

Guide to Safe Scouting

II - Aquatics Safety

Instructors for Safe Swim Defense and Safety Afloat Training

Safe Swim Defense and Safety Afloat training can be given by any person authorized by the council, including a BSA Aquatics resource person, a unit leader with aquatics skill, or any other person with aquatics knowledge or experience whom the local council has approved.

Safe Swim Defense

Before a BSA group may engage in swimming activities of any kind, a minimum of one adult leader must complete Safe Swim Defense training, have a commitment card (No. 34243) with them, and agree to use the eight defenses in this plan.

One of the best opportunities for Safe Swim Defense training is in summer camp. The eight defenses are:

1. Qualified Supervision

All swimming activity must be supervised by a mature and conscientious adult age 21 or older who understands and knowingly accepts responsibility for the well-being and safety of youth members in his or her care, who is experienced in the water and confident of his or her ability to respond in the event of an emergency, and who is trained in and committed to compliance with the eight points of BSA Safe Swim Defense. (It is strongly recommended that all units have at least one adult or older youth member currently trained as a BSA Lifeguard to assist in the planning and conduct of all swimming activity.)

2. Physical Fitness

Require evidence of fitness for swimming activity with a complete health history from physician, parent, or legal guardian. The adult supervisor should adjust all supervision, discipline, and protection to anticipate any potential risks associated with individual health conditions. In the event of any significant health conditions, an examination by a physician should be required by the adult supervisor.

Those with physical disabilities can enjoy and benefit from aquatics if the disabilities are known and necessary precautions are taken.

3. Safe Area

When swimming in areas not regularly maintained and used for swimming activity, have lifeguards and swimmers systematically examine the bottom of the swimming area to determine varying depths, currents, deep holes, rocks, and stumps. **Mark off the area for three groups: not more than 3 1/2 feet deep for nonswimmers; from shallow water to just over the head for beginners; deep water not over 12 feet for swimmers.** A participant should not be permitted to swim in an area where he cannot readily recover and maintain his footing, or cannot maintain his position on the water, because of swimming ability or water flow. When setting up a safe swimming area in natural waters, use poles stuck in the bottom, or plastic bottles, balloons, or sticks attached to rock anchors with twine for boundary markers. Enclose nonswimmer and beginner areas with buoy lines (twine and floats) between markers. Mark the outer bounds of the swimmer's area with floats. Be sure that clear-water depth is at least 7 feet before allowing anyone to dive into the water. Diving is prohibited from any height more than 40 inches above the water surface; feet-first entry is



The image shows a 'Safe Swim Defense' commitment card. At the top, it says 'Safe Swim Defense' next to a life preserver icon. Below that, it reads: 'This is to verify that _____ has satisfactorily completed specific instruction in Safe Swim Defense and has agreed to use the eight defenses in this plan on every occasion when _____ goes swimming. (Unit and No.) _____ This card is good for two years from date: _____ Council _____ Boy Scouts of America'. At the bottom, it says 'Signed: _____ Aquatics Counselor Approved by Council BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA'.

prohibited from more than 60 inches above the water. For any entry from more than 18 inches above the water surface, clear-water depth must be 10 to 12 feet. Only surface swimming is permitted in turbid water. Swimming is not permitted in water more than 12 feet deep, in turbid water where poor visibility and depth would interfere with emergency recognition or prompt rescue, or in whitewater, unless all participants wear appropriate personal flotation devices and the supervisor determines that swimming with personal flotation equipment is safe under the circumstances.

4. Lifeguards on Duty

Swim only where there are lifeguards on duty. For unit swims in areas where lifeguards are not provided by others, the supervisor should designate two capable swimmers as lifeguards. Station them ashore, equipped with a lifeline (a 100-foot length of 3/8-inch nylon cord). In an emergency, one carries out the line; the other feeds it out from shore, then pulls in his partner and the person being helped. In addition, if a boat is available, have two people, preferably capable swimmers, take it out—one rowing and the other equipped with a 10-foot pole or extra oar. Provide one guard for every 10 people in the water, and adjust the number and positioning of guards as needed to protect the particular area and activity.

5. Lookout

Station a lookout on the shore where it is possible to see and hear everything in all areas. The lookout may be the adult in charge of the swim and may give the buddy signals.

6. Ability Groups

Divide into three ability groups: Nonswimmers, beginners, and swimmers. Keep each group in its own area. Nonswimmers have not passed a swimming test. Beginners must pass this test: jump feetfirst into water over the head in depth, level off, swim 25 feet on the surface. Stop, turn sharply, resume swimming as before and return to the starting place. Swimmers must pass this test: jump feet first into water over the head in depth. Level off and swim 75 yards in a strong manner using one or more of the following strokes: sidestroke, breaststroke, trudgen, or crawl; then swim 25 yards using an easy resting backstroke. The 100 yards must be completed in one swim without stops and must include at least one sharp turn. After completing the swim, rest by floating. These classification tests should be renewed annually, preferably at the beginning of the season.

