

# APPENDIX 6

## RESOURCE GUIDE FOR AQUATICS ACTIVITIES

### WATER SAFETY

Water activities can make good den or pack activities, but safety rules are very important any time a pack is holding an event around water. Some of the Cub Scouts are probably nonswimmers, and it is likely that some who think of themselves as swimmers can't swim very far or safely in deep water.

To ensure safe aquatics activities, the Boy Scouts of America requires implementation of Safe Swim Defense and Safety Afloat plans whenever Scouting units engage in swimming or boating activities. Swimming or boating activities must be supervised by at least one adult with current training in the appropriate program. That training may be obtained at [my.scouting.org](http://my.scouting.org) or at various other Scouting venues. (However, training not done online is valid only if the participants are shown the same video viewed online.)

Safe Swim Defense and Safety Afloat provide awareness training of the procedures and skills needed to keep youth safe in and on the water. A conscientious adult who completes the training should learn enough to decide if he or she is sufficiently experienced and well-informed to make appropriate decisions to prevent incidents and to plan for and respond appropriately during emergencies. Additional information to make that assessment is found in the BSA publication *Aquatics Supervision*, No. 34346. Refer to Appendix 9: Additional Resources for more information.

*Aquatics Supervision* also serves as the text for Aquatics Supervision: Swimming and Water Rescue, and Aquatics Supervision: Paddle Craft Safety training. Those two adult training courses teach the skills needed to implement Safe Swim Defense and Safety Afloat procedures in various settings. Each course takes approximately eight hours. Check with your council service center for course offerings.

Leaders may also obtain skilled help to plan and conduct safe aquatics activities by consulting with the local council aquatics committee. Check with your council service center for contact information.



# BSA SAFE SWIM DEFENSE

BSA groups shall use Safe Swim Defense for all swimming activities. Go to <https://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/gss02> for detailed information about the eight principles.

1. Qualified supervision
2. Personal health review
3. Safe area
4. Response personnel (lifeguards)
5. Lookout
6. Ability groups
7. Buddy system
8. Discipline

## HOME SWIMMING POOL SAFETY FOR UNIT EVENTS

All elements of Safe Swim Defense apply at backyard pools even though they may be small, shallow, and familiar. The biggest danger is probably complacency. Adult supervision must be continuous while the pool is in use. A child who can't swim can drown silently within 20 seconds of entering water over their head.

*Aquatics Supervision* contains safety information specific to both in-ground and above-ground backyard pools. That includes the following:

- Most such pools are too shallow for diving. Diving prohibition should be discussed at a tailgate review for all participants prior to the activity.
- Beginner and swimmer areas may be combined in small, relatively shallow pools.
- Make sure to control access. Many backyard pools are too small to accommodate an entire pack at once. If other activities are also taking place, it may be best to allow only one den into the water at a time rather than allowing Scouts to move at will in and out of the water.
- Many states require pool fencing, which may help with supervision.
- If the uniform depth of an in-ground pool is too deep for short nonswimmers, they may need properly fitted life jackets.
- Rescues, if needed, should be simple. Provide reaching and throwing devices for active victims. A wading assist may be feasible for passive victims.
- For above-ground pools without decks, have a plan to remove large unresponsive adults who suffer a heart attack or other debilitating condition.

## GUARDED PUBLIC POOLS WITH LIFEGUARDS ON DUTY

*Aquatics Supervision* also covers swimming at public pools, waterparks, and guarded beaches.

Important items include the following:

- Dens and packs do not need to assign and equip rescue personnel. Professionally trained lifeguards provided by the venue satisfy that need.
- Unit leaders are still responsible for medical screening, ability groups, the buddy system, discipline, and supervision.
- Many public pools will have a safety line at the 5-foot mark separating shallow and deep water that can be used to help designate appropriate areas for the different ability groups. Otherwise, appoint adult lookouts to make sure nonswimmers and beginners stay in their assigned areas.

It is likely awkward to conduct frequent buddy checks. Therefore, arrange a time for everyone to leave the water and meet at a given location. Then do a head count. Otherwise rely on unit lookouts, buddies, and lifeguards to maintain vigilance. At large waterparks, leaders should accompany dens moving from one feature to another after everyone in the group is accounted for.

## BSA SAFETY AFLOAT (Boating Safety)

BSA groups shall use Safety Afloat for all boating activities. Go to [www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/gss02/](http://www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/gss02/) for more information on the nine principles.

