

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 a Scout activity, the BSA National Health and 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.

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 policies 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 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 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 life jacket properly worn by each participant; bikers, horseback riders, and whitewater kayakers need helmets for certain activities; 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 no participants are put at risk by attempting an 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. PLANS AND NOTICES

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 run 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. Aquatics 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.

Prohibited Activities

The Scouting program incorporates common activities such as swimming, climbing, cycling, archery, and snowboarding that, depending on the details, may include both real and perceived risks to participants. Those risks are managed by BSA policies, procedures, and guidelines that set limits and incorporate specific features such as safety equipment or qualified supervision. Guidance is provided by, but not limited to, the [Age-Appropriate Guidelines for Scouting Activities](#), [Safe Swim Defense](#), [Safety Afloat](#), [Climb on Safely](#), [Belay On](#), and the BSA [shooting sports](#) program. Activity components outside of BSA program guidelines are prohibited as follows:

1. Nonadherence to the [Scouter Code of Conduct](#)
2. Any activity that is not aligned with the current [Age-Appropriate Guidelines for Scouting Activities](#)
3. Aquatic activities that fail to comply with [Safe Swim Defense](#) and/or [Safety Afloat](#)
4. Activities related to COPE or climbing that fail to comply with [Climb on Safely](#) and/or [Belay On](#). This includes activities on courses that are not constructed to comply with standards set by the [Association for Challenge Course Technology \(ACCT\)](#) and/or are not inspected annually for integrity.
5. Flying—use of hang gliders, ultralights, experimental aircraft, or nontethered hot-air balloons, or flying in an aircraft as part of a search-and-rescue mission (*exceptions: transportation to Scouting events by commercial airlines; flying or [tethered hot-air balloon flights](#) following completion of the [Flying Plan Checklist](#)*)
6. Motorized vehicles used as program or activities—including all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), off-road vehicles, motorized personal watercraft (PWC), and motorized speed events (*exceptions: council-approved ATV and PWC programs that comply with [National Camp Accreditation Program \[NCAP\] standards](#); go-karting conducted at a commercial facility that provides equipment and supervision of cart operation; youth completing the Motorboating merit badge*)

7. Shooting or throwing sports outside of BSA program literature and guidance.

Examples of prohibited activities (with exceptions in italics) include:

- Anvil shooting, flintlocks, exploding targets, and devices regulated by the National Firearms Act
- Blow guns, boomerangs, and ballistae
- Homemade firearms and air cannons, potato cannons, and tennis ball cannons
- Throwing of shovels, torpedoes, spikes, or stars
- Inappropriate ammunition such as pumpkins, hard slingshot ammo, and tracers
- Cannons (*exception: council camp ceremonies, which must follow the [BSA's guidelines for cannon use](#)*)
- Crossbows (*except at the Summit Bechtel Family National Scout Reserve*)
- Reloading ammunition, and using reloaded ammunition (*except at Philmont Scout Ranch*)
- Spears, including atlatls, pole spears, and spear guns (*except at Philmont Scout Ranch*)

8. Open or concealed carry or use of firearms at any Scouting activity, *with the following exceptions:*

- *Law enforcement officers who are required to carry firearms within their jurisdiction*
- *Use as part of an official [BSA shooting sports program](#)*
- *Appropriate hunting in Venturing*

Some activities considered by youth and leaders are not compatible with the Scouting program. Some have unacceptable risks that have been confirmed by serious or even fatal consequences. Others are not compatible with the Scout Oath and Scout Law. The activities listed below are strictly prohibited as part of any Scouting program.

The list is not comprehensive, but it serves as a definitive list of prohibited activities and it offers a broad sense of what is not allowed as a Scouting activity. Scouting leaders should refer to this list when deciding on activities, and they should reflect vigorously on how any activity outside our published program would resonate with the Scout Oath and Scout Law.

The Boy Scouts of America prohibits the following activities (with exceptions in italics):

9. Extreme or action sports and associated activities that involve an unusually high degree of risk and often involve speed, height, a high level of exertion, and specialized gear or equipment. These activities include but are not limited to
 - Parkour
 - Cliff diving or jumping
 - Whitewater paddling on rapids rated Class V or above
 - Tree climbing
 - Free or solo climbing
 - Aerobatics while snowboarding, skiing, wakeboarding, or mountain biking
 - Parachuting, BASE jumping, or wingsuiting
 - Parasailing or any activity in which a person is carried aloft by a parachute, parasail, kite, flying tube, or other device
 - Participation in amateur or professional rodeo events, council or district sponsorship of rodeos, and use of mechanized bulls or similar devices (*This restriction does not apply to bicycle safety rodeos.*)
 - Jumping with bungee-cord devices (sometimes called shockcord jumping)
 - Bubbleball, Knockerball®, zorbing, Battle Balls™, bubble soccer, bubble football, and similar orb activities where participants collide or roll around on land or water
 - Flyboarding/jet-boarding
 - Highlining
 - XPOGO
 - Trampolines and trampoline parks (*exception: commercial facilities that meet or exceed current ASTM Standard F2970-15*)

