

## How to be a World Class Parent

By Doug Beavers, USPDCA Communications Director

In theory, coaches, athletes and parents all aspire to the same goal in diving – performance that equals the absolute potential of the athlete. You’ve heard it all before: “Do your best” “Be all you can be.” The kind of clichés we coaches thrive on. As you might suspect, I too share this goal of “maximal performance” for my divers. Unfortunately it can’t be done, don’t get me wrong; I’m an optimist almost to a fault. But I recognize that the pursuit of perfection is only that – a pursuit. This is the thrill of sport. It is in trying to obtain the unobtainable that we find satisfaction. It’s all about trying to close the gap between where the athlete is now and where they ultimately want to be.

Accepting that we cannot reach absolute mechanical or artistic perfection, divers and coaches can still pursue these goals with all of their energies. As long as the diver is moving toward the ideal, he or she is on the right path. But just how close can your son get to the ideal? What causes your daughter to move closer to, or pushes her further from, her ultimate potential as a diver? Certainly many factors, including build, strength, speed, desire, coach and facility, can have a positive or negative effect on a diver’s performances. Your role as the parent of an athlete can have a tremendous impact on the actual performance of your son or daughter. In fact, I have personally witnessed divers whose progress was so enhanced by the positive encouragement and support of parents that it seemed an almost unfair advantage. Sadly, I have also witnessed exceptional athletes crippled by well intentioned but overzealous parents. So what can you do?

Perhaps you already help with team functions, assist in running meets, or even run the meets yourself. While this is noble and appreciated work, it is not the kind of thing that will directly affect your child’s performances. The way you talk to your child about diving does have such an effect, as does the way you interact with your child’s coach. Do you ask your son if he enjoys it? Do you go to your daughter’s meets? Do you talk to him about his training habits or drill her on her handstand technique? Be careful what you say “yes” to – some subjects are off limits between a diver and a parent. Sometimes parents want to get specific when discussing diving with their children; “When are you

going to do an inward 2½?” “Why haven’t you made top ten yet?”

Parents can unknowingly create anxiety and even resentment in their children when they step outside of their role as a parent and take on the duties of the coach. Perhaps a preposterous example will help to illustrate my point....

Suppose for a moment that you were at work and your spouse (who knows nothing about your field) came in and said, “Hold it! I don’t want you working on those Johnson papers anymore. From now on I want you to pay more attention to these Smithson papers here.”

Now, do you disobey your boss and get to work on the Smithson papers, or do you tell your spouse to shove off? Either way you’re in pretty hot water, and it’s getting deep too. That’s the kind of no-win situation you put your child in when you start feeding them ideas on how to improve their diving. Perhaps the coach has completely different plans for your child, of which you are totally unaware. Perhaps he or she knows that attempting an inward 2½ would be absolutely disastrous at this point in your child’s development. Of course your son wants desperately to gain your approval, but he also wants to please his coach as well. It sounds like the Smithson papers all over again.

I will be blunt. I have heard this same sentiment expressed by every coach I have met, so I speak for them as well when I say this; if you are paying me to coach your child, then let me do it! I understand physiology, psychology, physics and fear. I’ve talked to the experts, and I have the experience. If you contradict what I have said, then you undermine my authority (or your own) and you certainly confuse your child. If you do these things, then we are much further from our goal than we would hope.

So what sort of relationship does the most for a world-class athlete? There is a special kind of relationship, which can propel an athlete forward with great effectiveness, giving them a distinct advantage over the competition. Known as the power point relationship, it can be visualized as an arrow being shot at a bulls-eye. The athlete is the arrowhead itself; he or she is the object, which will actually strike the target.

Occasionally in youth sports we come across an obvious case of a parent living vicariously through his or her child’s athletic performances. This invariably leads to a troubled and unsuccessful attempt at our metaphoric bulls-eye. A parent who seeks personal glory through the victories of a child is acting as a second arrowhead. But the fact is that with each attempt at the bulls-eye there can only be one arrow striking the target.

