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Response to "Insights on Parents Attending Swim Lessons"

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Response to “Insights on Parents Attending Swim Lessons”

The *IJARE* editorial (“*Insights on Parents Attending Swim Lessons*” in Volume 8, Issue 3, pp. 215–218) on parents attending and choosing lessons programs was excellent. I’d like to share a few of thoughts from my own experience as a parent, pool manager, and instructor trainer of swimming instructors for over 30 years. In my opinion, any program that disallows parents from access to their children during lessons has a problem and should be avoided. Why?

- Swimming instructors see their students for 30–45 min a couple times a week for about a month (typically 10 times). In the summer, they might see them 4–5 times a week for 2 weeks. In about 5 hr of contact time, they certainly do not have sufficient data from which to psychoanalyze their students’ family and determine what issues the child and/or the parents have. Certainly some parents are obviously overbearing, and their inappropriate behavior is evident from the outset. However that is the exception, not the rule.
- Parents who act less mature than their kids should be dealt with individually by the pool manager. A blanket policy of banning parents from access to their children is inappropriate and frankly suspicious.
- Parents are not “the enemy” to be locked away somewhere far from the pool deck in a padded cell. I think a common mistake made by both instructors and pool managers is assuming that the parents are always the root of the students’ problems, and that they are always a threat to “interfere” with the student’s progress. In fact, I am an advocate of just the opposite—let parents get as close to their kids as the kids need, especially when they’re in the water adjustment phase. Once comfortable with the water and the instructors, they can move farther away, or even just drop their kids off, and everyone will still be happy. Instead of the view that parents will interfere with control of their kids, they should be partners in their control. Parental observation of what’s happening is almost always helpful in determining why the child is having trouble or acting up. The parents are paying for the lessons, thus have a right to be present and to hold a vested interest in the results. Parents’ observations will often ensure the safety of their kids and hold instructors accountable for effective use of time. Far more often than not, the instructors and parents working together as a team creates the desired results: safe, happy, and improving students.
- How close is appropriate? I’ve seen excellent results from parents of 3-year-olds who sat on the wall with their child, or even in a swimsuit holding their child in between turns. The objective is to adjust the child to the water and the unfamiliar environment in a nonthreatening way. The child must feel safe first, have fun second, then learn to swim third. Without the first two, the ultimate objective (i.e., learn to swim) is not likely to be achieved. The line is crossed only when the parents are trying to teach the class, rather than support the

class. When that happens, the pool manager needs to get involved and redirect the parent to the appropriate supportive role. Parents as partners to the instruction process are far more effective than parents as enemies.

- I believe that the most important thing for kids when first learning to swim is that they associate swimming lessons with a safe, fun, and learning environment. They know that they're going to be carefully supervised and kept safe; that their parents are always watching out for them, and that the instructor is going to be enthusiastic, fun, and engaging. Swimming is one of the few athletic activities that we can do throughout our lifespan (e.g., into our 80s and 90s). By focusing on positive experiences from the outset, we can cultivate swimmers who have a lifelong love of swimming. A great lesson program is SAFE first, FUN second, and EDUCATIONAL third. This is not to downplay the third component of these guiding principles at all, just to keep it in proper perspective. As you mentioned in your article, swimming instructors must be thoroughly trained, so they can apply these principles at all times. Training must include strategies for keeping kids safe while always having fun, as well as methodology for teaching specific skills and strokes.

I am quite passionate about this topic, as it seems that we have lost some of our ability to work in cooperation with each other to achieve a common objective. It's discouraging to see an adversarial approach applied in places where a common objective is clear and a spirit of cooperation should be the norm.

Sincerely,

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