7. Buddy System

Pair every youth with another in the same ability group. Buddies check in and out of the swimming area together. Emphasize that each buddy lifeguards his buddy. Check everyone in the water about every 10 minutes, or as needed to keep the buddies together. The adult in charge signals for a buddy check with a single blast of a whistle or ring of a bell, and call "Buddies!" The adult counts slowly to 10 while buddies join and raise hands and remain still and silent. Guards check all areas, count the pairs, and compare the total with the number known to be in the water. Signal two blasts or bells to resume swimming. Signal three blasts or bells for checkout.

8. Discipline

Be sure everyone understands and agrees that **swimming is allowed only with proper supervision and use of the complete Safe Swim Defense.** The applicable rules should be presented and learned prior to the outing, and should be reviewed for all participants at the water's edge just before the swimming activity begins. Scouts should respect and follow all directions and rules of the adult supervisor. When people know the reason for rules and procedures they are more likely to follow them. Be strict and fair, showing no favoritism.

Classification of Swimming Ability

Swimmer Test

The swimmer test demonstrates the minimum level of swimming ability required for safe deep-water swimming. The various components of the test evaluate the several skills essential to this minimum level of swimming ability:

Jump feetfirst into water over your head in depth. Swim 75 yards in a strong manner using one or more of the following strokes: sidestroke, breaststroke, trudgen, or crawl; then swim 25 yards using an easy, resting backstroke. The 100 yards must be swum continuously and include at least one sharp turn. After completing the swim, rest by floating.

The test administrator must objectively evaluate the individual performance of the test, and in so doing should keep in mind the purpose of each test element.

1. "Jump feetfirst into water over your in depth, ...
The swimmer must be able to make an abrupt entry into deep water and begin swimming without any aids. Walking in from shallow water, easing in from the edge or down a ladder, pushing off from side or bottom, and gaining forward momentum by diving do not satisfy this requirement.
2. "...Swim 75 yards in a strong manner using one or more of the following strokes: sidestroke, breaststroke, trudgen, or crawl..."
The swimmer must be able to cover distance with a strong, confident stroke. The 75 yards must not be the outer limit of the swimmer's ability; completion of the distance should show sufficient stamina to avoid undue risks. Dog-paddling and strokes repeatedly interrupted and restarted are not sufficient; underwater swimming is not permitted. The itemized strokes are inclusive. Any strong side or breaststroke or any strong overarm stroke (including the back crawl) is acceptable.
3. "...swim 25 yards using an easy, resting backstroke..."
The swimmer must perform a restful, free-breathing backstroke that can be used to avoid exhaustion during swimming activity. This element of the test necessarily follows the more strenuous swimming activity to show that the swimmer is, in fact, able to use the backstroke as a relief from exertion. The change of stroke must be accomplished in deep water without any push-off or other aid. Any variation of the elementary backstroke may suffice if it clearly allows the swimmer to rest and regain wind.
4. "...The 100 yards must be swum continuously and include at least one sharp turn..."
The total distance is to be covered without rest stops. The sharp turn demonstrates the swimmer's ability to reverse direction in deep water without assistance or push-off from side or bottom.
5. "...After completing the swim, rest by floating."
This critically important part of the test evaluates the swimmer's ability to maintain himself in the water indefinitely even though exhausted or otherwise unable to continue swimming. Treading water or swimming in place will further tire the swimmer and therefore is unacceptable. The duration of the float test is not significant, except that it must be long enough for the test administrator to determine that the swimmer is resting and likely could continue to do so for a prolonged period. Drownproofing may be sufficient if clearly restful, but it is not preferred. If the test is completed except for the floating requirement, the swimmer may be retested on the floating only (after instruction) provided that the test administrator is confident that the swimmer can initiate the float when exhausted.

Reference: Swimming and Lifesaving merit badge pamphlets

Beginner Test

Jump feetfirst into water over the head in depth, level off, swim 25 feet on the surface, stop, turn sharply, resume swimming as before, and return to starting place.

The entry and turn serve the same purpose as in the swimmer test. The swimming can be done with any stroke, but no underwater swimming is permitted. The stop assures that the swimmer can regain a stroke if it is interrupted. The test demonstrates that the beginning swimmer is ready to learn deepwater skills and has the minimum ability required for safe swimming in a confined area in which shallow water, sides, or other support is less than 25 feet from any point in the water.

Pool and Surf Swimming

The Safe Swim Defense applies to swimming at the beach, private or public pool, wilderness pond, stream, lake, or anywhere Scouts swim. Here are some additional points for the pool and the surf.

Pool#151;If the swimming activity is in a public facility where others are using the pool at the same time, and the pool operator provides guard personnel, there may be no need for additional designation of Scout lifeguards and lookout.