1. Qualified supervision
2. Personal health review
3. Swimming ability
4. Life jackets
5. Buddy system
6. Skill proficiency
7. Planning
8. Equipment
9. Discipline

### WATER RESCUE

Water rescue training for the lay rescuer often uses a *reach, throw, row, go* mnemonic to establish a safe, effective sequence for responding to water emergencies. That sequence is important to Cub Scout leaders for two distinct reasons. First it establishes the procedure that response personnel under Safe Swim Defense should follow. If professionally trained lifeguards are not available at a swimming location, then the qualified supervisor has to provide personnel and equipment suitable for likely emergencies. Fortunately, that is often not as difficult as it might first appear. For that reason, a review of the reach, throw, row, and go sequence is appropriate. Important detail can be found in *Aquatics Supervision*.

The other reason for reviewing the sequence is for age-appropriate training of youth. Drowning is the second-leading cause of accidental death for those of Cub Scout age. Therefore, there is a chance that Cub Scouts will be faced with seeing someone in trouble. Cub Scouts have saved people from drowning.

However, there are also double drownings that occur yearly in the United States when well-meaning people of all ages attempt to save drowning victims. Those are often frantic friends and relatives whose swimming skills are no better than those of the person in trouble. Since Cub Scouts often lack swimming skills and the maturity to realize their limitations, it is important to modify the rescue sequence for Cub Scout training to reach, throw, row, and go for help.

**Reach:** This technique is appropriate to teach Cub Scouts, parents who are nonswimmers, and rescue personnel who are skilled in the water. People who can't swim often begin to struggle immediately after they step into or fall into water over their heads. That is likely to be very close to safety. If so, the rescuer should lie down, reach out, and grab the person. Lying down is necessary since the person in the water will likely stop all effort to remain afloat, and that sudden increase in weight can topple an unprepared rescuer into the water. If the victim is a bit farther out, an extension device such as a pole, paddle, or noodle can be used. Those should be swept to the person from the side, not used like a spear. Victims often cannot reach for an extended item, even if it is just a foot away. Rescuers should therefore be told to place the item under the person's arm or within grasp. Rescuers should also be told to provide loud, clear, simple instructions to the victim, for example "GRAB THIS!"

**Throw:** The second procedure in the sequence, used when the person is too far out to reach, is to throw the person an aid. A throwing rescue is also appropriate to teach to rescuers of any age and swimming ability. A float with a line attached is best, but any light floating item or a rope by itself may be used. An accurate first toss is required if a line is not attached, but throwing a line takes practice. Ring buoys are

often found at hotel and apartment pools and are good devices for Cub Scout practice. Leaders may also fashion throwing devices from light floating line and a plastic jug with just a bit of water in it for weight. A throwing rescue is best suited to poor swimmers in trouble. Drowning nonswimmers will not be able to reach for the object unless it lands within their grasp, nor will passive victims floating face down or on the bottom.

**Row:** A boat can be used to provide a mobile platform from which to do reaching or throwing assists. Since Cub Scouts do not have the skills needed for a safe rowing rescue, this procedure is not emphasized for that age group. A boat rescue is also not a common part of an emergency action plan for a unit swim since the swimming area is typically small and within easy reach of shore-based response personnel.

**Go:** For Cub Scout training, this item should be interpreted as “go for help.” That is, they should first shout for help, and if no one responds, seek out a responsible person such as a parent, lifeguard, or park ranger. Poor swimmers should not enter the water to attempt a rescue. On the other hand, a unit swim cannot rely on reaching or throwing rescues for emergency planning. An in-water assist will be needed for a parent suffering cardiac arrest in the water. At guarded swims, *GO* also means going with equipment since lifeguards or response personnel should never be without appropriate rescue aids.

## SWIM CLASSIFICATION TESTS

The following content on swim classification tests is taken from the *BSA Aquatics Supervision* guide.

Safe Swim Defense and Safety Afloat guidelines tailor activities to swimming ability. Therefore, the unit leader needs to provide opportunities for swim classification before aquatics outings. Swim tests conducted by council personnel during or just before summer camp give the unit one way to determine swimming ability. However, not all unit members attend camp, new members may join the unit at any time, and some units plan aquatics activities in lieu of summer camp. Therefore, the unit should be able to safely conduct its own swim tests.

## SWIMMER CLASSIFICATIONS

Scouting recognizes three basic swimming classifications: **swimmer**, **beginner**, and **nonswimmer**. Swim classification tests should be renewed annually, preferably at the beginning of the season.

