-management.
9. Reward frequently for success and effort but make them small, simple, practical, and personal things – kids don't need a CD or \$20 just for playing sport.
10. Best of all reward them with what they really love.....your time!
11. Be calm, relaxed and dignified at competitions and games.
12. Accept that progress in any sport takes a long time: it takes at least 7 – 10 years AFTER maturation in most sports for any athlete to achieve their full potential.
13. Believe it or not, kids can learn to pack and unpack their training bag, clean their own training and competition clothes, fill their own water bottle – teach them and encourage them to take control over their own sporting careers. A little manual work and helping out with household chores are important lessons in developing independence.
14. Don't reward champion performances with junk food!
15. Skills and attitude are the important things – don't waste money buying kids the latest and greatest equipment and hope to buy a short cut to success.
16. Encourage the same commitment and passion for school and study as you do for sport.
17. Avoid relying on "sports foods" or "sports supplements" – focus on a sensible, balanced diet which includes a variety of wholesome, healthy foods.
18. Allow your kids to try many sports and activities.





19. Don't specialize too early!!! There is no such thing as a champion ten year old winger or opening bowler or halfback.

20. Junk food is ok occasionally. Don't worry about it.

21. Praise qualities like effort, trying hard, attempting new skills, the execution of a new skill in a game and similar values rather than winning.

22. Love them unconditionally – (worth repeating).

23. Have your "guilt gland" removed – this will help you avoid phrases like "I've got better things to do with my time" and "Do you realize how much I have had to give up for you to play football". Everyone loses when you play the guilt game.

24. Encourage activities which build broad, general movement skills like running, catching, throwing, agility, balance, co-ordination, speed and rhythm. These general skills can then have a positive impact on all sports.

25. Encourage the occasional "down time" – no school or sport – just time to be kids!

26. Encourage relationships and friendships away from training, competition and school work – it's all about balance.

27. Help and support your child to achieve the goals they set, then take time to relax and celebrate and enjoy their achievement as a family.

28. Never use training or sport as a punishment – i.e. more laps / more training.

29. Do a family fitness class – yoga or martial arts or another sport unrelated to their main sport. Everyone benefits.

30. Car pool! Get to know the other kids and families in your child's team then in turn you can allow your child to be more independent by doing things with other (trusted) adults.

31. Attend training regularly to show you are interested in your child's effort and the process rather than just the win / loss of the outcome.

32. Help raise money for the team, club and kids: even if your own child is not involved in the target of the fund raising.

33. Tell your kids you are proud of them for being involved in a healthy activity.

34. Volunteer your time to be on the committee.

35. Volunteer your time to help out at training and competition BUT.....try not to work directly with your own child. This helps teach your kids the importance of “team” - where working together and supporting each other are important attributes.

36. Even if you were an athlete or a player, and even if you are a trained coach, resist the temptation to coach your own child. It rarely if ever works.

37. Be aware that your child’s passion for a particular sport may change.

38. Also be aware however that skills learnt in one sport can often transfer to another sport.

39. Accept flat spots – times when your child does not improve. During these times encourage participation for fun, focus on learning skills and help them develop perseverance and patience – two life skills that will help them throughout their lives.

40. Believe it or not, Australian kids are unlikely to die from drinking tap water.

41. Cheer for your child..... appropriately. Don’t embarrass yourself or them.

42. Make sure each week includes some designated family time, where you do family things and talk about family issues – not about sport.

43. Take a strong stand against smoking and drug use (both recreational and performance enhancing).

44. Set an example with sensible, responsible alcohol use when your kids are around.

45. Don’t look for short cuts like “miracle sports drinks” or “super supplements” – success in sport comes from consistently practicing skills and developing an attitude where the love of sport and physical fitness are the real “magic”.

46. If one of your kids is a sporting champion and the other kids in the family are not so gifted, ensure you have just as much time, energy and enthusiasm for whatever they are doing.

47. Eliminate the use of the phrase “well what we did when I was playing”.

48. Encourage your kids to find strong role models but try not to let this decision to be based on sporting ability only. Look for role models who consistently demonstrate integrity, humility, honesty and the ability to take responsibility for their own actions.

49. Encourage them to learn the qualities of leadership and concepts like sharing, selflessness, team work and generosity – sport teaches life lessons.

50. Don’t compare the achievements of your kids to any other kids – good or bad. It only creates barriers and resentments between young people and the world can do without more of that!



About Wayne Goldsmith



Wayne has been working in swimming for the past 27 years.

He's worked on deck with coaches, swimmers and swimming parents all over the world: USA, UK, Canada, Spain, France, England, Scotland, Portugal, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Japan, South Korea, The Philippines, Fiji, New Zealand and all around Australia.

Wayne's been a writer for Swimming World in the USA for the past 15 years.

He's been invited keynote speaker at the American Swimming Coaches Association five times and a speaker at the Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association 15 times.

Wayne is a winner of the Outstanding Contribution to Swimming in Australia Award.

To read more about Wayne and to check out some of his work go to his YOU TUBE Channel – with a special section for Sporting Parents:

https://www.youtube.com/ch?v=xKpvxF3iY5U&list=PLxw2oKwowHP_8dh7Pei-g_KGFCXLEE1lq

And check out his web sites:

<https://www.swimmingworldmagazine.com/news/category/wayne-goldsmith-water-world/>
www.newsportfuture.com
www.wgcoaching.com



“ *There is nothing more wonderful or more miraculous to a child than the unconditional love of a parent. Having a parent love, accept and value a child unconditionally for who they are - not for what they do - but for who they are - is the most important of all gifts a child can receive. If your child goes to bed at night knowing with absolute certainty that they are loved, accepted and valued for no reason other than they are your child - you've given them the greatest thing you can ever give them.* ”

Wayne Goldsmith.