

be water safe 

national challenge 2026

meerkats

 guidelines



"Drowning is not always obvious. It can happen silently and quickly, often in the time it takes to check a text or apply sunscreen."

— National Sea Rescue Institute (NSRI) —



be prepared

SCOUTS South Africa has adopted '**Be Water Safe**' as the **National Challenge for 2026!**

The National Sea Rescue Institute (NSRI) reports that South Africa experiences approximately **1,484 drownings every year**. This makes water safety one of the most important life skills for all young people.

The aim of this year's challenge is to raise awareness amongst the Meerkats and Scouters about being cautious when going to the beach and playing in pools, rivers and dams. This initiative provides Meerkats and Scouters with the necessary skills to stay out of danger and to help a friend who might be in difficulty in the water. It will make sure they know what to do in an emergency, who to call for help. This initiative is **not a "learn to swim" programme** and should be taught safely in a Scout Hall or community hall and not near water where one leader cannot supervise children that may venture into the water.

Everyday Scouts around the world contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the Scouts for SDGs initiative. The SDGs are a call to action to end inequality and poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that everyone has access to health, justice, and prosperity. This initiative is the world's largest coordinated youth programme that ensures and enables young people to take local actions that contribute to solving global challenges. (<https://sdgs.scout.org/>).

Embracing '**Be Water Safe**' drives the SDGs in several ways. The SDGs the programme addresses include:

- **SDG 3: Good Health and Well Being: *Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.*** Promoting safety, preventing injuries, and reducing drowning deaths.
- **SDG 4: Quality Education: *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.***
 - Building lifelong skills and knowledge in water safety.
- **SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.***
 - Preparing young people to respond to floods and water-related disasters safely.



This '**Be Water Safe**' challenge calls on every Meerkat to act through **Awareness, Preparedness, and Service & Responsibility**.

The **Be Water Safe National Challenge** is supported by the **Jaryd Payne Foundation**. The water safety skills that Meerkats gain through the Challenge are in memory of Jaryd and honour his love of the outdoors and playing football with friends.

SCOUTS South Africa also thanks the **NSRI** for their continued support in making this challenge possible.



the challenge:

To complete the **Be Water Safe national challenge**, Meerkats must complete the following:

Where a Programme-on-a-Plate (POP) has been provided, you are welcome to include your own ideas for games and activities that achieve the same learning and thematic outcomes, as the programme provided.

task 1: awareness

Complete the [Water Safety Superheroes programme-on-a-plate](#).

Complete **ONE** of the following:

1. Learn the essential safety rules to follow when you are in or around water.
2. Talk about what to pack when going to the pool, river, dam or beach.

task 2: preparedness

Complete **TWO** of the following:

1. As a Den, invite a swimming instructor to give a talk about the safety rules of swimming.
2. Learn how to help someone safely by putting them in the recover position when needed.
3. Complete one of the following Interest badges: [Little Frog Blue](#), [Little Frog Silver](#), or [Little Frog Gold](#).

task 3: service

Complete **TWO** of the following:

1. Create a yell or song to remember the emergency telephone numbers – 112 (cell phone) and 10177 (landline) and share this with your family and friends. *These can be fun educational videos too.*
2. Learn to swim to stay safe around water.
3. Encourage safe water habits at home or community pools by having Meerkats share simple water safety rules with parents, siblings and other children.

please note:

Den Scouters, water safety is an important life skill for children. We encourage you to come up with new ideas and activities under this theme, which can be used while you complete the challenge. Please document your ideas and share with other Den Scouters at your District Scouters Councils.

We will also ask you to share these ideas on the National Challenge Submission Form, so that your ideas become part of a resource library for Den Scouters to use when water safety advancements are run in following years.

registration

Den Scouters must register their Den for participation in the [National Challenge 2026 - Be Water Safe](#) by **15 February 2026** using the official online registration form by clicking on the [link HERE](#). (Ctrl + Click to follow link). It's simple quick and will only take two minutes!

deadline

- All 'Be Water Safe' Challenge activities must be completed by **30 November 2026**.
- All entries are to be submitted online, or to your Regional Team Coordinator: Meerkat Programme, by **Tuesday, 15th December 2026**.

