



BC Summer Swimming Association
SWIMMING | DIVING | WATER POLO | SYNCHRO

BCSSA Parents' Resource Guide

BC Summer Swimming Association

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1. Introduction

This “sample guide” can be of assistance in establishing an introductory document for new parents to your club. Please reprint and distribute as needed.

Foreword

We would like to welcome you to the exciting world of swimming. By joining a BCSSA club, your child has just become a member of one of the country’s largest and most organized youth sports.

This overview of competitive swimming should give you a good working knowledge of the sport and answer some basic questions. Keep in mind that this information is just an introduction. You are encouraged to talk to your swimmer’s coach and your club’s executive to get more information. Of course you can feel free to contact BCSSA for additional information regarding our four disciplines.

The disciplines we offer (swimming, diving, synchro & water polo) have many benefits, including the people you and your child meet. The camaraderie among swimmers is unique; many swimming buddies become lifelong friends.

In addition to being around fine people, swimming provides one of the most beneficial forms of exercise for cardiovascular and total fitness. This exercise can be enjoyed throughout one’s entire life.

Possibly the greatest benefits of participating in an organized swim program is the life skills your child will develop. These skills include time management, cooperation and sportsmanship. Your child will reap the benefits of swimming long after their participation ends. Most swimmers go on to be very successful and productive young adults largely due to the life skills they gained from swimming.

Competitive swimming is fun, exciting and rewarding. Children improve rapidly and in most cases enjoy huge improvements in physical and mental skills. During a young swimmers early development phase it is not unusual for a child to experience extraordinary time improvements. Children are learning and growing at a greater rate than at any other time in their athletic careers. It is difficult to avoid the tendency to push young athletes at this stage. Although a child of eleven or twelve can handle the physical demands of serious training, most coaches feel that the workload should not be great until a child reaches puberty. The emphasis should be placed on improving stroke technique, developing good training habits, learning race tactics and strategies, and having fun! It is strongly recommended that these young athletes participate in a variety of sports during this period. Participating in other sport activities provide children with a variety of activities and can help prevent “burnout”. Being involved in a range of activities can also assist in the acquisition of other vital physical skills. Many swimmers train for more than ten years during their careers. Swimming, especially at the youngest levels, should be fun and relatively pressure free.

After a child reaches puberty, sport scientists and coaches feel serious training can begin. This can be a particular frustrating time for swimmers. During the transition, an athlete may experience plateaus, or what appears to be a “set-back”. Chunks of time are no longer being dropped, and training requires more time and dedication. Many parents begin to question whether a child’s swimming career is over at this point. This, coupled with the normal demands of teenage life, cause many swimmers to leave the sport prematurely. It is critical that parents and coaches be very supportive during this period of adjustment, realizing that it will pass. Future performance improvements generally follow.

This booklet is designed to help you assist your child succeed in swimming. Remember, not every swimmer becomes a world record holder, but everyone gains from their swimming experience. Supporting your child in swimming can be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life. You may soon find yourself cheering at competitions, timing during meets, or even going on to become a BCSSA certified official. Whatever your role, your child’s experience in swimming has much to do with your positive support. Please ask questions of your coaches, officials, and fellow parents. We all have the same goal; to provide your child with the best possible experience in swimming.

2. Your Role as Parents

Competitive swimming programs provide many benefits to young athletes. They develop self-discipline, good sportsmanship, and time management skills. Competition allows the swimmer to experience success and to learn how to deal with defeat, while becoming health and physically fit.

As a parent, your major responsibility is to provide a stable, loving and supportive environment. This positive environment will encourage your child to continue. Show your interest by ensuring your child's attendance at practices, and by coming to meets.

Parents are not participants on their child's team, but obviously contribute greatly to the success experienced by the child and his/her team. Parents serve as role models and their children often emulate their attitudes. Be aware of this and strive to be positive role models. Most importantly, show good sportsmanship at all times toward coaches, officials, opponents, and teammates.

Be Enthusiastic and Supportive

Remember that your child is the swimmer. Children need to establish their own goals, and make their own progress towards them. Be careful not to impose your own standards and goals.

Do not over burden your child with winning or achieving best times. The most important part of your child's swimming experience is that they learn best themselves while enjoying the sport. This healthy environment encourages learning and fun, which will develop a positive self-image within your child.

Let the Coach, Coach

The best way to help a child achieve their goals and reduce the natural fear of failure is through positive reinforcement. No one likes to make mistakes. If your child is swimming poorly or struggles, remember that they are still learning. Encourage their efforts and point out the positive aspects of their swimming, things they did well. As long as they gave their best effort, you should make them feel like a winner.