The **swimmer** test demonstrates the minimum level of swimming ability required for safe deepwater swimming. The various components of the test evaluate several distinct, essential skills necessary for safety in the water. A precise statement of the swimmer test is:

Jump feetfirst 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.

The test administrator must objectively evaluate both the ease of the overall performance and the purpose of each test element. Any conscientious adult who is familiar with basic swimming strokes and who understands and abides by the following guidelines can administer the test.



**1. “Jump feetfirst into water over the head in depth. Level off . . .”**



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 the side or bottom, and gaining forward momentum by diving do not satisfy this requirement. If the swimming area available for the test is not quite over the swimmer’s head in depth, or does not provide a platform for jumping into deep water, then a person may be provisionally classified as a swimmer if able to easily bob repeatedly up and down in the water, then level off and begin swimming. The head must submerge without the legs touching bottom. Ideally, the feetfirst entry should be tested at the next available opportunity.

**2. “. . . swim 75 yards in a strong manner . . .”**



The swimmer must be able to cover distance with a strong, confident stroke. The 75 yards is not the expected upper limit of the swimmer’s ability. The distance should be covered in a manner that indicates sufficient skill and stamina for the swimmer to continue to swim for greater distances. Strokes repeatedly interrupted and restarted are not sufficient. The sidestroke, breaststroke, or any strong over-arm stroke, including the back crawl, are allowed in any combination; dog paddling and underwater strokes are not acceptable. The strokes need to be executed in a strong manner, but perfect form is not necessary. If it is apparent that the swimmer

is being worn out by a poorly executed, head-up crawl, it is appropriate for the test administrator to suggest a change to a more restful stroke. A skilled, confident swimmer should be able to complete the distance with energy to spare, even if not in top physical condition. There should be little concern if a swimmer is out of breath because the distance was intentionally covered at a fast pace. However, a swimmer who barely has the energy to complete the distance will benefit from additional skill instruction.

**3. “. . . swim 25 yards using an easy, resting backstroke.”**



The swimmer must demonstrate a restful, free-breathing backstroke that can be used to avoid exhaustion during swimming activity. It is placed at the end of the distance requirement to emphasize the use of the backstroke as a relief from exertion and may actually be used by some swimmers to catch their breath if they swam the first part more strenuously than needed. The change of stroke must be done without support from side or bottom. Any effective variation of the elementary backstroke is acceptable. The form need not be perfect. For example, a modified scissors kick may be substituted for a whip kick. Restful strokes

are emphasized in Scouting as important safety skills that can be used whenever the swimmer becomes exhausted or injured. Some swimmers, particularly current or former members of competitive swim teams, may not be familiar with the elementary backstroke. A back crawl will suffice for the test if it clearly provides opportunity for the swimmer to rest and catch the breath. However, individuals successfully completing the test with the back crawl should be encouraged to learn the elementary backstroke.

**4. “The 100 yards must be completed in one swim without stops and must include at least one sharp turn.”**



The total distance is to be covered without rest stops. It is acceptable for someone to float momentarily to work out a kink in a muscle or to tread water to avoid collision with another swimmer, but not to make up for a poorly executed stroke by repeatedly floating, grasping the side, or touching the bottom. The sharp turn demonstrates the important skill of reversing direction in deep water without support. There is no time limit for completion of the test.

**5. “After completing the swim, rest by floating.”**



This critically important component evaluates the swimmers’ ability to support themselves indefinitely in warm water when exhausted or otherwise unable to continue swimming. Treading water will tire the swimmer and is therefore unacceptable. The duration of the float is not significant, except that it should be long enough for the administrator to determine that the swimmer is in fact resting and could continue to do so. A back float with the face out of the water is preferred, but restful facedown floating is acceptable. If the test is

completed except for the floating requirement, the swimmer may be retested on the floating only (after instruction), provided the test administrator is confident that the swimmer can initiate the float in deep water when exhausted.

A precise statement of the **beginner** test is:

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

The entry and turn serve the same purpose as in the swimmer test. The swimming may be done with any surface stroke. Underwater swimming is not allowed. The stop assures that the swimmer can regain the stroke if it is interrupted. The test demonstrates that the beginner 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 on the water.

Anyone who has not completed either the beginner or the swimmer test is classified as a **nonswimmer**. The title is descriptive and nonjudgmental. It may represent those just learning to swim who do not yet have the skills to safely venture beyond shallow water. It may also apply to those who have not yet been tested or who have elected to forego the test and to accept the limitations on activities imposed by the classification.

