

Top 10 things I wish I had known before our first swim meet

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Our first meet was the first meet of summer 2010, an away meet at Carlisle, outdoors. Megan had just transferred to the Tidal Waves. The water was freezing being so early in the season but later in the day the sun was brutal. I wish I had had more advice so from a parent perspective, so here goes...

1. Bring clothes to keep warm – this applies indoor or outdoor. The kids are hanging around for much of the meet, the proportion of time they spend warming up and racing is small. It is essential that they have a warm up suit/tracksuit, sweats, sweat shirt to stay warm. Outdoor in the heat of the day, they need to cover-up too.
2. Volunteering – don't be intimidated because you are unfamiliar with it. Plenty of help and training is available. Start with timing as you will be with a partner who has most likely done it before and can help you. Have the more experienced timer write the times to start with so you only need to concentrate on the stopwatch. Timing is really the best 'seat' in the house and you will get to see your child swim close-up. Outdoor, make sure you have sun screen and water for yourself – no shade for a couple of hours can result in sunburn! Ask questions and get involved – as a rule of thumb, you are expected to volunteer for a spot during any session you have a swimmer in the water. Sign-up opportunities come via e-mail and are done through 'Time-to-sign-up' .
3. Bring plenty of sun cream to an outdoor meet – even if it's cloudy – the kids are outdoors for an extended period of time, sun burn is a real risk.
4. Pack food for an army but healthy small portions that they can eat between warm-ups and the meet and between races. Dried fruit, nuts, cereal/protein bars, cut up fruit, cheese sticks, veggies & hummus etc. Include plenty of water – staying hydrated is essential and add a Gatorade or similar.
5. Equipment – Have at least 2 caps and 2 pairs of goggles – (goggles – the same as the ones yours swimmer uses to train). Goggles break and caps tear ... often! A swimmer can never have enough towels with them!
6. Have stuff for your swimmer to do. Many of the swimmers hang-out, socialize, play cards, draw, color, write, listen to music. Whatever your child likes to do, have it on hand.

7. Know where you are going and arrive early – it can be a rotten thing to get your child up early during summer especially for an away meet which may require up to a 2 hour drive. Believe me, from experience, it is better to have extra time when you arrive than for you and your child to be getting stressed because you are running late.
8. For outdoor meets, bring a pop-up tent, rugs and coolers. Swim meets are long – provide plenty of shade at an outdoor meet. Unlike indoor meets where you will be on the bleachers, typically, at an outdoor meet, your child will sit with you so make sure they have an area to rest in the shade.
9. Be positive – whether your swimmer is having a meltdown due to nerves (and this is totally normal) or on a high and excited for the competition, encourage them. However they are feeling you can be sure swimmers before them have felt the same. Likewise after races – good or 'bad' performance – our coaches are fabulous and know exactly what to say to them if they have had a disappointing race, been DQ'd or improved a time. Ask them what the coaches told them and then reinforce it. At a recent swim meet I witnessed the type of pushy parent we do NOT want to be (not from the York Team) – a swimmer improved their time by ONLY 5 seconds but it wasn't enough to qualify for Divisionals... I was embarrassed by the treatment the mother bestowed on the girl and then later on her sister who put in a similar performance – the mother proceeded to walk out and did not finish watching the races her daughters participated in.
10. The coaches really do know best. Make sure you don't distract your swimmer before a race or directly afterwards – the coaches need to speak with them as soon as they come out of the water. Make sure your swimmer is on top of when their races are. If they are unsure – enlist the help of one of the older swimmers who can help them out – many of the Tidal Waves teens have been swimming in meets for a couple of seasons at least and will willingly help your new swimmer.

Useful Links:

York YMCA Swimming (incl. Tidal Waves) - <http://www.swimyorky.org>

Volunteering - <http://www.timetosignup.com/swimtidalwaves>