

The Sweet 16 of BSA Safety

These 16 safety points, which embody good judgment and common sense, are applicable to all activities:

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 or her ability to lead and 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 activities (e.g., scuba diving) may have to undergo professional evaluation in addition to completing 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 activities 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 of your circumstances and what you are doing in any outdoor or strenuous activity.

4. Safe Area or Course.

A key part of the supervisors' 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 participants and the activity and to include appropriate safety and program features. The supervisor should also check equipment to determine whether it is in good condition for the activity and make sure it is kept properly maintained while in use.

6. Personal Safety Equipment.

The supervisor must assure that every participant has and uses the appropriate personal safety equipment. For example, activity afloat requires that each participant properly wear a personal flotation device (PFD); bikers, horseback riders, and whitewater kayakers need helmets for certain activities; skaters need protective gear; and all need to be dressed for warmth and utility as the circumstances require.

7. Safety Procedures and Policies.

For most activities, common-sense procedures and standards can greatly reduce any risk. These should be known and appreciated by all participants, and the supervisor must assure compliance.

8. Skill Level Limits.

Every activity has a minimum skill level, and the supervisor must identify and recognize this level and be sure that participants are not put at risk by attempting any activity beyond their abilities. A good example of skill levels in Scouting is the swim test, which defines conditions for safe swimming on the basis of individual ability.

9. Weather Check.

The risks of many outdoor activities vary substantially with weather conditions. Potential weather hazards and the appropriate responses 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 an 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. Permits 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 a 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 assure 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. BSA strongly recommends that a person (preferably an adult) trained in cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) be part of the leadership for any BSA program. This person should be available for strenuous outdoor activity.

16. Discipline.

No supervisor is effective if he or she cannot control the activity and individual participants. Youth must respect their leaders and follow their directions.