Both nonswimmer and beginner classifications prevent a Scout from gaining the full benefit of aquatics programming. Unit leaders should promote swimming ability to all members and strive to have everyone in the unit classified as swimmers. Such a goal increases each Scout's safety and confidence, provides more recreational and instructional opportunities, and makes it easy for units to administer their own aquatics programs. Note that the beginner test is a requirement for Boy Scout Second Class rank, whereas the swimmer test is a requirement for First Class rank. A unit's ability to conduct swim classification tests also makes it easier to administer rank advancement.

## TESTING PROCEDURE

### Beginners:

- ✓ Jump into deep water.
- ✓ Swim 25 feet.
- ✓ Turn.
- ✓ Return.
- ✓ Total: **50 feet** with entry and turn

### Swimmers:

- ✓ Jump into deep water.
- ✓ Swim 75 yards with strong forward stroke.
- ✓ Swim 25 yards with restful backstroke.
- ✓ Rest by floating.
- ✓ Total: **100 yards** with entry and turn

All swimming activities, including swim classification tests, follow the elements of Safe Swim Defense. The health history of each individual should be reviewed before testing. No one should be allowed in the water against the recommendations of parents, guardians, or medical providers, such as a physician (MD or DO), nurse practitioner, or physician's assistant. Those who are not allowed to enter the water for whatever reason do not automatically fall into the nonswimmer category. Normally, nonswimmers are encouraged to participate in aquatics activities as an incentive to improve their skills. If the aquatics activities are conducted by the unit, then the adult in charge of the event should know the difference between those classified as nonswimmers on the basis of skill, and those not allowed to swim due to a chronic or temporary physical condition that limits water contact.



Swim tests are done one-on-one, with the examiner and youth as buddies.



Participant is asked to describe test and confirm comfort with each task. If there is any hesitation, check ability first in shallow water.



The unit may be asked to conduct swim classification tests before participation in a multiple-unit event, such as summer camp or jamboree. In those cases, care should be taken to preclude participation in an event as a nonswimmer by someone who should not be in the water. The unit leader should discreetly communicate such situations to the event supervisor. The youth should be privately put on their honor not to circumvent any restrictions.

Situations may arise when special consideration should be given to those with temporary medical conditions. For example, yearly swim classification renewals may be scheduled just before a canoe trip. A medical provider may approve a person with an ear infection or a sutured wound to go on the trip, but caution against submerging the head or the bandage. Since it would be difficult to administer the swim test without getting the ears or the wound wet, the adult leader might classify the Scout temporarily as a nonswimmer. That, however, would prevent the Scout from paddling in a canoe with their buddy. If the unit leader has sufficient evidence that the Scout is indeed a good swimmer—one who has earned the Lifesaving merit badge, for example, or is a member of a swim team—then an extension of the Scout's previous swimmer classification is appropriate until he heals sufficiently to retake the test.

The ideal place to conduct a swim test is a swimming pool with straight stretches of 25 to 50 yards and clear water at least 7 feet deep at the point of entry. Those taking the swimmer test can then be instructed simply to swim either four or two lengths as appropriate. A pool 25 or 50 meters in length is easily adapted by placing a turning mark or line at the yard mark, or by having the person swim the short extra distance. (Recall that the swimmer test is not meant to demonstrate the maximum distance a person can swim.) The course may also be laid out such that the swimmer follows a circular pattern around the pool rather than back and forth, but be sure to incorporate the sharp turn required by both beginner and swimmer tests.

Very small backyard or apartment pools (less than roughly 20 feet in the maximum direction) are fine for a unit swim, but should be avoided as locations for swim classification tests since likely contact with the sides and bottom during all the turns makes it difficult to judge how well the person can swim. Such pools may also be too shallow to meet the criterion for a feetfirst entry into water over the head in depth.

Any natural body of water that satisfies Safe Swim Defense requirements may be used for swim classification tests. Clear water is preferred over murky water; warm water over cold water. A pier that extends from shore to deep water is ideal for the feetfirst entry in the requirements, but a floating platform can also be used.

If a pool open to the public is used for testing, try to schedule a time when the pool is less crowded. Inform pool personnel of what you are doing. A guard may be willing to clear an area briefly if you have only one or two Scouts who need the test.

During swim classification tests, the swimmer and the test administrator form a buddy pair. If there is a large group needing tests, then several testers are useful. Individual testing is required. Unit members should not be aligned at each lane and started at once, as in a swim competition.