The Swimmers' Bill of Rights

BC Swimmers have the...

- ✓ Right of opportunity to participate in swimming regardless of their ability level.
- ✓ Right to have qualified adult leadership.
- ✓ Right to participate in safe and healthy environments.
- ✓ Right to play, as a child and not as an adult.
- ✓ Right to proper preparation.
- ✓ Right to participate at a level that is commensurate with their development level.
- ✓ Right to be treated with dignity by all involved.
- ✓ Right to equal opportunity to strive for success.
- ✓ Right to have fun through swimming.

Your Responsibility as a Parent

Get Your Child "There" on Time

As in all sports there are many events that your child must attend; practices, team meetings, competitions, special events, etc. The coach wants your child to enjoy the experiences of swimming, as much as possible. The coach also has a responsibility to look after the team as a whole. Start times are very important to get the most use out of pool time, ensure arrival commitments are made and events generally go as planned. Late or inconsiderate members hurt everyone. If your child is going to be late or miss, let someone know.

Become Involved

This does not mean you have to run for President your first year, but try to get involved in some aspect of the club. The easiest position is to sign up to be a timer at the first swim meet. You get to enjoy the competition, meet other parents, and watch your child participate. Officiating can be fun and you can progress through the levels at a similar rate as your child. Very few other sports provide this opportunity.

It is important that you try to attend your club's monthly meetings and especially the Annual General Meeting. You certainly do not need to run for office, but you should be aware of the club's business affairs. You also may have an expertise that the club could tap into for assistance.

In this era of economically trying times, the cost of swimming is becoming progressively more difficult to deal with. It is imperative that parents pitch in to assist the club with all fundraising and cost effective measures. The phrase "Many hands make the load light" is one that truly describes the approach you should have towards the task of running a swim club.

Billeting

Swimming as a sport is controlled by the same financial responsibilities as other sports: equipment, coaching, facility costs, and travel. Swimming is fortunate in that swimming families open their homes to visiting swimmers by billeting them during meets. This practice saves swimming parents many thousands of dollars over the season. Please be generous about accepting billets, your child may need one next meet.

When accepting billets you should supervise and assist them, as you would your own children. Warm up times are usually the same for all teams, and coaches do like to have swimmers there on time. The most difficult situation is dealing with a competition with heats and finals where there is a break. Coaches like their finalists to rest and get some nourishment. If it is impossible to get the children back home, a bag lunch helps the need for nourishment.

If your child is going to be billeted remember he/she is a representative of your family, club, and community and must act appropriately. It is very important that your child is identified if there are allergies, conditions or medications so that they may be placed with an appropriate family. A billet gift is always a kind gesture to than the family that cared for your child.

Are you a Pressure Parent?

The following survey has been taken from the Amateur Swimming Association of Great Britain. If you answer yes to one or more of these questions, you may be in danger of pressuring your child. It is important to remember that the parents' role is critical and should be supportive at all times to ensure a positive experience for your child.

- ✓ Do you want your child to win more than he/she does?
- ✓ Do you show your disappointment if he/she has a poor result?
- ✓ Do you feel that you have to "psyche" your child up before a competition?
- ✓ Do you feel that your child can enjoy the sport only if he/she wins?
- ✓ Do you conduct a "post modern" immediately after competition?
- ✓ Do you feel that you have to force your child to go to training?
- ✓ Do you find yourself wanting to interfere during training or competition thinking that you could do better?
- ✓ Do you find yourself disliking your child's opponents?

3. What to Watch For At a Meet

The following is a brief summary of the components of the sport of competitive swimming. Hopefully they will help to convey a better understanding of the sport.

The Racing Course:

The length of the short course racing pool is 25 meters and the long course pool is 50 meters. The pool has six or eight lanes and each lane is usually 2.0 to 2.5 meters wide. The water temperature must be kept at a minimum of 24 degrees.

The Meet:

Swim meets are the “tests” to measure your swimmers training progression. Meets present many challenges to swimmers and are often approached with different expectations during different “phases” of training. It is very important to communicate with your swimmers to make sure you understand the goal of the meet. Swimming fast is always the desired outcome, but not always the primary goal. Different phases of training elicit different competitive responses.

There are a total of 11 individual events and 2 relay events for both girls and boys. In most meets you will find all of the events, however certain divisions are restricted to certain events. For example, the younger divisions will compete in 50m Breaststroke, while the older divisions will do a 100m Breaststroke.