The buddy system is critically important, however, even in a public pool. Remember, even in a crowd, you are alone without protection if no one is attentive to your circumstances.

The rule that people swim only in water suited to their ability and with others of similar ability applies in a pool environment. Most public pools divide shallow and deep water, and this may be sufficient for defining appropriate swimming areas. If not, the supervisor should clearly indicate to the participating Scouts the appropriate areas of the public facility. Although such procedures add a margin of safety, their use may not always be practical when the swim activity is conducted at a public facility where non-Scouts are present. A responsible adult supervisor, who understands his or her responsibility and the elements of safety, can exercise discretion regarding certain procedures while maintaining safety.

The surf swimming environment — with its wave action, currents, tides, undertow, runouts, and sea pests like stinging jellyfish — requires precautions for safe swimming that aren't necessary in other environments. A swimmer's physical condition is very important and should enable the swimmer to recover footing in waves, swim vigorously for at least five minutes without becoming exhausted, and remain calm and in control when faced with unexpected conditions.

Designated swimming areas are marked by flags or pennants that are easily seen. Beginners and nonswimmers are positioned inshore from the standing lifeguards equipped with reach poles. Better swimmers are permitted seaward of the lifeguard but must remain shoreward of anchored marker buoys. The lifeguard-to-swimmer ratio should always be 1-to-10, with a rescue team that is supplied with a rescue tube or torpedo buoy and stationed at the beach area.

Safety Afloat

Safety Afloat has been developed to promote boating and boating safety and to set standards for safe unit activity afloat. **Before a BSA group may engage in an excursion, expedition, or trip on the water (canoe, raft, sailboat, motorboat, rowboat, tube, or other craft), adult leaders for such activity must complete Safety Afloat Training, No. 34159, have a commitment card, No. 34242, with them, and be dedicated to full compliance with all nine points of Safety Afloat.**



1. Qualified Supervision

All activity afloat must be supervised by a mature and conscientious adult age 21 or older who understands and knowingly accepts responsibility for the well-being and safety of the children in his or her care, who is experienced and qualified in the particular watercraft skills and equipment involved in the activity, and who is committed to compliance with the nine points of BSA Safety Afloat. One such supervisor is required for each 10 people, with a minimum of two adults for any one group. At least one supervisor must be age 21 or older, and the remaining supervisors must be age 18 or older. All supervisors must complete BSA Safety Afloat and Safe Swim Defense training and rescue training for the type of watercraft to be used in the activity, and at least one must be trained in CPR. It is strongly recommended that all units have at least one adult or older youth member currently trained as a BSA Lifeguard to assist in the planning and conducting of all activity afloat.

For Cub Scouts: The ratio of adult supervisors to participants is *one to five*.

2. Physical Fitness

All persons must present evidence of fitness by a complete health history from a physician, parent, or legal

guardian. Adjust all supervision, discipline, and protection to anticipate any risks associated with individual health conditions. In the event of any significant health conditions, a medical evaluation by a physician should be required by the adult leader.

3. Swimming Ability

A person who has not been classified as a "swimmer" may ride as a passenger in a rowboat or motorboat with an adult swimmer, or in a canoe, raft, or sailboat with an adult who is trained as a lifeguard or a lifesaver by a recognized agency. In all other circumstances, the person must be a swimmer to participate in an activity afloat. Swimmers must pass this test:

Jump feetfirst into water over your head. Swim 75 yards in a strong manner using one or more of the following strokes: sidestroke, breaststroke, trudgen, or crawl; then swim 25 yards using an easy resting backstroke. The 100 yards must be swum continuously and include at least one sharp turn. After completing the swim, rest by floating. This qualification test should be renewed annually.

4. Personal Flotation Equipment

Properly fitted U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation devices (PFDs) must be worn by all persons engaged in activity on the open water (rowing, canoeing, sailing, boardsailing, motorboating, waterskiing, rafting, tubing, kayaking, and surfboarding). Type II and III PFDs are recommended.

5. Buddy System

All activity afloat necessitates using the buddy system. Not only must every individual have a buddy, but every craft should have a buddy boat when on the water.

6. Skill Proficiency

All participants in activity afloat must be trained and experienced in watercraft handling skills, safety, and emergency procedures. (a) For unit activity on white water, all participants must complete special training by a BSA Aquatics Instructor or qualified whitewater specialist. (b) Powerboat operators must be able to meet requirements for the Motorboating merit badge or equivalent. (c) Except for whitewater and powerboat operation as noted above, either a minimum of three hours' training and supervised practice or meeting requirements for "basic handling tests" is required for all float trips or open-water excursions using unpowered craft.

For Cub Scouts: Canoeing, kayaking, rowing, and rafting for Cub Scouts (including Webelos Scouts) are to be limited to council/district events on flat water ponds or controlled lake areas free of powerboats and sailboats. Prior to recreational canoeing and kayaking, Cub Scouts are to be instructed in basic handling skills and safety practices.

