

Parents Survival Guide (for a first meet)

by Kari Donald

It is time to take your child to his/her first swim meet! The purpose of this quick, light-hearted guide is to give parents an idea of what to expect at a swim meet.

A. What to bring:

Required: Swimmer with all equipment (extra goggles/towel are a plus)

Optional: Chairs or blankets to sit on between events

Light nutritious snacks and drinks

Books/crayons/etc. to keep busy between events

Pen and highlighter

B. When to go:

A day or two before the meet, definitive warm-up times will be announced. Some meets have more than one warm-up session, so you want to be sure you get there for the right one. At large meets, it is a good idea to get there a little early so you can find a good place to set up your stuff.

C. At the meet (during warm-ups/before start):

1. Get yourself a heat sheet. (Just about anyone at the meet can point out the table where they are on sale. Price is usually \$3 to \$7). The heat sheet is a print-out of the order of events and the order of go for the swimmers. Check to see that your swimmer is listed for all the events she/he entered.

2. Write on your swimmer (optional but VERY helpful, especially with multiple swimmers). Many parents will write their swimmer's events on their arms or leg in some variation of the following format:

E-H-L _____

E stands for EVENT number

H stands for HEAT number

L stands for LANE number

_____ the space lists distance and stroke

Not only does this make it easy for the swimmer to look up their next event, but now just about any volunteer/parent at the meet will be able to help a lost swimmer figure out when they are supposed to swim next. However, it is still important to follow the meet as it progresses to avoid missing an event.

D. Swimmers take your mark.....

1. The coaches like to talk to the swimmers before and after their swim.. Give your swimmer time to stop by and still make it to the starting blocks. The more swimmers at the meet the sooner she/he should stop the the coaches' table.

2. Get to the "blocks":

Bullpen: Most meets have a "bullpen" for the 8 & under swimmers. This group of brave volunteers lines up the kids and gets them to the right lanes for their event. They usually start getting the kids organized 2 events before the one they are swimming in. Either listen for announcements calling swimmers to the bullpen or watch for activity there.

Other swimmers: Older children/those not in bullpen should be at the start end of the pool and getting by their lane during the event preceding theirs. If there aren't many heats in the preceding event they may want to get there even sooner. It is the swimmer's responsibility to be in place for his/her event. There are usually plenty of volunteers to help or answer questions about where to go or how soon they should be heading to the blocks.

3. Relays: Most meets have relays at the end of the session. The coaches decide who will be on relay teams, so parents don't need to sign up their swimmers for relays. However, please check with the coach before you leave with your swimmer after his/her events to make sure they aren't needed for a relay. If we don't have enough swimmers. then the relay has to scratch. When you enter a meet and know that you won't be able to stay until the end of a session please tell the coach and note that on your meet entries, so your swimmer won't be counted towards a relay team.

4. Disqualifications: fondly referred to as 'DQ's" (not Dairy Queen): Not a big deal. There are two types of swimmers. Those that have been DQ'd and those that will eventually get a DQ. Officials watch the swimmers to ensure that the strokes are performed legally. This is to prevent any unfair advantages and to let the coaches and swimmers know what areas need improvement. (It's much easier to correct mistakes BEFORE they become habit). Most of the young swimmers are happy just to make it to the end of the pool and don't know/care about DQ's. Other swimmers can rest assured that they are in good company should they get one. Even Olympic swimmers get DQ'd. (Ed Moses got one at a U.S. meet). NOTE: Questions should not be directed to the officials.

5. Results: The results of each event will be posted as soon as possible and include the swimmer's official time. The coaches pick up all awards from the meet and have them placed in the swimmer's folder at the pool.

E. Most important:

Enjoy the meet!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Swim meets are lots of fun! If you have any questions about what's going on ask any seasoned swim Mom or Dad. We were all in your shoes once too!

Some etiquette/terms to know:

Starts: No flash photography during starts. There is a strobe that flashes to start the swimmers and a camera flash can be confusing to swimmers and cause a false start. Also, spectators should keep quiet after the "swimmers take your mark" command is given.

Whistle starts: Used for starts at most meets. Referee will blow a whistle 4 times (quick and short) signaling the swimmers to get ready. One long whistle is the signal for the swimmers to step up on the block (or step in the water for backstroke starts).

Overhead starts: Used at some meets to keep swim meet moving along quickly. After swimmers finish their swim, they remain in the water close to the wall while the next heat starts. (The next heat to swim will usually be on the blocks waiting for the last swimmer in the heat in the water in the water to finish). As soon as the next heat starts and is in the water, the waiting swimmers climb quickly out of the water.
NOTE: Overhead starts are not used for backstroke.