

# **Safe Swim Defense Policy & Guidelines**



**Outdoor Service Guides**

Scouting for Everybody!

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The following guidelines are “defenses” for providing a safe swimming experience on any OSG group scout outings. These are a set of guidelines and recommended practices that each local group SHOULD follow.

**The Safe Swim Defense consists of 8 points to be covered in any swimming situation or environment.**

## 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 Safe Swim Defense.

## 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 non-swimmers; 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 non-swimmer 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 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

Every swimming activity must be closely and continuously monitored by a trained rescue team on the alert for and ready to respond during emergencies. Professionally trained lifeguards satisfy this need when provided by a regulated facility or tour operator.

When lifeguards are not provided, the adult supervisor must assign at least two rescue personnel, with additional numbers to maintain a ratio to participants of 1:10. The supervisor must provide instruction and rescue equipment and assign areas of responsibility as outlined in Point #3 on Safe Areas.

The qualified supervisor, the designated response personnel, and the lookout work together as a safety team. An emergency action plan should be formulated and shared with participants as appropriate.

## 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: non-swimmers, beginners, and swimmers. Keep each group in its own area. Non-swimmers have not passed a swimming test.

### Beginner Swim Test

Beginners must pass this 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 the starting place.

### Swimmers Swim Test

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.