7. Planning

- *Float Plan* Obtain current maps and information about the waterway to be traveled. Know exactly where the unit will "put in" and "pull out" and what course will be followed. Travel time should be estimated generously. Review the plan with others who have traveled the course recently.
- *Local Rules* Determine which state and local regulations are applicable, and follow them. Get written permission to use or cross private property.
- *Notification* File the float plan with parents or participants and a member of the unit committee. File the float plan with the local council office when traveling on running water. Check in with all those who should be notified when returning.
- *Weather* Check the weather forecast just before setting out, and keep an alert weather eye. Bring all craft ashore when rough weather threatens.
- *Contingencies* Planning must identify possible emergencies and other circumstances that could force

a change of plans. Appropriate alternative plans must be developed for each.

For Cub Scouts: Cub Scout canoeing, kayaking, rowing, and rafting do not include "trips" or "expeditions" and are not to be conducted on running water (i.e., rivers or streams); therefore, some procedures are inapplicable. Suitable weather requires clear skies, no appreciable wind, and warm air and water.

8. Equipment

All equipment must be suited to the craft, to water conditions, and to the individual; must be in good repair; and must satisfy all state and federal requirements. Spare equipment or repair materials must be carried. Appropriate rescue equipment must be available for immediate use.

9. Discipline

All participants should know, understand, and respect the rules and procedures for safe unit activity afloat. The applicable rules should be presented and learned prior to the outing, and should be reviewed for all participants at the water's edge just before the activity begins. When Scouts know and understand the reasons for the rules, they will observe them. When fairly and impartially applied, rules do not interfere with the fun. Rules for safety, plus common sense and good judgment, keep the fun from being interrupted by tragedy.

Note: For cruising vessels (excluding rowboats, canoes, kayaks, and rafts, but including sailboats and powerboats greater than 20 feet long) used in adult-supervised unit activities by a chartered Venturing crew/ship specializing in watercraft operations, or used in adult-supervised program activity in connection with any high-adventure program or other activity under the direct sponsorship and control of the National Council, the standards and procedures in the Sea Scout Manual may be substituted for the Safety Afloat standards.

Personal Flotation Devices (PFDs)

Properly fitted U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation devices (PFDs) must be worn by all persons engaged in activity on the open water (rowing, canoeing, sailing, boardsailing, motorboating, waterskiing, rafting, tubing, and kayaking).

Only U.S. Coast Guard-approved equipment (types I, II, or III) is acceptable for use in Scouting aquatics. Ski belts are not acceptable. Scouts and unit leaders should learn which type is appropriate for each specific circumstance and how to wear and check for proper fit.

Water Clarity

Swimming activity in turbid water should be limited to surface swimming. Turbid water exists when a 12-inch white disk at the depth of 3 feet is not visible from above the surface of the water. Underwater swimming, headfirst entry (except for racing dives), and board diving are not permitted in turbid water. Supervised instruction in lifesaving skills and surface diving may be conducted in confined areas of turbid water not exceeding 8 feet in depth and free of bottom hazards.

Snorkeling and scuba skills are taught and practiced only in clear water. Clear water exists when a 12-inch disk at a depth of 8 feet is visible from above the surface of the water.

BSA Lifeguard

BSA Lifeguard training has been established to provide units (packs, troops, teams, crews, and ships) with qualified individuals within their own membership to give knowledgeable supervision for activities on or in the water. The first standard in the Safe Swim Defense and Safety Afloat guidelines establishes a need for

qualified supervision. An adult currently trained as a BSA Lifeguard or an adult leader assisted by a Scout holding BSA Lifeguard training meets this requirement. To enroll in the BSA Lifeguard course, you must be at least 14 years of age or have completed the eighth grade. The latest requirements for BSA Lifeguard training are included on the application form, No. 34435A. Every unit leader is encouraged to become trained or to be certain that at least one youth or adult member of the unit has such training.

Swimming Area

Swimming areas should be large enough to avoid crowding (minimum of 40 square feet per swimmer). Note the following in accordance with Safe Swim Defense rules. **Mark off the area for three groups: not more than 3.5 feet deep for nonswimmers; from shallow water to just over the head for beginners; deep water not more than 12 feet for swimmers.**

Diving and Elevated Entry

"Diving" refers to any water entry where the feet are not making first contact with the water. "Elevated entry" refers to any water entry from a height more than 18 inches above the water. According to BSA Safe Swim Defense standards, no diving or swimming activity of any kind is done in water with a depth greater than 12 feet.

All water entry must be feetfirst where the water has less than 7 feet of unobstructed depth. A leaping entry is recommended where water is at or above head level; a step-down or jump-down entry from a sitting position is recommended for shallower water.

