

# 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.

**Table 1: BSA Safe Swim Defense**

<b>The Eight Defenses Are:</b>	
<b>1. Qualified Supervision</b>	<b>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 certified as a BSA Lifeguard to assist in the planning and conduct of all swimming activity.)</b>
<b>2. Physical Fitness</b>	<b>Require evidence of fitness for swimming activity with a complete health history from physician, parent, or legal guardian.</b> 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, the unit leader should require proof of an examination by a physician. Those with physical disabilities can enjoy and benefit from aquatics if the handicaps are known and necessary precautions are taken.
<b>3. Safe Area</b>	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, deep holes, rocks, and stumps. <b>Mark off the area for three groups: not more than 3 1/2 feet deep for non-swimmers; from shallow water to just over the head for beginners; deep water not more than 12 feet for swimmers.</b> 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 non-swimmer and beginner areas with buoy lines (twine and floats) between markers. Mark the outer bounds of the swimmer area with floats. Be sure that clear-water depth is at least 7 feet before allowing anyone to dive into the. Diving is prohibited from any height more than 40 inches above the water surface; feet-first entry is 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 over 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.

**Table 1: BSA Safe Swim Defense**

<b>The Eight Defenses Are:</b>	
<b>4. Lifeguards on Duty</b>	<p>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.</p>
<b>5. Lookout</b>	<p>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.</p>
<b>6. Ability Groups</b>	<p>Divide into three ability groups: Nonswimmers, beginners, and swimmers. Keep each group in its own area. <i>Non-swimmers</i> have not passed a swimming test. <i>Beginners</i> 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. <i>Swimmers</i> 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 include at least one sharp turn. After completing the swim, rest by floating. <b>These classification tests should be renewed annually, preferably at the beginning of the season.</b></p>
<b>7. Buddy System</b>	<p><b>Pair every youth with another in the same ability group.</b> Buddies check in and out of the swimming area together. Emphasize that each buddy lifeguards his buddy. Check everyone in the water about every ten minutes. The adult in charge signals for a buddy check with a single blast of a whistle or ring of a bell and a call of "Buddies!" The adult counts slowly to ten 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.</p>
<b>8. Discipline</b>	<p>Be sure everyone understands and agrees that <b>swimming is allowed only with proper supervision and use of the complete Safe Swim Defense.</b> 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.</p>

# 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 feet first into water over the head in depth, level off, and begin swimming. 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 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 feet first into water over the head in depth, level off, and begin swimming..."  
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, or 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 give evidence of 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 indicate the ability to execute 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 may

suffice if it clearly provides opportunity for the swimmer to rest and regain wind.

4. "...The 100 yards must be completed in one swim without stops and include at least one sharp turn..."  
The total distance is to be covered without rest stops. The sharp turn simply 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 component of the test evaluates the swimmer's ability to maintain 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 are therefore unacceptable. The duration of the float test is not significant, except that it must be long enough for the test administrator to determine that swimmer is, in fact, resting and could likely continue to do so for a prolonged time. The drown proofing technique may be sufficient if clearly restful, but it is not preferred. If the test is completed except for the float 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 feet first 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--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.

**Surf--**The surf swimming environment of 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 stationed at the beach area and supplied with a rescue tube or torpedo buoy.

## 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, head-first 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.**

## Swimming

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 3-1/2 feet 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 shallow 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.**

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