

Understanding Athlete Progressions of Training *(from USA Swimming Website, Parent Education Articles)*

Knowing what to expect and being able to support your child through the phases of training as they progress through the sport is an important responsibility for any swim parent.

From ages 6-14 athletes are in what we call the generalized phase. Coaches are trying to build base fitness and endurance while focusing on proper technical development of the strokes, starts and turns. This pre-pubescent and pubescent stage of growth and development is the aerobic and technical foundation for more intense and specialized work in the next phase. During the generalized phase, especially for the younger age-groups (6-10 years) structured play, games, establishment of rules, structure of practices and more experience at swim meets is should be some of the major focuses.

From age 11-14 your swimmers may be going through puberty and where peak height velocity or their growth spurt can take place. This is when their bodies change and where they're learning how to maneuver in their new skin. Some athletes may seem sudden performance gains while others may plateau or even see a decline. It's especially important in this phase of training that athletes focus on technical development, off-events, are even encouraged to participate in other sports. Athletes learn more about race strategy.

The second phase of training is Specialization. Athletes have gone through or may be on the tail end of puberty and have entered adolescence. In this phase, if athletes can have had a solid base, can start to work at higher intensities and put in higher quality workouts. Athletes really begin to refine race strategy and take more responsibility for their own training.

Because their bodies are more physically developed some athletes are ready to begin a structured dryland program. This is also where athletes start to focus on just one sport and put in more time at the pool.

The final phase of training will hopefully take them to a very successful and satisfying end of career and where the athletes fully mature physically and emotionally within the sport. Athletes in this phase are really ready to put on more muscle mass, training at top end speeds, and also realize the importance of other training factors such as sleep, nutrition and psychology. Athletes in this phase are usually highly motivated and with the right program and guidance can really reach their full potential.

Although these phases are generalizations you can often see characteristics overlap into different phases. Depending on the growth and development of your athlete, some characteristics described may be seen either or earlier or later. What's important is the base knowledge of the progression that usually occurs and to be able to apply it to your athlete.