

# BSA Snorkeling Safety

Snorkeling Safety is the recommended procedure for conducting group snorkeling at a private or public pool, wilderness pond, stream, or wherever the water looks inviting enough to take a dip.

## 1. Qualified Supervision

All snorkeling 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 the youth members in his or her care; who is experienced in the water and is 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 Snorkeling Safety.

## 2. Physical Fitness

All persons must present evidence of fitness for snorkeling 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, a medical evaluation by a physician should be required by the adult leader. Those with physical disabilities can enjoy and benefit from aquatics if the disabilities are known and the necessary precautions are taken.

## 3. Safe Area

Training in the use of snorkeling equipment shall be performed in clear, confined water that is not more than 12 feet deep. Snorkeling may be done in water outside of a confined area under the direction of the qualified supervisor if the participant has met the BSA snorkeling requirements. The local conditions and ability of those engaged in the snorkeling activity should be considered by the qualified supervisor to determine if any special precautions should be taken. Snorkeling shall not be done if boat traffic, waves, current, water temperature, or weather conditions in the area are deemed unsafe by the qualified supervisor. Time in the water should be adjusted based on the water temperature.

## 4. Proper Equipment

- a. The snorkeling equipment shall be properly fitted and in good repair.
- b. The use of snorkeling vests and personal flotation devices is at the discretion of the qualified supervisor based on the local conditions and the ability of the person(s) engaged in the snorkeling activity.
- c. A diver-down flag must be used in accordance with local rules and regulations.
- d. Appropriate lifesaving equipment in good repair is ready and available to the qualified lookout while supervising the snorkeling activity.

## 5. Qualified Lookout

The qualified lookouts are stationed in a location (either afloat or ashore) where it is possible to see and hear all those engaged in the snorkeling activity. The qualified lookout is a strong swimmer with lifeguard skills (i.e., competent swimmers with basic water-rescue skills serve as both lookouts and lifeguards). A minimum of two qualified lookouts are provided with at least one qualified lookout for every eight snorkelers in the water.

## 6. Ability

Beginners and nonswimmers in clear, confined water of the appropriate depth may use masks and fins, separately or together, under close supervision. Training for Snorkeling, BSA is limited to qualified swimmers.

Snorkeling in open water is limited to those classified as swimmers unless the supervisor determines that those in the other ability groups may safely participate while wearing a properly fitted personal flotation device.

A group should not undertake a snorkeling activity in open water unless all participants, including the adult supervisor, have completed basic instruction in the Snorkeling, BSA requirements.

## 7. Buddy System

All participants in snorkeling activities should be paired as buddies and remain close enough that they are constantly aware of their buddy's location and condition. Generally, buddies should take turns making breath-holding dives. That is, one buddy remains at the surface, floating with his mask in the water while breathing through the snorkel, and keeps an eye on the buddy who is down. When the diver surfaces, both buddies should check their position relative to the rest of the group before moving on or letting the other buddy dive.

It is the combined responsibility of the adult supervisor, the lookout, and the lifeguards to know the number of people in the water at all times, to make periodic checks of that number, and to call for buddy checks when it is necessary to confirm that number.

## 8. Discipline

Be sure everyone understands and agrees that snorkeling is allowed only with proper supervision and use of the complete BSA Snorkeling Safety. The applicable rules should be presented and learned prior to the outing, and should be reviewed for all participants at the beginning of the snorkeling activity. Scouts should respect and follow all directions and rules of the adult supervisor. When people know the reason for rules and procedures they are likely to follow them. Be strict and fair, showing no favoritism.

## Snorkeling, BSA Award Requirements

The Snorkeling, BSA requirements have been developed to introduce Scout-age children to the special skills, equipment, and safety precautions associated with snorkeling; to encourage the development of aquatics skills that promote fitness and recreation; and to provide a solid skills and knowledge foundation for those who later will participate in more advanced underwater activity.