Although the tests may be explained to the unit as a whole, the test administrators should briefly review the tests with each participant. Each person should be asked if he or she would like to first try the beginner or the swimmer test. If the person asserts the ability to easily swim 100 yards, then it is not necessary to take the beginner test before the swimmer test. Youth who are hesitant may take the beginner test first and follow it with the swimmer test if that seems appropriate. Those who fall just short of the required distances may be given a few pointers, a rest, and another try. Those who cannot complete the tests should be congratulated



Tests measure comfort in the water but do not require perfect form.



Rest stops are not allowed. However, the course should be close to the side to allow for resting and easy assists if needed.

on how far they got, encouraged to practice, and told that they will be able to retake the test at a later date. If a person in a swimsuit at the swimming area decides not to take either test, they should be encouraged to slip into shallow water and show what they do know. That is, professed nonswimmers should be part of the overall unit activity, not shunted aside in the interest of time. Everyone should be encouraged to try to swim to the best of their ability, but no one should be coerced into the water.

Some participants may be willing to jump into water over their head even though they have never done it. Therefore, every participant should be asked if they have jumped into deep water before. If they have not, first confirm that they can swim in shallow water and then see if they are comfortable in deep water with a slide-in entry at the edge. The test may proceed once the person demonstrates comfort in deep water.

With proper screening, those taking the test should not be at risk of a bad experience. Nevertheless, test administrators should be ready and able to provide immediate assistance if the swimmer does need help, perhaps due to a cramp or exhaustion. Ideally, the course for the beginner test should be alongside a pool deck or pier so that the swimmer is always within a hand's reach or a single stroke from support. The course for the swimmer test should be within reach of a pole. The best way to keep poles ready for use is to lay them along the edge of the pool or pier. A pole is then within easy, unobtrusive access at all times. If the course incorporates a floating dock in a natural body of water, then the feetfirst entry and first few strokes should be within easy reach. If the course then extends beyond the reach of a pole, the swimmers should be either within reach of rescue personnel in a rowboat or canoe or within easy throwing distance of a ring buoy on a line or a throw bag. If a person taking the test succeeds in leveling off after the feetfirst jump, then the most likely need will be to encourage a tired swimmer to come to the side under their own power. In a few cases, a reaching assist may be needed immediately after the feetfirst entry. Test administrators should be skilled in basic rescue techniques to satisfy Safe Swim Defense guidelines for trained safety personnel. If there are others in the water not taking part in the testing, then additional response personnel (lifeguards) are needed. In either case, a lookout is required to monitor all in-water activity.

## SWIM TEST ANXIETY

Both the unit leader and the test administrator should be sensitive to those who may be fearful of the water, uncertain of their ability, worried about peer reaction, otherwise apprehensive, or simply confused about the process and what is expected of them. The unit leader should work with the test administrator to help prepare such Scouts for the swim test, particularly when it is conducted by someone the Scout is unfamiliar with, such as staff at resident camp or at a multiunit, council-organized swim test prior to camp.

The first day of a camp program may be an overwhelming experience for Scouts for many reasons—being away from home and the support systems that home provides, the thrill but uncertainty of what they will experience at camp, and perhaps thoughts of how they will measure up in comparison to their buddies. At summer camps, the swim test is often the first program activity where Scouts both interact significantly with those outside the unit and are asked to perform to a standard. That experience may produce significant anxiety for a small number of youth. However, there is no justification for fears to be realized. The unit leader can help prepare those Scouts both before and at camp so that the swim test is a positive experience. The following items should help leaders recognize and reduce anxiety about the testing process:

- **Early identification.** Scouts who may be anxious around the water or with the swim test process should be identified well before summer camp or other event for which the test is required. Comfort around the water should be included in the leader's discussion with parents for youth who join the unit. The leader should also talk to the Scouts themselves. For Cub Scouts, check to see if swimming is an interest. Be sure to watch for nonverbal cues to see if their body language matches what they say.
- **Year-round swimming programs.** A year-round swimming program provides meaningful and fun activities and allows the leader to observe firsthand the comfort level of Scouts around the water. It also provides an opportunity to see how unit members respond to those reluctant around the water or with lesser swimming ability.



- **Prepare the unit for the test.** The leader should familiarize Scouts with the swim test process. Explain the purpose of the test and how it will be conducted. Explain that each Cub Scout's swimming ability may be different and that the better swimmers are expected to encourage and support those with lesser ability. Remind everyone that opportunities to retake the test will be provided to those who don't make it as far as they would have liked. Encourage any Cub Scout who needs to speak with the leader away from their peers to do so. And remember that no one should be forced—whether by anyone's statement or through peer pressure—to take either test if they choose not to.