Freestyle Events:

In the freestyle events, the competitor may swim any stroke he or she wishes. The usual stroke used is the front crawl. The alternate overhead motion of the arms, a side-to-side breathing action and an alternating “flutter kick” characterizes this stroke. The freestyle is swum in 50 and 100 meter distances which are standard in BCSSA; however some clubs choose to offer longer distances at meets they host, however they are not official events recognized at a Regional or Provincial Championships. Freestyle is the fastest of the four competitive strokes and is generally the easiest and most natural to learn. As a result of these factors it commonly used as the primary training stroke.

Backstroke Events:

In the backstroke, the swimmer must stay on his or her back at all times. The stroke is an alternating motion of the arms combined with a synchronized “flutter kick”. It is the swimmers objective to “roll” from side-to-side while maintain a very “quiet” head position. At each turn, a swimmer must remain on their back until the actual turning action has begun. Backstroke flags are positioned 5 metres away from each wall to alert swimmers of the proximity to the wall. Swimmers begin a “stroke-count” upon seeing the flags and begin the turn after counting a specific number of strokes. Swimmers must surface within 15 metres after the start of the race, and after each turn. Backstroke race distances are typically 50 and 100 meters.

Breaststroke Events:

Perhaps one of the most difficult strokes to master, the breaststroke requires simultaneous movements of the arms on the same horizontal plane. The hands are pushed forward from the breast, on or under the surface of the water and swept “out and back” simultaneously in the propulsive stage of the stroke. The kick is a simultaneous thrust of the legs called a “whip” or breaststroke kick. No flutter or dolphin kicking is allowed. At each turn a swimmer must touch with both hands at the same time. Breaststroke races are generally 50 and 100 meters.

Butterfly Events:

The most beautiful and physically demanding stroke, the butterfly features the simultaneous overhead stroke of the arms combined with the dolphin kick. The dolphin kick features both legs moving up and down together. No flutter kick is allowed. The butterfly was “born” in the early 1950’s as a loophole in the [breaststroke] rules and in 1965 was made an Olympic Event in Melbourne, Australia. Butterfly races are generally 50 and 100 meters.

Individual Medley:

The individual medley, commonly referred to as the “I.M.”, features all four competitive strokes. In the I.M. a swimmer begins with the butterfly, changes to the backstroke after one-fourth of the race, then the breaststroke after another quarter and finally finishes with the freestyle. The I.M. is swum in 100 and 200 meter distances.

Medley Relay:

In the medley relay four different swimmers swim all four strokes. No swimmer may swim more than one leg of the relay, which is swum in backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly, and freestyle order. The medley relay is generally 200 metres.

Starts & Turns:

Many races are lost due to poor starts and turn technique. In the start, the starter who visually checks that all swimmers are down and still calls the swimmer to the starting position. Once the starter is satisfied, the race is started by either a gun or electronic tone. A swimmer’s ability to react quickly to the start signal is critical, but only part of good start technique. The swimmer’s ability to efficiently transfer their flight to a streamlined entry followed by an aggressive, but controlled transition to swimming will be a major determinant in the success of their start.

Quick turns are essential to a good race. Excellent turn technique allows a swimmer to maintain their swimming tempo in and out of walls, thereby conserving energies that may otherwise be used to get back up to speed. In all events the swimmer must touch the wall, but in the freestyle and backstroke events swimmers may somersault as he or she reaches the wall, touching only with the feet. In the other two competitive strokes, the swimmer must touch the wall with both hands before executing the turn.

Strategies:

The sprint races (50 and 100 meters) are an all-out controlled explosion of effort from start to finish. The slightest mistake can cost precious hundredths of seconds – and the race. The 200 meter events require the swimmer to have a sense of pace, as well as the ability to swim in a controlled sprint. Swimming the first portion of the race too fast of a pace can sap swimmers' strength and cause a poor finish. Swimming the first portion of the race too slowly can separate the swimmer from the pack and make catching up impossible.

There are two ways to swim a distance race. Swimmers may elect to swim the race evenly (holding the same pace throughout the race) or they may "negative split" the race. A negative split occurs when the swimmer covers the second half of a race faster than the first half. Typically these conditions will be dictated by both the swimmers genetic predisposition towards distance events, and their personal level of fitness. It is the unwise and poorly coached swimmer who attacks a distance event with too much speed.

The Team:

A swim team is composed of any number of swimmers. Participants compete in different divisions and meets depending on their achievement level and how old they are at the beginning of each competitive season. Team practice groups are usually determined by age and ability.