national challenge 2026 badge

- Meerkats who complete all [Be Water Safe](#) Challenge activities will receive the [National Challenge 2026 – Be Water Safe Badge](#).
- Dens will receive a [National Challenge 2026 – Be Water Safe Certificate](#).

safe from harm



While completing the tasks for the [National Challenge 2026 – Be Water Safe](#), Meerkats must not be placed in hazardous or dangerous situations under any circumstances. All activities must comply with the SCOUTS South Africa Safe from Harm Framework and be supervised by responsible adults. Participation should provide meaningful learning or service experiences while ensuring the safety, well-being, and enjoyment of all Meerkats.

activity permits

All activities require the correct [SCOUTS South Africa Activity Permits](#) and [parental consent forms](#). Please ensure that all necessary permissions, parent/guardian consent forms, and SCOUTS South Africa Activity Permits are obtained before undertaking any Community Service Projects with Meerkats, Cubs or Scouts.

share your impact – be a water safety champion

You can also help raise public awareness by taking advantage of the PR opportunities offered by the [National Challenge 2026](#). With parental consent, share your [Be Water Safe](#) activities and photos on social media to inspire others. Please also share your stories with pr@scouts.org.za, so we can share some of them on our SCOUTS SA social media channels!

Suggested hashtags: #BeWaterSafe #NationalChallenge2026 #scoutssouthafrica #scoutssa #scouts #Skills4Life #YouthEmpowerment #Scouts4SDGs #jarydpayne



awareness – water safety superheroes programme-on-a-plate

Theme:	Water Safety Superheroes
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Time	Min	Activity	Equipment	Scouter
	05	Opening circle:	Totem	
<i>Water can be fun, so let's learn how to be safe when we are near it.</i>				
05	05	<p>STEAM RELEASE: Buddy up</p> <p>Tell the Meerkats that they are 'swimmers'. Explain that swimmers must always have an adult with them. The Meerkats run around the playing area pretending to swim. When the Den Scouter calls 'buddy up', each Meerkat quickly finds a partner and stands side-by-side. If someone is left without a buddy, the Meerkats helps them find one and everyone stays together. We never swim alone.</p>	None	
<i>Remember, when enjoying time in the sun to slip, slop, slap and seek!</i>				
10	10	<p>STORY: Slip, slop, slap and seek</p> <p>If possible, have a T-shirt, sunscreen, and a hat available to help demonstrate the story.</p>	Story	
<i>To help us remember how to stay safe near water, we're going to play a fun game together.</i>				
20	10	<p>REVISION GAME: Simon says...</p> <p>Explain that Meerkats should only do the action if you say "Simon says..." first.</p> <p>Examples of actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Simon says</i> put on your life jacket. • <i>Simon says</i> stay close to an adult near water. • <i>Simon says</i> walk near the pool. • <i>Simon says</i> raise your hand to ask for help. • <i>Simon says</i> look for safety signs. • <i>Simon says</i> wear a hat and sunscreen at the beach. <p>Tricky (don't do) actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jump into water without an adult. • Run near the pool. • Swim alone. • Swim after eating. • Swim when there is lightning. • Swim when you are tired or cold. <p>After each action, briefly talk about why it is safe or unsafe to help reinforce learning.</p>	None	



Time	Min	Activity	Equipment	Scouter
<i>Let's use our creativity to make Meerkats playing safely on floating tubes, just like we've been learning.</i>				
30	10	HANDCRAFT: Floating on water See instructions below.		
<i>To help us remember where it is safe to swim, we're going to play a game about swimming between the flags.</i>				
40	05	WIDE GAME: Lifesaving at the beach <i>(Acknowledgement: kingswim.com.au)</i> This game reinforces the understanding of swimming between the flags at the beach. Two leaders will hold the lifesaving flags. They will move to a separate location to represent where it is safe to swim. Ask the Meerkats to move together to the place where it is safe to swim. Once everybody is between the flags, ask the flag holders to change their location. Again, Meerkats must move together and fit in between the flags. Repeat 2-3 times.	Two flags on poles/sticks.	
<i>Let's use our voices and bodies to sing a song about the waves in the sea going up and down.</i>				
45	05	SINGING: The waves in the ocean (Tune: Wheels of the bus)	See words below	
<i>Let's see if you can tell the difference between safe and unsafe water choices.</i>				
50	05	ACTIVE GAME: Safe or unsafe Name the two side of the playing area 'safe' and 'unsafe'. Ask the Meerkats a water safety question, e.g. swimming with an adult watching – safe or unsafe. If they think this is safe, they will run to the safe side of the playing area. If they think this is unsafe, they will run to the unsafe side. After each one, briefly explain why it is safe or unsafe. Other examples: Safe questions: Holding hand near a pool Listening to lifeguard rules Staying behind the pool fence. Unsafe questions: Running around the pool Swimming alone Pushing someone into the water Going near a river without an adult Playing near water during a storm.		



