

Is my child ready for swim team?

(Swimmer Requirements)

By Coach Chris

When summer rolls around the managers and I are asked this question and, as a parent of kids who swim, I've also asked this myself. Having been a part of swim team from the parent side and now as a coach, I have gained a clear perspective on this subject. Based on discussions with other parents, coaches and managers, I have developed a policy regarding our swim team Shrimper program.

Let me start by emphasizing that my goal for swim team is for kids to become better swimmers in a fun, challenging, and safe environment. It really is fun to watch kids grow and develop in any sport and that is why I love coaching. On the other side, there is not much worse than watching a child that is "not ready" struggle, become frustrated and even feel inadequate. These children are setup to have a bad experience and will potentially never return to swimming. Sometimes it really is best to wait a year or take swim lessons instead.

How do you know when your child is ready?

There are three components needed for a young child to have a positive, productive and safe experience on swim team. These will be the basis for evaluating children trying out for our Shrimper program:

STRENGTH: Can your child swim the length of a 25 yard or meter pool doing the crawl (freestyle stroke)? It doesn't have to be perfect, but it should be mostly intact. That means first and foremost that they aren't afraid of the water, that they have their face in the water (except when breathing), that their feet are kicking and that they show they can move their arms in large circles out of the water and in front of them. If they can do this ALL the way without stopping, then fine-tuning their stroke can be learned on swim team. This minimum amount of strength is critical for the swimmer and their safety since they will be doing multiple laps during every practice. This component is a MUST, and a child will not be allowed to continue on swim team without it.

MATURITY: First, is your child capable of following instructions, abiding by rules, and able to pay attention in large group settings? Again, they don't have to be perfect on all fronts at all times, but in general children will need to be able to pay attention and respect authority. I recognize that young children have short attention spans so I try to make the environment fun for them so they stay engaged. Second, is your child mentally "sturdy" enough to withstand a half hour to an hour of rigorous exercise daily? You may not know what your child's disposition is until they've been tested, so if they are exposed to similar situations that require mental stamina that can be helpful.

DESIRE: Does your child really want to be here? Kids will often need a gentle push or encouragement to get started (with anything), but what I look for is whether it gets easier for them and you as they are more exposed to swim team. I love to see kids become so excited that swim team becomes their idea. Swim team is a relatively short season, but can be quite intense so desire to participate goes a long way to a successful season.

My advice to parents to evaluate and prepare their children:

- START NOW! Get your child in a pool, whether swim lessons or recreational play.
- Watch your child try to swim the length of a pool. Are they swimming the crawl? Can they make it without stopping? If not, strongly consider swim lessons.
- Talk to your child now about swim team. Discuss the routine (practices & meets), other kids that will be there and determine whether or not it appeals to them.

I look forward to seeing your children on swim team.