No diving is permitted in water with less than 7 feet of unobstructed depth. Diving is permitted in clear water over 7 feet deep from a dock, pier, or platform that is no more than 18 inches above the water surface. For elevated entry from 18 inches high but less than 40 inches above the water surface, clear and unobstructed water depth must be at least 9 feet. The water must be clear enough to enable supervisory and guard personnel to see the diver at the deepest part of the plunge.

Board diving is permitted only from boards, mounted on a fixed (not floating) platform or deck, no more than 40 inches (approximately 1 meter) above the water surface. Clear water depth below the board should be 9 to 12 feet. A guard or supervisor should be positioned where the diver can be seen at all times beneath the surface. There should be no other surface or underwater activity or obstruction for at least 15 feet on either side of the board and 25 feet in front of the board. Diving should always be done straight ahead from the board, never to the sides.

Any elevated entry from a height greater than 40 inches must be feetfirst and only from a fixed platform or solid footing no more than 60 inches above the water surface. Clear water depth should be 10 to 12 feet. Other protective measures and distances are the same as for board diving.

Scuba Policy



Any person possessing, displaying, or using scuba (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus) in connection with any Scouting-related activity must either be currently certified by, or enrolled in a training course authorized by the National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI), the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), or Scuba Schools International (SSI). These agencies are recognized by the Boy Scouts of America for scuba training and instruction. Alternatively, if PADI, NAUI, or SSI training and instruction is not available, certification may be accepted from other agencies that comply with Recreational

Scuba Training Council (RSTC) guidelines, provided that such acceptance has been expressly approved by the BSA local council in consultation with the BSA national Health and Safety Service.

Cub Scouts

Youth members in Cub Scouting are not authorized to use scuba in any activity.

Boy Scouts and Varsity Scouts

The use of scuba is not authorized for a BSA unit, except so that registered Boy Scout youth and leaders may participate in the Scuba BSA program conducted by a certified dive instructor in compliance with this policy. Scuba BSA is not a diver certification program.

Scuba training programs may be a part of troop/team activities for participants who are 14 years of age or older. Members who meet the age requirement and are properly certified may participate in group dives under the supervision of a responsible adult who is currently certified as a dive master, assistant instructor, or any higher rating from NAUI, PADI, or SSI. Student divers must be under the supervision of a currently certified NAUI, PADI, or SSI instructor. No exceptions to the BSA age requirement are permitted. Scouts with a junior diver certification may dive only when accompanied by a buddy who is a certified open-water diver at least 18 years old.

Venturers

Scuba programs may be a part of Venturing activities for participants who are 14 years of age or older. Members who meet the age requirement and are properly certified may participate in group dives under the supervision of a responsible adult who is currently certified as a dive master, assistant instructor, or any higher rating from NAUI, PADI, or SSI. Student divers must be under the supervision of a currently certified NAUI, PADI, or SSI instructor. No exceptions to the BSA age requirement are permitted.

Snorkeling

The Snorkeling BSA requirements introduce Scout-age children and adult leaders to the special skills, equipment, and safety precautions associated with snorkeling; encourage the development of aquatics skills that promote fitness and recreation; and provide a foundation for those who later will participate in more advanced underwater activity.

Snorkeling Safety is the recommended procedure for conducting BSA swimming activities using masks, fins, and snorkels. Since snorkeling is a swimming activity, Safe Swim Defense guidelines are applicable. Snorkeling Safety clarifies and extends Safe Swim Defense concepts to situations encountered during training and open water snorkeling.

Snorkeling BSA

Counselors. Any adult trained and assigned by a currently certified Aquatics Instructor BSA may serve as a counselor for the Snorkeling BSA award. A person certified to conduct snorkeling instruction by the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), or the National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI), or other BSA recognized agency, also qualifies as a Snorkeling BSA counselor.

Programming. Instruction must be conducted in clear, confined water with a maximum depth of 12 feet. A swimming pool is recommended. Snorkeling BSA is ideally suited to winter programs using indoor pools. Three 45-minute sessions are recommended for instruction, practice, and completion of requirements.

Snorkeling Safety

1. Qualified Supervision

All swimming activity, including snorkeling, must be supervised by a mature and conscientious adult age 21 or older who understands and knowingly accepts responsibility for the well-being and safety of the youth members in his or her care; who is experienced in the water and is confident of his or her ability to respond in the event of an emergency; and who is trained in and committed to compliance with the eight points of BSA Safe Swim Defense.

An experienced snorkeler must supervise snorkeling instruction and open water snorkeling activities. At a minimum, the supervisor must possess skills and knowledge matching the Snorkeling BSA award, and have experience with environments similar to those of the planned activity. The supervisor is responsible for compliance with each point of BSA Snorkeling Safety.

Unit leaders may rely on the expertise of other adults to supplement their knowledge and training. They may delegate the task of supervision, for example, when the unit is participating in a snorkeling activity conducted by a tour operator, provided they are satisfied that the operator's training and experience will provide a safe activity with appropriate safeguards.