1. Before doing other requirements, successfully complete the BSA swimmer test: Jump feetfirst 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 must include at least one sharp turn. After completing the swim, rest by floating.
2. Discuss the importance of the buddy system in all aquatics activities, and explain specifically how the buddy is to be used at all times in snorkeling, beginning with the fitting and adjusting of equipment.
3. Define snorkel swimming and diving; explain the function, fit, and selection of mask, fins, and snorkel. Explain circumstances in which an inflatable flotation vest should be worn for snorkeling.
4. In confined, shallow (waist-deep) water, demonstrate the following:
  - a. Defogging a mask; equalizing pressure in your mask, ears, and sinus cavities.
  - b. Using a snorkel, including the clearing of water at the surface and resuming free breathing without removing the snorkel from your mouth.
5. In confined, shallow (waist-deep) water, demonstrate the use of swim fins: (Note: Requirements should first be completed using only fins, and then repeated while wearing a mask and snorkel.)
  - a. Fit and adjust fins to feet.
  - b. Swim at the surface (10 yards) and underwater (three yards) using the flutter kick.
  - c. Control direction without using your hands while swimming with fins at the surface and underwater.
6. In confined, deep water (maximum 12 feet), demonstrate:
  - a. Proper techniques for entering and exiting the water while wearing snorkeling equipment.
  - b. Headfirst and feetfirst surface dives, including proper body position for safe ascent and descent.
7. Show knowledge of snorkeling signals:
  - a. Demonstrate divers' signs and signals, both audible and visual, for use at the surface and underwater.
  - b. Set out a diver down flag and explain its function.
8. In clear, confined water 8-12 feet deep that has a firm bottom, while swimming with a buddy, use mask, fins, and snorkel to locate and recover an object from the bottom.
9. Demonstrate basic survival skills:
  - a. Float facedown for five minutes while breathing through a snorkel with a minimum of movement.
  - b. Demonstrate survival floating for five minutes without use of a snorkel.
  - c. Using fins, show how to tow an exhausted or unconscious buddy to safety.
10. Review and explain the eight points of Safe Swim Defense and BSA Snorkeling Safety. Explain training, preparations, and precautions required for snorkeling in open water. Explain environmental factors that affect snorkeling and discuss special precautions needed for oceans, streams, and lakes.
11. Explain pressure, buoyancy, and submerged optics and acoustics related to snorkel swimming and diving.
12. Discuss the effects of submersion on the body and how to handle potentially dangerous situations:
  - a. What is hyperventilation and how is it avoided?
  - b. What are the symptoms and consequences of hypothermia?
  - c. Why is CPR training recommended for those participating in swimming and snorkeling activities?

## Information for Counselors

### Counselors

Any individual trained and assigned by a trained Aquatics Instructor, BSA may serve as a counselor for the Snorkeling, BSA award. A person recognized and certified as a snorkeling instructor by the Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI), National Association of Underwater Instructors (NAUI), American Red Cross, or Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) also qualifies as a Snorkeling, BSA counselor.

## **Recognition**

The individual completing the official requirements will receive a recognition card and swimsuit patch. The completed award application should be submitted to the local council service center by the counselor or unit leader.

## **Programming**

Instruction must be conducted in clear, confined water with a maximum 12-foot depth. A swimming pool is recommended. Snorkeling, BSA is ideally suited to winter programs using indoor pools. Three 45-minute sessions are recommended for instruction, practice, and completion of requirements.

## **References**

The Swimming merit badge pamphlet is an excellent reference for Snorkeling, BSA. A number of useful publications are also available from NAUI, PADI, the Council for National Cooperation in Aquatics, and others. Such publications are available through local dive shops.

## **Requirements**

All requirements must be completed as stated on the application form. The counselor may not omit, vary, or add requirements. The requirements are presented in the order in which they should be taught to the Scout.

The second requirement considers the time-honored and time-proven principle of the buddy system. Snorkelers and divers must use the buddy system at all times. Before beginning the activity, each person helps his buddy fit and check the equipment. The principle of the buddy system is that two people can enjoy an aquatic activity together while each provides the critical margin of safety for the other. Each buddy must always be aware of the condition and circumstances of his buddy, and must always be prepared to give immediate assistance if needed.

Last Updated: 10 APR 2002