



Section A: What Does “Intimate Harm” Look Like in Swimming?

Mini-lesson objectives

- Explain what we mean by “intimate perpetrators” in youth sport (people who use closeness, care, or trust to cross boundaries).
- Show how this can develop gradually, not just through obvious, dramatic incidents.

Key teaching points

In swimming, “intimate perpetrators” are adults or older peers who use their closeness to a swimmer—trusted coach, mentor, older teammate, team manager, even a family friend—to push past emotional or physical boundaries. They might offer extra attention, favors, car rides, or one-on-one “special training” as a way to build dependence before anything clearly unsafe happens.

Because these adults seem caring and invested in the swimmer’s success, their behavior can be confusing. The same person who celebrates time drops or comforts a swimmer after a bad race might also send late-night messages, ask for secrets, or test physical boundaries in ways that feel “off.” Many athletes do not immediately label this as abuse, especially when they are grateful for the attention or feel indebted.

Important gaps

- Standard education often focuses on “stranger danger” or obvious violence, not on slow, relationship-based harm from trusted adults or peers.
- Swimmers may be told to look for dramatic incidents instead of small, early tests of trust and privacy.
- Adults sometimes describe boundary-crossing as “caring,” “supportive,” or “just mentorship,” which hides the pattern.

Section B: Grooming Patterns in Swim Settings

Mini-lesson objectives

- Name common grooming behaviors that can appear in pools, team travel, and online communication.
- Show how power, secrecy, and gradual escalation work together.



Key teaching points

Grooming often follows patterns: special attention, gifts or favors, increased privacy, testing rules, and then more explicit boundary violations. In swimming, this can look like a coach offering private technique sessions alone, asking a swimmer to keep certain conversations secret, commenting on their body or suit fit, or shifting from team messages to private DMs.

Perpetrators may slowly move from “good job” texts to personal topics, from group hugs to lingering touch, or from normal team jokes to sexualized comments. Each step is often small enough to be denied or minimized, which makes it hard for a swimmer to decide when “normal closeness” has become unsafe.

Important gaps

- Many safety videos talk about “grooming” but do not show swim-specific examples like travel, deck changing, or social media contact between sets.
 - Programs rarely teach swimmers to notice how **patterns over time** can feel different from one isolated moment.
 - Cultural expectations of obedience, gratitude, and not disappointing a coach can make it harder to challenge grooming behaviors early.
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Section C: Why Intimate Harm Is Hard to Name

Mini-lesson objectives

- Explore emotional barriers that keep swimmers from recognizing or reporting intimate harm and normalize mixed feelings about closeness, dependency, and loyalty.

Key teaching points

Swimmers may feel cared for, special, and successful because of the relationship—even while feeling uncomfortable. They might worry that speaking up will destroy their progress, hurt team results, or “ruin” an adult’s reputation. Some fear not being believed because the adult is well liked or considered “great with kids.”

Shame and self-blame are common. Athletes may ask themselves, “Did I encourage this?” or “Maybe I overreacted.” When cultural messages stress gratitude, respect, and not making waves, swimmers can feel guilty for even questioning someone who appears generous or supportive.

Important gaps

- Lessons often tell athletes to report “bad people,” but do not address what to do when the person has also done real good (helped them succeed, supported their family, advocated for them).



- Little time is spent on the emotional side: grief, confusion, and losing a relationship that once felt positive.
 - Systems may frame harm in legal terms only, without providing emotional and cultural language that fits what swimmers actually experience.
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Section D: Intimate Perpetrators and Culture

Mini-lesson objectives

- Connect grooming and intimate harm with cultural norms around respect, obedience, and saving face.
- Highlight why some swimmers are especially vulnerable to relationship-based harm.

Key teaching points

In authoritative or collectivist cultures, young people may be taught to prioritize family reputation, group harmony, and respect for elders. That can make it harder to challenge or report someone who is seen as “part of the family,” a respected coach, or a community leader. Swimmers might fear being blamed for bringing shame, disrupting the team, or threatening scholarships and opportunities.

Stereotypes—such as seeing certain groups as quiet, obedient, or “mentally tough”—can make adults assume those swimmers do not need extra check-ins or support. Intimate perpetrators can exploit this by targeting athletes who are less likely to push back or be believed.

Important gaps

- Standard safe sport content often treats all athletes as if they have the same freedom to say “no,” even though some face much stronger cultural and structural pressures.
 - Families and clubs rarely talk together about how respect and obedience can coexist with clear boundaries and the right to leave unsafe relationships.
 - Rarely are identity-specific examples offered to show how intimate harm might look for Asian, immigrant, LGBTQ+, disabled, or otherwise marginalized swimmers.
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Section E: Building Protections Around Close Relationships

Mini-lesson objectives

- Identify concrete protections that keep closeness from becoming control.
- Show how teams, families, and swimmers can share responsibility for safety.

Key teaching points

Healthy closeness in swimming includes clear boundaries, shared expectations, and more than one trusted adult. No single coach, older swimmer, or mentor should “own” all information about an athlete’s struggles, mental health, or training. Regular check-ins with parents or guardians, assistant coaches, school counselors, or independent advocates provide multiple exits if something feels wrong.

Teams can normalize questions like, “Is this still okay?” and “Who else knows about this plan?” Simple policies—no secret chats, transparent social media rules, clear limits on one-on-one time, and written guidelines for physical contact—turn vague expectations into concrete protections. Swimmers should be encouraged to leave or change groups if a relationship feels confusing or controlling, even when performance looks good on paper.

Important gaps

- Many programs write policies but do not translate them into everyday language or scripts swimmers can actually use.
- Emotional support after disclosure is often underdeveloped; athletes may be moved or separated without ongoing care.
- Legal or formal responses are emphasized more than prevention tools that help swimmers and families spot problems early.

Intense, caring relationships are a big part of why swimmers stay in the sport and perform at their best. But when closeness becomes control, secrecy, or fear, it stops being healthy. Naming intimate harm and building protections around close relationships allows swimmers to keep the good parts of connection—trust, mentorship, support—without sacrificing their safety, autonomy, or long-term love of the sport.