



Lifesaving

Scouts BSA · Aquatics · Eagle-required

Name

Started

Completed

Lifesaving teaches you how to help someone in trouble in the water while keeping yourself safe. You'll learn to reach, throw, and only then go, and you'll practice real rescue skills. It's challenging, but it builds strong swimming and calm thinking.

Requirements

Every official requirement, in plain language. Check the official wording when you sign off (scouting.org/merit-badges/lifesaving/). Tips and examples are ideas, not extra requirements.

- ☐ **1** Before starting requirements 3–15, go over the Safe Swim Defense principles with your counselor

Tip: Learn each point of Safe Swim Defense and be able to explain why it matters at any swim outing.

Example: Walk through Safe Swim Defense at a troop lake swim: qualified supervision, a health check, a marked swim area by ability, lookouts, buddy pairs with regular buddy checks, and clear rules everyone hears before getting in.

- 2** Before requirements 3–15

Tips for this section: Build up your distance a little each week. Mixing strokes helps you stay strong for longer swims.

- ☐ **2a** Earn the Swimming merit badge

- ☐ **2b** Swim 400 yards without stopping, doing at least 50 continuous yards each of sidestroke, breaststroke, elementary backstroke, and front crawl, strongly, with good form and rhythmic breathing

3 Drowning and rescue basics

Tips for this section: Learn the signs that someone is struggling, since drowning is often quiet. Remember the order: reach, throw, row, and only then go.

Example for this section: Describe what a drowning person looks like: upright in the water, head back, mouth at the surface, arms pressing down, unable to call for help. Contrast that with a distressed swimmer who can still wave and shout.

- ☐ **3a** Explain common drowning situations, such as unfenced home pools, drop-offs, river and rip currents, and medical emergencies, and how to avoid them

- ☐ **3b** Explain how to recognize someone in the water who needs help

- ☐ **3c** Explain the order in which water rescue methods are tried

- ☐ **3d** Explain how rescue methods differ depending on where you are and how the person in trouble is doing

- ☐ **3e** Explain when you should not attempt an in-water rescue

- ☐ **4** Demonstrate reaching rescues with different items, such as your arm or leg, a towel, a shirt, a paddle, or a pole

Tip: Practice reaching with a pole, towel, or your arm while staying low and balanced on the deck.

Example: From a pool deck, lie flat or stay low, brace yourself, and extend a pole, towel, or your arm to a buddy acting as a victim. Talk to them the whole time: "Grab the pole. I've got you."

- ☐ **5** Demonstrate throwing rescues with items like a throw line, a ring buoy, a rescue bag, and a free-floating support. Land at least one so a practice victim 25 feet from shore can grab it

Tip: Throw a ring buoy or throw bag at a target over and over until your aim is reliable.

Example: Throw a ring buoy or throw bag at a target several body lengths away, aiming past and beyond the person so the line lands across their reach. Coil it and throw again until you can hit the mark several times in a row.

- ☐ **6** With your counselor's OK, watch a rowing rescue (in person or on video) done from a canoe, kayak, rowboat, or stand-up paddleboard, and discuss with your counselor how well and efficiently it was done

Tip: Watch closely how the rescuer approaches and helps the person aboard without tipping the boat.

- ☐ **7** List items you could use as aids in a go rescue and explain why aids that float are preferred

Tip: Make a list of rescue aids and think about why having something that floats between you and the person keeps you safer.

Example: List go-rescue aids like a rescue tube, ring buoy, kickboard, or even a picnic cooler. Explain that something that floats keeps space between you and a panicked person, so they grab the aid instead of you.

8 Rescues with buoyant aids (conscious subject)

Tips for this section: Practice with a buddy acting as the subject, and always keep the buoyant aid between you.

- ☐ **8a** Rescue a conscious practice subject 30 feet out in deep water with one of two buoyant aids from your counselor: enter properly, swim a strong approach, talk to them to check their condition and give directions and encouragement, hand over the aid, let go, and stay a safe distance away as they reach safety

- ☐ **8b** In a separate rescue of a conscious subject 30 feet out in deep water, use the other buoyant aid: enter properly, swim a strong approach, talk to them to check their condition and give directions and encouragement, then tow them to safety with the aid

- ☐ **9** Discuss with your counselor when to take off heavy clothes before a swimming rescue. Then get out of your street clothes within 20 seconds, enter, approach a conscious subject 30 feet out in deep water, talk to them, and tow them to safety using something that doesn't float, like a towel or shirt

Tip: Practice in the pool with an instructor present, removing shoes and heavy clothes calmly and quickly.