2. Physical Fitness

All persons must present evidence of fitness for snorkeling activity with a complete health history from physician, parent, or legal guardian. The adult supervisor should adjust all supervision, discipline, and protection to anticipate any potential risks associated with individual health conditions. Recent sinus or ear infections may temporarily preclude surface dives while snorkeling. Those with known adverse reactions to stings from marine life, or with chronic conditions such as diabetes or asthma, may need special medications at hand. Adults with known risk factors for cardiovascular disease should not undertake strenuous activities without the advice of their physician. In the event of any significant health conditions, a medical evaluation by a physician should be required by the adult leader. Those with chronic disease or physical disabilities may still be able to enjoy and benefit from aquatics if the conditions are known and necessary precautions are taken.

3. Safe Area

Training in the use of snorkeling equipment shall be performed in clear water in a confined area that conforms to Safe Swim Defense guidelines. 'Clear water' implies pool-like visibility. At a minimum, an 8-inch disk with white and black quadrants at a depth of eight feet should be recognizable from above the surface. 'Confined area' denotes either a pool or an established summer camp swimming area with direct access from the shore or a dock.

Safe conditions for open water swimming and snorkeling depend on water clarity, area definition, depth, access, and other environmental factors. Snorkeling is limited to clear water. 'Open water' denotes a temporary swimming area of flexible extent in a natural body of water that may not be close to shore.

An open water snorkeling area need not have physical boundary markers, but the activity should be restricted within a specified distance of a point on shore, an anchored vessel, a moving guard boat, or a float with a dive flag attached. Generally, a 50-foot radius is recommended, and may be dictated by local regulations concerning the use of a dive flag. The area covered by the snorkeling group should be small enough to allow rapid assistance from rescue personnel.

Emergency response places limitations on safe water depth as well as water clarity and area.

Guards should be able to quickly and easily reach the bottom, locate, recover, and transport a submerged victim to shore or vessel. At the start of the activity, and periodically if the group moves along a reef or other feature, the guards should check their ability both to see and to reach the bottom. The group should be directed towards shallower water whenever the guards experience any difficulty. (Twelve feet is designated as a reasonable maximum depth in Safe Swim Defense. In practice, slightly shallower or deeper depths may be appropriate. Different guard personnel will be able to easily recover objects from different depths, particularly if wearing fins. The practical way to confirm a safe depth is to test that the bottom is within comfortable reach of all designated rescue personnel.)

Limited or distant access to the snorkeling area may require additional consideration. Underwater features close to a sloping beach or near an anchored vessel are ideal. If the snorkeling site is a considerable distance from a beach or permitted anchoring location, the ability to rest becomes important and may restrict the activity close to shallow water or dictate the use of inflatable vests

and/or small guard craft. Tide tables should be consulted in areas with large tidal changes, especially when beach access is at the base of a cliff. Snorkeling in a river may require an exit point downstream of the entry.

Snorkeling should not be done if water depth, clarity, or temperature, boat traffic, waves, current, weather, marine life, or bottom conditions, including vegetation, are deemed unsafe by the qualified supervisor. Time in the water should be adjusted based on water temperature and sun exposure. Snorkeling at night is limited to lighted pools unless the activity is conducted at a BSA nationally accredited high-adventure base.

4. Proper Equipment

- a. All snorkeling equipment shall be properly fitted and in good repair.
- b. The use of inflatable snorkeling vests and personal flotation devices is at the discretion of the qualified supervisor based on local conditions and the abilities of the participants and guards. Use of individual flotation devices is required in open water whenever there is a noticeable current or swells, when the bottom is not visible from the surface (due to vegetation or limited visibility beyond 8 feet), or when the activity is an extended distance (> 50 yards) from shore or craft.
- c. A dive flag should be used at all open water sites. It may be displayed from a dive boat or attached to a float and towed with the snorkeling party. Local rules and regulations may specify the type of flag and how close snorkelers must stay to it.
- d. Protective clothing may be worn. Gloves are appropriate in areas with sharp rocks or encrusted structures. A shirt or a diver's body suit will provide limited protection from sun, abrasion, or coral burns and minor insulation in warm water. In temperate water, a partial or full wet suit may be worn. Weight belts may not be used.
- e. Lifesaving equipment in good repair shall be ready for immediate use by guard personnel. A flotation device is recommended, such as a rescue tube, bodyboard, or PFD, supplemented, as appropriate, by reaching and throwing devices, and small craft. Dive boats should be equipped with radios and first aid kits, and should deploy a safety line.