10. Use of accelerants, chemicals, or pyrotechnics to start fires or in ceremonies
(*exception: solid fire starters designed and manufactured for this purpose*)
11. Using homemade or modified equipment that fails to comply with the BSA [Chemical Fuels and Equipment policy](#)
12. Burning any solid, liquid, gel, or gas fuel in a tent—including tents or teepees that feature or support stoves or fires
13. Activities where participants strike at each other, including martial arts, boxing, combat games, gladiator games, and reenactment activities such as live action role-playing games (LARP) and Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA) activities
(*exception: tai chi*)
14. Activities where participants shoot or throw objects at each other, such as rock-throwing, paintball, laser or archery tag, sock fights, or dodgeball
15. Service projects that fail to comply with federal, state, or local laws regarding the safety of youth (For more information, visit www.youthrules.gov and www.dol.gov/general/topic/youthlabor/hazardousjobs/.)
16. Use of power tools by youth, including chainsaws, log splitters, wood chippers, and power saws or mills (*Youth may use age-appropriate tools following tool manufacturers' guidelines.*)
17. Exploration of abandoned mines
18. Fireworks, including selling of fireworks (*exception: fireworks displays by a certified or licensed fireworks control expert*)
19. Water chugging, and eating or drinking competitions such as “chubby bunny” or hot dog eating contests
20. Hunting (*Venturing crews may conduct hunting trips, and councils may host special adult hunting expeditions provided that all participants have obtained necessary permits and/or licenses from state or federal agencies and have completed a hunter safety education course.*)
21. Intramural, interscholastic, or club sport competitions or activities

Please review [Prohibited Activities FAQ's](#) if you have any questions.

You can use [this Safety Moment on prohibited activities](#) to help explain the policies at your meetings.

Approved by the National Leadership Council May 30, 2019

BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA SCOUTER CODE OF CONDUCT

On my honor I promise to do my best to comply with this Boy Scouts of America Scouter Code of Conduct while serving in my capacity as an adult leader:

1. I have or will complete my registration with the Boy Scouts of America, answering all questions truthfully and honestly.
2. I will do my best to live up to the Scout Oath and Scout Law, obey all laws, and hold others in Scouting accountable to those standards. I will exercise sound judgment and demonstrate good leadership and use the Scouting program for its intended purpose consistent with the mission of the Boy Scouts of America.
3. I will make the protection of youth a personal priority. I will complete and remain current with Youth Protection training requirements. I will be familiar with and follow:
 - BSA Youth Protection policies and guidelines, including mandatory reporting: www.scouting.org/training/youth-protection
 - The Guide to Safe Scouting: www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss
 - The Sweet Sixteen of BSA Safety: www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/gss/sweet16
4. When transporting Scouts, I will obey all laws, comply with Youth Protection guidelines, and follow safe driving practices.
5. I will respect and abide by the Rules and Regulations of the Boy Scouts of America, BSA policies, and BSA-provided training, including but not limited to those relating to:
 - Unauthorized fundraising activities
 - Advocacy on social and political issues, including prohibited use of the BSA uniform and brand
 - Bullying, hazing, harassment, and unlawful discrimination of any kind
6. I will not discuss or engage in any form of sexual conduct while engaged in Scouting activities. I will refer Scouts with questions regarding these topics to talk to their parents or spiritual advisor.
7. I confirm that I have fully disclosed and will disclose in the future any of the following:
 - Any criminal suspicion, charges, or convictions of a crime or offense involving abuse, violence, sexual misconduct, or any misconduct involving minors or juveniles
 - Any investigation or court order involving domestic violence, child abuse, or similar matter
 - Any criminal charges or convictions for offenses involving controlled substances, driving while intoxicated, firearms, or dangerous weapons
8. I will not possess, distribute, transport, consume, or use any of the following items prohibited by law or in violation of any Scouting rules, regulations, and policies:
 - Alcoholic beverages or controlled substances, including marijuana
 - Concealed or unconcealed firearms, fireworks, or explosives
 - Pornography or materials containing words or images inconsistent with Scouting values
9. If I am taking prescription medications with the potential of impairing my functioning or judgment, I will not engage in activities that would put Scouts at risk, including driving or operating equipment.
10. I will take steps to prevent or report any violation of this code of conduct by others in connection with Scouting activities.