Example: Practice on the deck of a guarded pool with your instructor: get out of your shoes and outer clothes in 20 seconds or less, enter, and tow a buddy to safety holding a towel or shirt. Talk about when it's worth the time to undress and when you should go in as you are.

- ☐ **10** Discuss with your counselor why you should avoid contact with an active (struggling) subject, and demonstrate lead-and-wait techniques

Tip: Practice staying at a safe distance and talking to the subject while you wait for the right moment.

Example: With a buddy playing a struggling swimmer, swim out with a rescue tube and stop just out of reach. Talk calmly and push the tube to them. If they lunge for you, back away and wait until they're holding the tube and calmer before you tow them in.

11 Rescues without equipment (conscious subject)

Tips for this section: Practice with your instructor and a trusted buddy, and go slowly until each move feels natural.

- ☐ **11a** Starting in the water near a conscious subject 30 feet out, talk to them to check how they are and coach them, then do an armpit tow of a calm, responsive, tired swimmer resting on their back

- ☐ **11b** Starting in the water near a conscious subject 30 feet out, talk to them to check how they are and coach them, then do a cross-chest carry of an exhausted, responsive swimmer treading water

- ☐ **12** In deep water, show how to break free when a victim grabs your wrist, then do the same for front and rear holds around your head and shoulders

Tip: Learn escapes in shallow water first with your instructor, then move to deep water when you're ready.

13 Rescuing an unconscious subject

Tips for this section: Practice the approach and tow with a buddy, keeping the subject's face clear of the water.

- ☐ **13a** Equipment assist with a buoyant aid: for an unconscious subject 30 feet out, enter properly, approach strongly, talk and splash before touching, then quickly get them out (with help if needed) and ready for CPR

- ☐ **13b** Front approach and wrist tow: for an unconscious subject 30 feet out, enter properly, approach strongly, talk and splash before touching, then quickly get them out (with help if needed) and ready for CPR

- ☐ **13c** Rear approach and armpit tow: for an unconscious subject 30 feet out, enter properly, approach strongly, talk and splash before touching, then quickly get them out (with help if needed) and ready for CPR

- ☐ **14** Discuss with your counselor what to do if a victim sinks out of sight before a rescuer gets there, and complete 14a and 14b

Tip: Practice surface dives in a supervised pool, coming up slowly and checking your surroundings.

- ☐ **14a** Using a feetfirst surface dive, bring up a 10-pound weight from 8 to 10 feet of water

- ☐ **14b** Do it again with a headfirst surface dive

15 Spinal injury management (shown to your counselor)

Tips for this section: Work as a team with your instructor guiding you, moving slowly and keeping the subject's head and neck still.

- ☐ **15a** Discuss what causes spinal injuries and their signs and symptoms

- ☐ **15b** Support a faceup subject in calm water you can stand in

- ☐ **15c** In water you can stand in, roll a subject from facedown to faceup while keeping them supported

16 Resuscitation

Tips for this section: Take a CPR course from a certified instructor so you can practice on manikins.

- ☐ **16a** Describe how to tell when someone needs rescue breathing and CPR

- ☐ **16b** Show your CPR skills, rescue breathing included, on a mannequin, guided by a current CPR/AED instructor trained through a nationally certified provider

- ☐ **17** Discuss with your counselor the causes, prevention, and treatment of other swimming and boating injuries and illnesses, including hypothermia, dehydration, heat illnesses, muscle cramps, sunburn, stings, and hyperventilation

Tip: Talk through common injuries like cramps, hypothermia, and cuts, and how you'd care for each.

Example: Pick injuries you could see around water, like a cramp, a cut from a rock, hypothermia after a cold swim, or a sunburn, and explain how you'd recognize and treat each one until help arrives.