The Sweet Sixteen of BSA Safety

Few youth organizations encompass the breadth, volume and diversity of physical activity common to Scouting, and none enjoy a better safety record. **The key to maintaining and improving this exemplary record is the conscientious and trained adult leader who is attentive to safety concerns.**

As an aid in the continuing effort to protect participants in Scout activity, the BSA National Health & Safety Committee and the Council Services Division of the BSA National Council have developed the "Sweet Sixteen" of BSA safety procedures for physical activity. These 16 points, which embody good judgement and common sense, are applicable to all activities.

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1. QUALIFIED SUPERVISION

Every BSA activity should be supervised by a conscientious adult who understands and knowingly accepts responsibility for the well-being and safety of the children and youth in his or her care. The supervisor should be sufficiently trained, experienced and skilled in the activity to be confident of his/her ability to lead and to teach the necessary skills and to respond effectively in the event of an emergency. Field knowledge of all applicable BSA standards and a commitment to implement and follow BSA policy and procedures are essential parts of the supervisor's qualifications.

2. PHYSICAL FITNESS

For youth participants in any potentially strenuous activity, the supervisor should receive a complete health history from a health care professional, parent or guardian. Adult participants and youth involved in higher-risk activity (e.g., scuba) may require professional evaluation in addition to the health history. The supervisor should adjust all supervision, discipline and protection to anticipate potential risks associated with individual health conditions. Neither youth nor adults should participate in activity for which they are unfit. To do so would place both the individual and others at risk.

3. BUDDY SYSTEM

The long history of the "buddy system" in Scouting has shown that it is always best to have at least one other person with you and aware at all times as to your circumstances and what you are doing in any outdoor or strenuous activity.

4. SAFE AREA OR COURSE

A key part of the supervisor's responsibility is to know the area or course for the activity and to determine that it is well-suited and free of hazards.

5. EQUIPMENT SELECTION AND MAINTENANCE

Most activity requires some specialized equipment. The equipment should be selected to suit the participant and the activity and to include appropriate safety and program features. The supervisor should also check equipment to determine that it is in good condition for the activity and is properly maintained while in use.

6. PERSONAL SAFETY EQUIPMENT

The supervisor must ensure that every participant has and uses the appropriate personal safety equipment. For example, activity afloat requires a PFD properly worn by each participant; bikers, horseback riders, and whitewater kayakers need helmets for certain activity; skaters may need protective gear; and all need to be dressed for warmth and utility depending on the circumstances.

7. SAFETY PROCEDURES AND POLICIES

For most activities there are common sense procedures and standards that can greatly reduce the risk. These should be known and appreciated by all participants, and the supervisor must ensure compliance.

8. SKILL LEVEL LIMITS

There is a minimum skill level requirement for every activity, and the supervisor must identify and recognize this minimum skill level and be sure that none are put at risk by attempting activity beyond their ability. A good example of skill levels in Scouting is the venerable "swim test" which defines conditions for safe swimming based on individual ability.

9. WEATHER CHECK

The risk factors in many outdoor activities vary substantially with weather conditions. These variables and the appropriate response should be understood and anticipated.

10. PLANNING

Safe activity follows a plan that has been conscientiously developed by the experienced supervisor or other competent source. Good planning minimizes risks and also anticipates contingencies that may require emergency response or a change of plan.

11. COMMUNICATIONS

The supervisor needs to be able to communicate effectively with participants as needed during the activity. Emergency communications also need to be considered in advance for any foreseeable contingencies.

12. PERMIT AND NOTICES

BSA tour permits, council office registration, government or landowner authorization, and any similar formalities are the supervisor's responsibility when such are required. Appropriate notification should be directed to parents, enforcement authorities, landowners, and others as needed, before and after the activity.

13. FIRST AID RESOURCES

The supervisor should determine what first aid supplies to include among the activity equipment. The level of first aid training and skill appropriate for the activity should also be considered. An extended trek over remote terrain obviously may require more first aid resources and capabilities than an afternoon activity in the local community. Whatever is determined to be needed should be available.

14. APPLICABLE LAWS

BSA safety policies generally parallel or go beyond legal mandates, but the supervisor should confirm and ensure compliance with all applicable regulations or statutes.

15. CPR RESOURCE

Any strenuous activity or remote trek could present a cardiac emergency. Aquatic programs may involve cardiopulmonary emergencies. The BSA strongly recommends that a CPR-trained person (preferably an adult) be part of the leadership for any BSA program. Such a resource should be available for strenuous outdoor activity.

16. DISCIPLINE

No supervisor is effective if he or she cannot control the activity and the individual participants. Youth must respect their leader and follow his or her direction.

In addition to these general rules, safety concerns in certain BSA activities, including most of the aquatics programs, have been specifically addressed in more detailed guidelines. All leaders should review and comply with such guidelines in the respective activities.

These include:

- Swimming (all in-the-water activity) - Safe Swim Defense, No. 34370
- Boating (all activity afloat) - BSA Safety Afloat, No. 34368
- Boardsailing BSA Award Application, No. 20-935
- Winter Sports - Health & Safety Guide, No. 34409, Guide to Safe Scouting, No. 34416
- Cycling - Bike Safe, Health & Safety Guide, No. 34409
- Skating - Health & Safety Guide, No. 34409
- Snorkeling - Safe Swim Defense, Snorkeling Award application, No. 19-176
- Guide to Safe Scouting, No. 34416
- Camp Health & Safety, No. 19-308
- Venturing Reference Guide, No. 25-202
- Watersking - Safe Swim Defense, BSA Safety Afloat, Camp Program and Property Management, No. 20-920, Section IV