Of course, there are plenty of other roles a parent can take in our archery metaphor. Aside from the arrowhead there is the shaft, the individual feathers for straight flight, the bow which propels it, and the archer himself. See yourself as part of this system allowing your child to hit his or her target. Realize that if you contradict the coach's instructions you may act as a misaligned feather. By scolding your child for an unintentionally poor performance you serve as a crooked shaft. If you are forcing your own unrealized dreams of athletic achievement on your child, you are, in effect, tearing off the feathers, breaking the shaft and making the game unwinnable for your child. This is his moment to shine; it is her chance for glory. It is not yours to take. Your contribution, positive or negative, may determine whether or not the arrowhead strikes home.

*So what can you do? Support your child with unconditional love regardless of the outcome of a competition. A poor practice may warrant nothing more than a pat on the back or a hug. Many of the athletes I have worked with could punish themselves internally much more severely than anyone else ever could. Encourage them to talk it out; diving is a sport filled with fear and frustration. These emotions are always better vented than pent-up. Support them emotionally and financially. As coaches we will guide them on a path toward success. We will feed them the concepts necessary, we will train their bodies and their minds, and together we will take a shot at the bulls-eye.*

## Ten Commandments for Parents of Athletes

Parents play a critical role in a child's success in any field. Certainly athletics is no different. But what can seem like the right thing to do is sometimes counterproductive. The following is an abbreviated list of Commandments for Parents of young athletes. These commandments are based upon the conditions which are most likely to allow your children to become healthy, successful competitors and people. No one wins all the time, nor would it be of any value if they did. Following the principles behind this list will help you to create the climate necessary for your child's success.

1) Thou shall not make this about you. It is easy to lose yourself in the excitement of competition, to get caught up in old feelings of your own athletic glories and short-falls. This time, however, the moment belongs to your child. Don't allow yourself to ruin his or her moment by projecting your own needs onto the situation.

2) Thou shall not coach, motivate or bribe. You pay your money to a coach because he or she is qualified to do the job. Allow the coach to work effectively by granting him/her authority on the sport. Diving is a very technical sport, which should not be taught by those without specialized training. Your coach has worked hard to become an expert in this field, and parent's should resist the temptation to throw their two cents in on technique. In addition, diving is unique in that all athletes must, with the help of their coaches, face and conquer considerable fear. The result is that coaches will form a very close bond with and understanding of your child, and this understanding gives the coach great insight into the motivation and discipline of your child. Finally, bribing a child to do a new trick seems harmless, but can effectively diminish the motivation that the coach strives to teach the athletes – internal motivation to achieve purely for the satisfaction of it, and not for material rewards.

3) Thou shall love unconditionally. It is crucial that your child understands one thing above all else – that your love for him/her does not in any way hinge on his/her performance. There is already plenty of pressure in trying to get the dive right at the moment of the big meet. If you throw in a sense that "mom or dad will be mad if I blow it," then failure is almost inevitable.

4) Thou shall follow the same rules of sportsmanship as thy child. The best advice on sportsmanship is quite simple; "A champion takes victory and defeat in the same way." Lead your child by example, and put a swift end to gloating and other forms of poor

sportsmanship by showing that you won't tolerate it in yourself or your child.

5) Thou shall not compare nor divide. Comparing your child to other athletes on the team or in the meet is unhealthy and pointless. Success is a journey, not a destination. Every child will take a different path, will learn at a different speed, and will arrive at a different kind of success. Before you become concerned about who is outpacing your child, ask yourself "Is my kid having fun? Is he learning? Is this a positive thing for him?" If the answers are "yes," you have nothing to worry about. This sort of comparison mindset leads to divisions within the team, and animosity among parents. Don't fall into this trap.

6) Thou shall take criticism straight to the coach. Any concerns or questions about the program should go straight to the coach. Discussing and complaining in the stands with other parents is a waste of your energy, and won't fix the problem. It also may plant seeds of discontent in the parent group, which is bad for everyone. It is also helpful to remember that these things always seem to get back to the coach anyway, and the grapevine is a very inaccurate way to communicate. Help to improve the team by talking directly with the coach.

7) Thou shall teach thy child to find the lessons in failure. Once again, success is a journey, and failure is a teacher. In life, we are taught the same lessons over and over until we get the message and learn the lesson. Diving is a sport that is made up of 90% failure. If we teach children to see failure as an opportunity for growth, we empower them for life.