5. Lifeguards/Lookout

It is the responsibility of the qualified supervisor to designate personnel for emergency response whenever lifeguards are not provided by a facility or tour operator. The snorkeling party should be divided into groups of 2 to 8 swimmers with two guards, paired as buddies, assigned to each group. (Units may be divided by patrols or crews.) The guards should be competent swimmers with basic water rescue skills. Emergency procedures, including entries, exits, and the role of everyone in the group, should be reviewed and practiced prior to the activity using rescue aids at the site. The guards should be stationed either afloat or ashore where they can see and hear all those in their group. To improve visibility, the guards and the swimmers should be positioned so that they do not face into the sun. Snorkelers in a group should remain off the same side of a vessel. Inflatable or rigid dinghies with oars are appropriate guard craft. The guards and snorkelers should remain close enough for rapid rescue response, generally within 50 feet of one another. In some situations, the qualified supervisor may deem it appropriate for the guards to tow rescue aids while accompanying their group in the water.

Guards are responsible for surveillance as well as rescue. If there is more than one group, then a separate lookout, who may be the qualified supervisor, should coordinate the entire activity and monitor changing conditions. The lookout should have audible or visible means, such as an air horn or flag, to recall all groups. If a boat is used to transport snorkelers to the site, then at least one person should remain aboard who knows how to drive the boat and use the radio. At least one person in the party must be trained in CPR.

It is the combined responsibility of the adult supervisor, the lookout, and the guards to know the number of people in the water at all times and to make frequent visible confirmations of that number. Buddy boards and tags, or their equivalent, must be used to account for everyone in the water.

6. Ability

Scouts classified as beginners or nonswimmers may use snorkeling equipment in clear, confined water of appropriate depth, as specified in Safe Swim Defense (points 3 and 6), during instructional swims or during closely-supervised recreational activity. Training for the Snorkeling BSA award is

limited to Scouts and adults classified as swimmers. Only those who have completed the Snorkeling BSA requirements may participate in open water snorkeling.

7. Buddy System

All participants in snorkeling activities are paired as buddies. Buddies should check each other's equipment prior to the activity and review hand signals. During the activity, they should remain close enough that they are constantly aware of their buddy location and condition. Generally, buddies should take turns making breath-holding dives. That is, one buddy remains at the surface, floating with his mask in the water while breathing through the snorkel, and keeps an eye on the buddy who is down. When the diver surfaces, both buddies check their position relative to the group before moving on or letting the other buddy dive.

The adult supervisor, lookout, or guards may call buddy checks as needed to keep the buddies together. Buddy checks may also be called to aid communication. Buddy pairs should be instructed to routinely watch for pre-determined audible and visual signals of a buddy check.

8. Discipline

Be sure everyone understands and agrees that snorkeling is allowed only with proper supervision and use of the complete Safe Swim Defense and BSA Snorkeling Safety standards. The applicable rules should be presented and learned prior to the outing, and should be reviewed for all participants at the beginning of the snorkeling activity. Scouts should respect and follow all directions and rules of the adult supervisor. When people know the reasons for rules and procedures they are more likely to follow them. Treatment should be strict and fair, with no favoritism.

Kayaking

Kayaking activities are limited to Boy Scouts, Varsity Scouts, and Venturers. Additional kayaking information may be found in the *Kayaking BSA* pamphlet, No. 19-510, the *Fieldbook*, No. 33104; the *Whitewater* merit badge pamphlet, 33405; and *Varsity Team Program Features, Volume III*, No. 34839.

Kayaking BSA

Kayaking BSA provides an introduction to kayaking skills and safety procedures and serves as a program opportunity for Boy Scout, Varsity, and Venturing units in camp or out. Mastery of Kayaking BSA skills is a first critical step towards satisfying Safety Afloat guidelines for safe kayak excursions.

Kayaking Safety

1. Qualified supervision.

All kayaking activities must be supervised by a mature and conscientious adult who understands and knowingly accepts responsibility for the well-being and safety of the youth and who is experienced with the type of kayaks and activity under consideration. One adult supervisor is required for every 10 participants, with a minimum of two for any one group. All supervisors must complete Safety Afloat and Safe Swim Defense training, and at least one must be trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).

2. Physical fitness.

Evidence of fitness for swimming activity is required in the form of a complete health history from a physician, parent, or guardian. The supervisor must know the physical condition of all participants and must adjust activities to avoid any potential risks associated with individual health concerns.

3. Swimming ability.

Every participant must be classified as a "swimmer" to participate in training for Kayaking BSA or to paddle a solo kayak at a Scouting function.

4. Personal flotation equipment.

Properly fitted U.S. Coast Guard-approved personal flotation devices (PFDs) must be worn by all persons engaged in kayaking.

5. Buddy system.

Scouts never go on the water alone. Every person must have a buddy, and every craft on the water must have a "buddy boat."

6. Skill proficiency.

All persons participating in activity afloat must be trained and practiced in craft-handling skills, safety, and emergency procedures. Kayaking BSA prepares Scouts and unit leaders for kayaking on flat water of a limited extent, such as that at a camp waterfront. Kayak trips require additional training in emergency equipment and communication. Ocean and river trips require additional kayaking skills for dealing with waves and moving water and the ability to "read" the environment. Units should not undertake excursions on class II whitewater before mastering the necessary skills on class I rivers.