EQUIPMENT: What they'll need

Practice Suits: Suits worn by swimmers during practice sessions. They are generally made of polyester nylon, Lycra or stretch nylon. These suits are usually loose fitting, and many swimmers training with sever suits on for the purpose of drag. It is desirable to have both a practice suit and competition suit, as the practice suit would ideally be more durable but consequently heavier. The competition suit should only be worn for racing so as to keep it tight fitting and streamlined.

Cap: A latex or silicone swim cap is used during a race or practice to cut down resistance and to protect swimmer's hair from the damaging effects or chlorine.

Competition Suit: A team racing suit may be required for competition. This suit is usually 2 to 3 sizes smaller than the practice suit to reduce resistance. Specialized fabrics have been developed to optimize performance.

Fins: Flippers worn on the feet, used for stroke technique and speed assisted training.

Goggles: Lenses worn by swimmers during practice and competition to enhance vision and protect their eyes from the effects of chemicals in the water. It is essential to get a good quality goggle with an excellent fit. Try them on before you buy, not all goggles fit the same!

Kickboard: Device usually made of plastic or Styrofoam, used to work the kick portion of a stroke.

Pull buoy: Usually made of Styrofoam, this device is placed between the legs to isolate the use of the arms; the pull buoy is used to strengthen the arms and is sometimes used for stroke work.

Sweats: Some type of warm-up or sweat suit should be worn at meets and to and from practice during cold weather.

Team Uniform: A team uniform is usually made up of one or more of the following: suit, cap, T-shirt, sweat shirt and/or parka. Each club has a uniform which is usually a requirement, and unique to the team.

Towel: Swimmers usually prefer a thick, large beach towel. A minimum of two towels is recommended for meets.

4. The Rules

The technical rules of swimming are designed to provide fair and equitable conditions of competition and to promote uniformity in the sport. Each swimming stroke has specific rules designed to ensure that no swimmer gets an unfair competitive advantage over another swimmer. The technical rules for each stroke may be found in the publication "Rules & Regulations of BCSSA" otherwise known as the "BCSSA Rulebook".

Certified officials observe the swimmers during each event to ensure compliance with these technical rules. If a swimmer commits an infraction of the rules, they will be disqualified from that event which means they will not receive an official time nor be eligible for an award in that event. Disqualifications may result from actions such as not getting to the starting block in time, false starting, walking on or pushing off the bottom of the pool, pulling on the lane lines, or unsportsmanlike conduct. For a description of the technical stroke rules, please refer to the latest edition of the BCSSA rulebook, which can be found on the BCSSA website.

Officials' Levels

Level 1: Timer, Place Judge, Marshall

Level 2: Clerk of the Course, Chief Timer, Electronics, Meet Office/Recorder, Stroke & Turn

Level 3: Starter, Referee, Meet Manager, Chief Meet Recorder

Level 4: Master Official (evaluation by BCSSA Director of Officials required)

The Officials:

Officials are present at all competitions to implement the technical rules of swimming and to ensure that the competition is fair and equitable. Officials attend clinics and must shadow/work meets before becoming certified. All parents are encouraged to get involved with some form of officiating.

If your child is disqualified (DQ'd) in an event, be supportive rather than critical. For beginning swimmers, a disqualification should be treated as a learning experience, not as a punishment. A disqualification alerts the swimmer and coach to what portions of the swimmer's stroke need to be corrected. They should be considered in the same light as an incorrect answer in school work – they point out areas which need further practice. The disqualification is necessary to keep the competition fair and equitable for all other competitors. A supportive attitude on the part of the official, the coach, and the parent can also keep it a positive experience for the disqualified swimmer.

5. The Governing Body

What is BCSSA?

BCSSA is the provincial governing body for amateur competitive summer aquatics and was incorporated in 1967, but was formed in 1958.

As the provincial governing body for summer aquatics, BCSSA is responsible for the conduct and administration of summer swimming, diving, synchronized swimming and water polo in British Columbia. In this capacity, BCSSA formulates rules, implement policies and procedures, regulates the Provincial Championships, disseminates safety information, and administers a multitude of funding programs.

How is BCSSA organized?

BCSSA organizes the province into eight geographical regions, each region representing the clubs in those regions. The regions are: Cariboo, Fraser South, Fraser Valley, Kootenay, Okanagan, Simon Fraser, Vancouver & District and Vancouver Island.

How are decisions made in BCSSA?

BCSSA is a not-for-profit organization made up of very dedicated volunteers. Interested volunteers donate their time, energy and expertise at every level from the local clubs to the BCSSA Board of Directors.

The BCSSA Board meets approximately three times a year and an Annual General Meeting is held once a year, which generally takes place during the Provincial Championships.