



SAFETY

AN ADMINISTRATOR'S GUIDE TO CHEERLEADING

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1. Make sure your coach receives proper training in accepted standard of care such as through the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators safety course and conduct the appropriate background checks.

The American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators is the largest not-for-profit educational organization for cheerleading coaches. AACCA operates as an independent organization since its founding by Varsity Spirit Corporation. AACCA certification features safety awareness training with a safety test administered at the end of the training session. A safety course such as the AACCA Safety Course is required for all NCAA cheerleading coaches, and by several states and school districts around the country. It should be required for yours.

2. Make sure your coach adheres to accepted practice and performance guidelines. AACCA practice guidelines require direct supervision by a coach with practices held in a location suitable for the activities of cheerleaders (i.e., use of appropriate mats, away from excessive noise and distractions, etc.) Most states require adherence to the skill restrictions put in place by the National Federation of High Schools. Your program should be following these rules and procedures, which include restrictions on skills such as basket toss flips and pyramids which involve more than two persons high.

3. Make sure that performance skills are being taught in the proper sequence using skills progression training, with an emphasis on training all squad members in proper spotting methods. Skills progression training ensures that cheerleaders build upon mastered technique when learning more difficult and advanced stunts or tumbling, i.e. cartwheel to round-off to back-hand spring. Spotters are responsible for assisting or catching the top person in a stunt with a priority to protect the head, neck, and shoulders of the top person coming off of a stunt.

4. Check to make sure the coach properly balances practice time between athletic training and spirit leadership instruction. Cheerleading is an activity that builds self confidence, leadership and communication skills and involves more than stunts and tumbling. Safety begins with leadership. Instilling these qualities in cheerleaders helps prevent accidents when all squad members hold safety as a priority. The stunts and tumbling involved in cheerleading should aid the cheerleader in generating excitement and participation by the fans. Performing difficult stunts only for the sake of athleticism should be avoided at games and reserved for competition venues with professional spotters and mats.

5. Make sure an emergency plan is in place.

A comprehensive emergency plan is necessary to provide a quick and effective response to an emergency situation with specific duties assigned to all responders. A sample emergency plan can be found at <http://www.aacca.org/emergencyplan.asp>.

6. Be responsive to safety concerns. If a coach, parent or athlete informs you of safety concerns, listen closely and evaluate the complaint in an impartial manner. It is often difficult to notice issues from other's perspectives. Oftentimes, a parent or outside observer may be fearful of a skill which has been practiced over and over only because it "looks" unsafe. However, there may also be validity to the concern over a child if the coach has not been following the accepted standards. If an athlete expresses fear of a particular skill to the coach, extra effort must be given to ensure proper physical and psychological performer readiness are in place before continuing. Allowing or forcing an athlete to perform a skill without proper readiness increases the risk of injury.

Administrators should treat cheerleading as they would any other athletic activity on their campus. Make sure the team is being properly supervised by a qualified adult and provide the support needed in order to minimize the risk to the participants.

