



Developmental process

Swim parents can learn about the Developmental Process in Sports...and respect it:

John Leonard was one of the overseas speakers at the conference in Queenstown. Here, he explains what we can expect and should do when our children develop:

One of the most frequently asked questions in swimming is "how come I'm not as fast as "those guys?" Sometimes this can come from child to parent, or child to coach. Occasionally, and unfortunately, it can come from parent to child (pretty destructive, though unintentionally so.)

The most common correct response to the question is "they are physically developed earlier than you are." "They" may be bigger, taller, more coordinated, and most importantly, STRONGER than another swimmer. Children develop at different rates, hence the concept of chronological age and biological age. You can be 12 with the "look" of a 10 year old boy, or you can be twelve with a need to shave every other day and the build of a late teenager. And the difference in girls of the same chronological age is even more pronounced. The point being, children can be "spoon" in terms of age and development, they can be "early developers" and they can be "late developers". One is not "better" than the other" - they are simply, different. Whatever developmental "advantage" or "disadvantage" they are at early in life, tends to even out quite dramatically in the later teen years.



The danger is that the slower developing child may become discouraged by their lack of competitive success, despite great practice attendance, great skill development and hard work. Size and strength DO matter in the sprint events. One solution is for the late developer to focus on the event distances that especially reward diligence in training and diligence in learning...the 200s of the strokes, the 400 IM, and the distance free events.

A second issue is that parents of fast -developing children may become incorrectly focused on "winning races" since that is what their child may do...rather than on the real business of age group swimming...the perfection of technique and solid aerobic training background. It's easy for any of us as parents to dream dreams of the Olympic Games when our 10 year old is dominating his local opposition, or even national competition...but they are biologically advanced, which will later "even out".

Very important for parents to recognise that your child will develop at their own time and rate...and comparing them (favourably or unfavourably) with others does them (and the others) a serious dis-service.

The only valid comparison that is also meaningful is the child swimming against their own best times. And may they make steady progress in that measurement!. *All the best for good swimming! JL.*