Time	Min	Activity	Equipment	Scouter
<i>Be smart, be safe and have fun around water!</i>				
55	05	Closing circle	Totem	

resources:

STORY: Slip, slop, slap and seek
(An AI generated story)

One sunny morning, Milo the Meerkat wanted to go for a swim. The sun was shining bright in the sky. Before Milo went outside, his mum asked, "Milo, how can we keep you safe in the sun?" (**Pause and ask the children: *What should Milo do first?***)

Milo slipped on a shirt to cover his arms. "Slip!" everyone cheered. Next, Mum held up a bottle. "It's sunscreen!" she said. (**Ask the Meerkats to pretend to rub sunscreen on their arms and face.**)

Milo slopped on sunscreen. "Slop!" everyone shouted. Then Milo looked at his head. "Oh no, I forgot something!" (**Ask: *What does Milo need to wear?***)

Milo slapped on a hat. "Slap!" went the children. At the pool, Milo started to feel warm. He looked around and saw a big tree. (**Ask: *What should Milo do now?***)

Milo went to seek some shade under the tree. "Seek!" everyone said. Milo played happily all day and stayed safe in the sun.

"Slip, Slop, Slap, and Seek keeps me safe!" he smiled.

HANDCRAFT: Floating on water
(Acknowledgement: [Paper Pool Floatie Art Project For Kids](#))

What you will need:

- o Card
- o Paper Scraps - optional
- o Crayons, coloured pencils, markers etc.
- o Scissors
- o Small Paper Plate
- o Blue paper
- o Glue

Directions:

- o Give each Meerkat a 'body' template, which they can decorate, adding a swimming costume, face, etc.
- o Pre-cut a small circle from the centre of a small paper plate, to create the opening for the person to sit in. Have the Meerkats decorate the paper plate inner tube however they like.
- o Glue the 'paper plate pool float' to the centre of the blue paper. Follow that up by gluing their decorated friend piece to the centre of the float. You want it to look like they are floating and relaxing in it.
- o Then display your *pool floatie artwork* proudly for all to see!



SONG: The Waves in the sea

(Acknowledgement: www.CleverStuff.com.au)

The waves in the sea go up and down,
Up and down, up and down,
The waves in the sea go up and down,
All day long.

The dolphins in the sea go EEKK, EEKK, EEKK,
EEKK, EEKK, EEKK, EEKK EEKK EEKK,
The dolphins in the sea go EEKK, EEKK, EEKK
All day long.

The fish in the sea go swish, swish, swish,
Swish, swish, swish, swish, swish, swish
The fish in the sea go swish, swish, swish,
All day long.

The boats on the sea go toot, toot, toot,
Toot, toot, toot, toot, toot, toot
The boats on the sea go toot, toot, toot,
All day long.

ACTIVE GAME: Water safety rules

(Source: *Cub Trail*)

- www.CleverStuff.com.au)
- Never swim in unknown waters (that is dams, rivers, lakes or pools you do not know).
- Never dive into water if it is not clear or if you do not know how deep it is. You could hit something and hurt yourself.
- Never swim with your clothes on – they get heavy.
- Never swim without a responsible adult close-by.
- Do not push people into a pool, dive in without looking first, run around the edge or duck your friends.
- Never eat or chew while swimming.
- Wait an hour after eating before going into the water.
- Never use your hand to rescue a friend.
- Never jump in to save a friend – call for help!
- Never swim when you are too ... anything ... too tired; too hungry; too cold; too upset.
- At the beach, swim only at the proper bathing area or near other people.
- Inflated water wings, rings, lilos and tyre tubes keep you afloat, but be careful as you could easily be carried out into deep water or down river.