8) Thou shall help thy child to persevere. Because there is so much fear involved with diving, a child may wish to drop out of the sport rather than face the next new dive. This often occurs after a diver has taken time off at the end of the season. Children rarely understand the value of delayed gratification without guidance from an adult. Our culture is so preoccupied with instant gratification that it is even more critical to teach the value of hard work and sacrifice for greater rewards. Talk to the coach if you see your child becoming overwhelmed by fear or becoming reluctant to go to practice. These are usually problems, which can be solved through communication.

9) Thou shall get thy child to workout on time. Success in diving depends on consistent practice habits over the entire year. Poor attendance leads to fear, frustration, crashing, and poor meet performances.

10) Enjoy the ride. Diving is a unique sport, which can serve to teach your child many valuable life skills. Take time to share this unique experience with your child, and have some fun while you're here!

# What Diving Parents Should Know

By Joe Chirico, Head Coach Boston Area Diving

The sport of diving is safe, fun and exciting. More than 20 million children participate in organized sports, but only a few thousand of the most talented athletes will become divers.

Many young divers dream of the making it to the Olympic Games, others dream of making their high school teams or getting a college scholarship. No matter what size a child's dream, it is important that the dream is their dream. Parents should nurture these dreams and help them come true.

Being a "diving parent" is just one more facet in the challenging job of being a parent. The goal of this booklet is to provide some pointers. Every situation is different, so you should use your best judgment.

Through Diving your Child can Acquire

- Improved athletic and motor skills;
- A positive self-image;
- Improved social skills from interacting with teammates and coach;
- An ability to deal with success and disappointments;
- Sportsmanship and leadership skills;
- A chance to travel, visit new places and make new friends.

A Diving Parents' Responsibilities

- Make sure the diver is at practice on time and ready to dive. Siblings and career obligations often make this difficult. Car pools with teammates are often the best solution.
- Encourage your child without pressuring them. Always show interest and enthusiasm.
- Try not to coach your child. During practices and meets, allow the coaches to do their job. Some coaches find that divers perform better and more effectively when parents are not present or are seated further away.
- If your child misbehaves, a coach has some responsibility to discipline them, but the ultimate responsibility for discipline remains with the parent.
- Do not criticize coaches, officials or other divers in front of your child.
- Let your child know that you will be there for them, even if a practice or competition does not go as well as hoped or anticipated.
- When asked, help out with team or meet activities. When at a meet hosted by another team, remember to thank coaches, officials and other meet

volunteers. Putting on a meet is a tough job; expressions of appreciation are always welcome.

#### How To Prepare Your Child For A Competition

- Most divers do not need a pep talk from their parents before a meet. Divers usually get excited about competing, and do not need to get “fired up.” Let the coach set the mood and the tone.
- If your child seems nervous, help him or her to focus on their goals. Always be positive with your encouragement and comments.
- Diving is a sport that is better performed when the athlete is relaxed. To reduce stress, it is important that the diver’s self esteem (or the parents’) does not depend on the outcome of a meet or the performance of a particular dive. It is important to remember that a poor performance at a competition is not a negative reflection on the diver or the parent. Win or lose, a diver must know that he or she has his or her parents support and approval.

#### How To Handle A Poor Performance

It is impossible for an athlete to give a top performance at every meet. Dealing with disappointment can be much more difficult than dealing with success. A parent should focus on some aspect of the competition that went well.

Examples include performing a new dive for the first time in competition, or visible improvements such as a better toe point or higher jump. Allow your diver to be disappointed before trying to cheer them up. A diver needs to know that they can fail and still be supported. Then focus on up-coming events.

Try not to say the following:

- Oh, it’s not that important.
- If only you had...
- Why did you balk?
- We pay a lot for you to train, and this is all we get?
- It wasn’t your fault, it was the judging.
- If only the coach let you do another dive.

#### Communicating with the Coach

A diving coach can have a positive and long-lasting relationship with your child. He or she can help a diver to perform well and make diving a pleasant experience for your child. As a parent, you may find it difficult to approach a coach with a question or a concern. Remember, you and the coach are working together in the best interest of your child, and you should feel comfortable discussing with the coach any issue that affects your child.