7. Planning.

Before Scouts go afloat, they develop a float plan detailing their route, time schedule, and contingency plans. The float plan considers all possible water and weather conditions and all applicable rules or regulations, and is shared with all who have an interest.

8. Equipment.

All equipment must be suited to the craft, to the water conditions, and to the individual. Equipment must be in good repair and meet all applicable standards. Appropriate rescue equipment must be available. Whitewater kayaking requires the use of safety helmets. During treks, safety gear such as navigation aids, weather radios, individual signal devices, throw bags, first aid kits, spare paddles, and spare clothing should be carried in the kayaks or in support craft.

9. Discipline.

Scouts must know and respect the rules, and always follow directions from the adults supervising the activity afloat. Rules and safety procedures should be reviewed before each group launch.

Waterskiing

Safe waterskiing starts with safe equipment; a thorough knowledge of techniques; competent instruction; an efficient, careful towboat operator; and a conscientious observer. A life jacket is a must for all waterskiers. Skis should be in good shape and free from sharp or protruding edges. The boat operator should be driving solely for the benefit, satisfaction, and safety of the skier. The boat and skier should stay away from docks, swimmers, boaters, people who are fishing, and other objects.

The Water-Skier's Safety Code and Boat Driver's Safety Code are found in the *Waterskiing* merit badge pamphlet. These are guidelines to be followed by all those involved in the sport of waterskiing.

Waterskiing activities are limited to Boy Scouts, Varsity Scouts, and Venturers.

Reference: Waterskiing merit badge pamphlet, No. 33348

Boardsailing

The BSA boardsailing program has been developed to introduce Scout-age children to basic boardsailing skills, equipment, and safety precautions, to encourage development of skills that promote fitness and safe aquatics recreation, and to lay a skill and knowledge foundation for those who will later participate in more advanced and demanding activities on the water.

Any person recognized and certified as an instructor by Windsurfer International or the U.S. Board Sailing

Association may serve as a counselor for the Boardsailing Award with the approval of the local council service center. Any person trained and experienced in boardsailing skills and safety may serve as a counselor for this award in a Scout summer camp program under the direction and supervision of a currently trained BSA Aquatics Instructor.

Instruction in recreational activity must be conducted according to the BSA guidelines for boardsailing. The Boardsailing Award is now available for inclusion in Scouting programs.

Reference: Boardsailing BSA Award Application, No. 19-935

American Whitewater Guidelines

The following guidelines, adapted from the American Whitewater Safety Code, are geared especially for Scouting-related whitewater activities and are an excellent supplement to the SAFETY Afloat guidelines.

1. **Be a competent swimmer**
Being a safe whitewater boater does not require Olympian swimming skills, but you should be comfortable and competent in the water and be able to handle yourself underwater.
2. **Wear a personal flotation device (PFD)**
A properly fitted vest-type PFD offers back and shoulder protection as well as the flotation needed to swim safely in whitewater.
3. **Wear a solid, correctly fitted helmet**
A helmet is essential in kayaks or covered canoes and is recommended for open canoeists using thigh straps and rafters running steep drops.
4. **Keep your boat under control**
Your skills should be sufficiently developed to enable you to stop or get to shore before reaching danger. Do not enter a rapid unless you are reasonably sure that you can run it safely or swim it without injury.
5. **Be aware of river hazards**
Whitewater rivers present many hazards, such as high water or very cold water, strainers (brush or trees in the water), dams, ledges, holes, undercut rocks, or places where broaching (hitting an obstacle broadside) is likely. If you do not think you can boat around a hazard, get out and walk.
6. **Avoid Boating Alone**
The recommended minimum party is three people in at least two craft.
7. **Know the limits of your boating ability**
Do not attempt rivers or rapids that require paddling skills more advanced than those you possess.
8. **Know how to self-rescue**
Learn and practice self-rescue techniques such as recovering from a capsize.
9. **Be trained in rescue skills**
Be able to perform CPR and first aid, including being able to recognize and treat hypothermia.
10. **Be suitable equipped and prepared for emergencies**
 - Wear shoes that protect your feet.
 - Carry a throw rope, knife, whistle, and waterproof matches.
 - Tie your glasses on.



- Bring duct tape on short runs and a full repair kit on isolated rivers.
- Do not wear bulky clothing that could get waterlogged and hinder your ability to swim.

11. Be responsible for your own safety

- Make thoughtful and responsible decisions about whether to participate in a trip.
- Choose appropriate equipment.
- Scout all rapids first and use your best judgment to decide whether to run or portage.
- Evaluate your own and your group's safety on an ongoing basis. Speak with anyone whose actions on the water are dangerous, whether the person is a part of your group or not.

For more information about whitewater safety and to view the complete American Whitewater Safety Code, visit www.americanwhitewater.org.

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The Boy Scouts of America  <http://www.scouting.org>