

## WATER SAFETY – Level 1

Swimming, boating, water skiing and fishing are among the most popular forms of recreation. Millions of Americans enjoy different water activities each year. In order to make any experience with the water fun, it must be made a safe experience. Every year, thousands of people drown in the United States. Most of these accidents would not occur if basic rules of water safety were followed. This chapter will give guidelines to make your water activities safe and enjoyable.

### SWIMMING SAFETY

The most popular water activity is swimming. Whether swimming in a public pool supervised by a lifeguard, taking a dip in a river on a canoe trip, or swimming in a lake on a camping trip, safety measures must be followed. As boys and adults, with your family or Pioneer Train, you must plan for safe swimming experiences. Your safety plan before swimming is as important as following safety rules while swimming.

#### Swimming Lessons

One important step before swimming is skills instruction. City recreation departments, the YMCA, the American Red Cross and other organizations offer swimming lessons. Through supervised swimming instruction you will learn the skills needed to be a confident, safe swimmer. Although basic swimming strokes and skills are not included in this chapter, everyone should learn how to swim before entering the water.

#### A Safe Swimming Environment

Another step before swimming is planning when to swim. In an indoor pool, swimming can be done year round. When swimming outdoors in pools, lakes and rivers, water temperature and weather must be considered. Water temperature may be dangerously cold at certain times of the year; your body may lose the ability to move properly in cold water. Beware of electrical storms when swimming outside. Swimming in the dark can be dangerous when hazards cannot be seen or swimmers are unable to see each other. When your body begins to feel tired while swimming, take a break out of the water to regain your energy. Never swim to the point of exhaustion.

When planning where to swim, choose a safe swimming area. Whenever possible, swim where a lifeguard is on duty. When swimming in unfamiliar water, check the depth of the water and locate all obstacles. Enter the water slowly to search for hazards that may make the swimming area unsafe. "Look before you leap"; do not jump or dive in without knowing your swimming area.

Here are some hazards to locate and avoid:

- Shallow water (especially in diving areas)
- Litter such as glass, tires, metal objects, etc.
- Large rocks, stumps and logs
- Decks, piers and rafts and their underwater structures
- Weeds and other plant growth

- Sudden drop-offs and deep holes
- Strong currents or wave action
- Types of marine life that cause injury

### "Do's and Don'ts" for Safe Swimming

Practice rules of common sense in the swimming environment. Establish guidelines for all swimmers to follow. Lifeguards and/or adult supervisors must be present to enforce the safety guidelines. Following the "do's and don't's" in the swimming area can mean the difference between fun and injury or death.

- Never swim alone
- Stay out of the water and away from the waterfront area without adult supervision
- Obey all rules set up for each particular swimming area
- Stay within designated boundaries
- Don't rely on toy flotation devices as life preservers (air mattresses, inner tubes, surfboards, beach balls, etc.)
- Call for help only when you need it; never fake drowning
- Non-swimmers and weak swimmers should wear life preservers
- Keep basic rescue and lifesaving devices nearby such as an extend pole, ring buoy with rope, first aid kit, etc.
- Do not allow running, pushing, dunking, etc. In the water on piers and rafts and on the shoreline
- Keep swimming, diving, fishing and boating areas separate from one another

### A Safe Swimming Plan

To summarize the many safety guidelines, here are 6 steps to a safe swimming plan.

1. An adult must supervise a swim. He or she must be trained in water safety and must be able to administer artificial respiration (a certified lifeguard is strongly recommended). For larger groups, more than one supervisor is needed.
2. Determine the swimming abilities of all the boys. Be aware of any specific health problems. Administer swimming tests to check the level of the swimmers.
3. Use the "buddy system". Before entering the water, assign each swimmer a partner with the same swimming ability. Have periodic buddy checks (about every 15 minutes). At the buddy signal, partners grasp hands and raise them overhead so that the supervisor can take a count.
4. Set up a "check in/check out" system. Each buddy pair checks in to the swimming area together before swimming and checks out together afterward. An "in/out" board with nametag identification can be used. Swimmers hang their tags on hooks on the board to show when they are in the swimming area and when they are out.
5. Clear the swimming area of all hazards and dangers. Determine water depth so boundaries can be set for swimmers of different abilities.
6. Establish safety rules for the swimming area. Make sure all swimmers understand and follow the water safety rules. Keep rescue and first aid equipment nearby.

## Rescue Methods for the Non-Lifeguard

Only a certified lifeguard should attempt a swimming-type rescue. Physical contact with a victim in the water can be dangerous to both rescuer and victim. But even a non-swimmer can help a swimmer in trouble. Here are three ways that a non-lifeguard can attempt a rescue. With any attempt, do not put your own life in danger by allowing the victim to pull you into the water.

**REACHING:** If a swimmer in trouble is close by a pier, deck, raft or shoreline, an object can be extended. The rescuer reaches out to the victim using an item of clothing, a belt, pole, branch, paddle, oar, etc., to pull the victim to safety. The rescuer should anchor his body by lying down or keeping low to avoid being pulled into the water.

**THROWING:** When a swimmer in trouble is beyond reach, a rescue item can be thrown. The rescuer throws a buoyant object to the swimmer for him to grab onto for support. If available, use a ring buoy attached to a rope so that the victim can be pulled in. Even if a rope is not attached, throw a flotation device for the victim to cling to until he can be reached. A life preserver, a floating cushion, an inner tube, an empty plastic jug, a wooden board, etc., can be used for rescue.

**WATERCRAFT RESCUE:** When a swimmer in trouble is beyond throwing distance, a small watercraft such as a canoe or rowboat can be used. The rescuer must know how to use the watercraft before attempting a rescue. Always approach the swimmer with caution to avoid tipping the boat; never steer the boat into the victim or allow him to grab onto the side. A throwing or reaching device in the boat can be extended to the victim for his rescue. If the swimmer is unconscious or needs to be brought aboard, the boat must keep balanced to avoid tipping. Using extreme caution, bring the swimmer aboard over the stern of the boat.

If a safe swimming plan is followed, most accidents can be avoided. Everyone will enjoy a safe swim!