The best time to approach a coach is before or after a practice or a meet, not during the event. It is helpful to remember that a coach is most likely concerned with long-term goals and may have a different perspective than the

parent. Also, remember that a coach is concerned with the best interests of the team, as well as those of your individual child.

A misunderstanding or miscommunication should be addressed early on before it turns into a more serious problem. Approach the coach with your concern and listen to the coach's explanation. Some misunderstandings may be a miscommunication on the part of the child. Occasionally a parent may want to remove a child from the sport due to an unpleasant experience.

Before making any abrupt moves, a parent should talk to the coach to see if a less drastic step may improve the situation.

Working together, parents and coaches can create a positive atmosphere for a diver. Please remember, it is the parents' job to support the diver and the program, and the coach's job to coach.

After the Event, A Parent May Want To

- Make sure the child is available for any award ceremonies if applicable.
- Tell your child what a great job they did and how proud of them you are.
- Help them to relax if they are preparing to dive in a second event.
- Make sure they are eating and/or drinking the proper foods.
- Once the diver has finished competing, check with the coach before leaving (to find out about the next practice or warm-up times for any upcoming events).

In Closing, being a diving parent has many rewards, but it is not always easy.

This booklet was designed to help make your role as a diving parent a little more straightforward. This is only a starting point. We hope it is useful



## Winners don't let negative thoughts take over their lives

By Bob Frisk

Think like a winner.

That's sound advice for every high school athlete, but it's also not that easy. Winners understand the power of positive thoughts, but we're living in a world filled with negative thoughts. They surround us every day.

I don't know the percentage of your time spent watching television, listening to the radio, reading newspapers or magazines, going to movies or scrolling the Internet, but I do know the negative information you find there is overwhelming.

And not surprising.

It's gotten so bad on the radio I listen to music stations or CDs in my car.

I also rarely watch TV news because I know they'll spend most of the time dealing with negative stories. I can wait for my morning newspaper, which probably also will lead with negative news.

Maybe it's just easier to digest in the morning.

Television and newspapers know a tragic accident grabs and holds more viewers and readers than a feel-good charity fund-raiser put on by an Eagle Scout.

Negative news — if it bleeds, it leads — sells better than positive news. It's as simple as that.

It's all about ratings and ad revenue and, frankly, considering the state of the newspaper business these days, I can understand that thinking a lot better now than I did even a year ago.

Talk radio is another source of negativity. I call it confrontational radio because the hosts usually are looking for ways to stir up their audience for some lively conversation. And there's no accountability for the Joe Sixpacks who call in to vent.

You also have trouble escaping negativity in a theater. How many movies are out there with positive messages? Maybe that's why the charming "Hairspray" appealed to me this summer even at my advanced age.

I read that 90 percent of the input we get in the world is negative. And 90 percent of the things we tell ourselves are negative.

Maybe those percentages are too high, but it would be difficult to dispute them.

Young people, beware.

It's too easy to be easily swayed by all this negativity. Pessimistic people surround you, and if you're not careful, their pessimism will start rubbing off. As a high school athlete, you have to be very careful about letting all these negative thoughts take over your life.

I think four main obstacles tend to get in the way of maintaining a positive attitude — fear, worry, anger and doubt.

If you have a bad practice or game, your immediate response is to become fearful.

Fear triggers worry.

Fear and worry trigger anger.

Doubt follows all these negative emotions.

You must always focus on the future rather than the past. Don't keep worrying about who did what or who is to blame.

If you are faced with a difficulty, you must focus on the solution and not the problem.

Doesn't that thought process make more sense than rehashing the problem?

Solutions are inherently positive. They take you away from the negative thoughts.

The focus must be on where you want to be and what you want to do. And then begin moving in that direction ... immediately.

Winners must learn techniques to replace the negative with the positive.

You have to work on yourself until you reach the point where you believe you will be a total success in anything you want to accomplish.

Commitment is the glue that holds everything together. It's the most powerful tool you have as a human being.

The key to success is going from being interested to being committed.

It all starts when you roll out of bed each day.

Winners wake up every morning with excitement, enthusiasm and confidence.

Winners tell themselves that this is going to be a great day, good things are going to happen.

Winners feel that each day will bring success their way.

Winners set their minds for victory.

Are you a winner?

What was your first thought when you woke up this morning?

Positive or negative?

There's your answer.

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