



## BEST PRACTICES FOR SAFETY IN CHEERLEADING

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### 1. DEFINITIONS

- a. Cheerleading is an athletic activity that uses organized routines made from elements of cheers, tumbling, dance, jumps, and stunting to direct spectators of events to cheer for sports teams at games and matches, build school unity, and/or compete at cheerleading competitions. Cheerleading draws attention to the event and encourages audience participation.
- b. The athlete involved is called a cheerleader
- c. American Association of Cheerleading Coaches & Advisors (AACCA) is a non-profit educational association for the cheerleading coaches across the United States, dedicated to the safe and responsible practice of student cheerleading.

## 2. COACHING AND SUPERVISION

- a. All coaches and/or supervisors must be at least 21 years of age.
- b. All coaches, supervisors, and/or advisors are to follow the Supervision guidelines outlined in Chapter IV, Environmental Safety Factors, in the *AACCA Cheerleading Safety Manual*, second edition.
- c. Training
  - 1) Completion of cheer and/or spirit instructor training from a nationally recognized cheer or spirit organization.
    - a) Examples of suitable training organizations
      - i. American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Advisors (AACCA)
      - ii. United Spirit Association (USA)
      - iii. Universal Cheerleaders Association (UCA)
      - iv. National Cheerleaders Association (NCA)
      - v. The Spirit Consultants (TSC)
    - b) Instructor training should be repeated at least every three (3) years for updated information.
  - 2) Proficiency in the proper techniques, execution, and progression of tumbling, jumps, partner stunts, pyramids, and spotting.
- d. Coaches are to demonstrate knowledge and competency in the following areas:
  - 1) Care and prevention of athletic injuries, including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and first aid, including, but not limited to, a basic understanding of the signs and symptoms of concussions and the appropriate response to concussions;
  - 2) Coaching techniques;
  - 3) Rules and regulations in the athletic activity being coached;
  - 4) Child or adolescent psychology.
- e. Additional requirements for coaches who are not full-time employees
  - 1) Background checks to determine any offenses referenced in Education Code sections 44010, 44011, or 44424;
  - 2) Tuberculosis testing, every four (4) years;
  - 3) Armatus Molestation Prevention training;
  - 4) Agree to follow all applicable school board policies;
  - 5) Agree to and sign a “Code of Ethical Conduct;”
  - 6) Completion of a Volunteer form, as applicable.
- f. Coaches and/or supervisors attend practice and/or competition to supervise students.

### 3. SCHEDULE

- a. Competitions, practices, and fundraising events must be scheduled and approved by the school site administrator prior to the beginning of the season.
  - 1) Fundraising events that are not sponsored by established parent-teacher/faculty organizations, such as PTA and PFO, or established booster clubs, are to follow district board policy and/or Fiscal Crisis and Management Assistance Team (FCMAT) guidelines for fundraising events found in Chapter 8 of the current *Associated Student Body Accounting Manual, Desk Reference and Fraud Prevention Guide*.
    - a) Found at: [http://www.fcmat.org/stories/storyReader\\$911](http://www.fcmat.org/stories/storyReader$911)
- b. A written schedule of competitions, meetings, and/or team practices must be attached to the field trip form. The school site administrator must approve additions to the schedule.
- c. Team practice does not begin until an adequate number of adult coaches and/or supervisors are present. If an insufficient number of adult coaches and/or supervisors are available, practice is to be cancelled.
- d. Ad hoc practices, competitions, and fundraising events. Practice sessions, competitions and/or fundraising events not on the approved schedule are not school-sanctioned.
  - 1) The coach, supervisor, and/or committee organizing practices, competitions, and fundraising events that are not on the approved schedule may not be covered by the district liability insurance program.

### 4. PERSONAL INSURANCE

- a. Each participant must show proof of personal medical and/or accident insurance.
- b. Information regarding personal accident insurance will be available through the district.

### 5. REQUIRED FORMS

- a. All applicable forms are to be signed and returned by the athlete and the athlete's parent or guardian annually before the athlete's initiating try-out, practice, or competition.
- b. All sport team and sport club participants must submit a fully completed and signed "Voluntary Sports/Athletic Event Or Activity, Informed Consent And Liability Release, Acknowledgment And Assumption Of Potential Risk" form
- c. District Forms
  - 1) Field Trip/Excursion Authorization and Medical Treatment Authorization with attached practice schedule and competition schedule

- 2) Physical Examination
  - 3) Concussion information
  - 4) Readmission to School of Student with Temporary Disability or Injury
  - 5) Personal Vehicle Use (coaches, supervisors, and chaperones).
  - 6) Student Transportation Permission
- d. Accident Reports
- 1) VCSSFA “Report of Personal Accident” Form VCSS SFA – 1006 must be completed after any injury arising out of or in the course of travel to, or participation in Competitive Team Sport Clubs practice and/or competition.
  - 2) All accident reports must be completed thoroughly, accurately, and submitted to the district office within 24 hours of the incident.

## **6. CONCUSSION MANAGEMENT**

- a. Coaches are to be trained in a basic understanding of the signs and symptoms of concussions and the appropriate response to concussions. (California Education Code (Ed Code), Section 35179.1(b)(6))
- b. A concussion and head injury information sheet shall be signed and returned by the athlete and the athlete’s parent or guardian annually before the athlete’s initiating practice or competition. (Ed Code, §49475(a)(2))
- c. An athlete who is suspected of sustaining a concussion or head injury in an athletic activity shall be immediately removed from the activity for the remainder of the day, and shall not be permitted to return to the activity until he or she is evaluated by a licensed health care provider, trained in the management of concussions, acting within the scope of his or her practice. The athlete shall not be permitted to return to the activity until he or she receives written clearance to return to the activity from that licensed health care provider. (Ed Code, §49475(a)(1))
- d. Refer to Best Practices for Concussion Management for more information  
<http://www.vcssfa.org/RiskControl/BestPractices/tabid/2068/Default.aspx>

## **7. RETURN FROM INJURY OR ILLNESS**

- a. An athlete who suffers a significant injury or illness during an athletic activity should be immediately removed from the activity for the remainder of the day, and should not be permitted to return to the activity until he or she is evaluated by a licensed health care provider
  - 1) Broken bone(s);
  - 2) Severe joint sprain, requiring a splint or cast;
  - 3) Severe muscle strain;

- 4) Concussion;
  - 5) Seizure;
  - 6) Heat exhaustion and/or heat stroke.
- b. The athlete should not be permitted to return to the activity until he or she receives written clearance and release to return to the activity from a licensed health care provider.
- 1) Readmission to School of Student with Temporary Disability or Injury form

## **8. TRANSPORTATION**

- a. Refer to “Best Practices for Student Activity Transportation.”  
<http://www.vcssfa.org/RiskControl/BestPractices/tabid/2068/Default.aspx>

## **9. FACILITY/ENVIRONMENT**

- a. An appropriate environment must be provided based on the number of participants, skills allowed, the ability levels of the teams and the current safety rules for the levels involved in the competition.
- b. Areas for cheerleading participation should be separated from other concurrent activities by some form of barrier and/or clearly marked.
- c. Floors, as well as outdoor performing surfaces, should be level, smooth, clean, and dry.
- d. The designated performance area must have a minimum border of two feet before any drop-off or obstruction.
  - 1) Any columns, obstructions, or protrusions in the participation environment should be properly and safely padded.
- e. The ceiling height must be adequate based on the level of the teams performing and the skills allowed.
- f. Artificial lighting should be at least 50 foot candles for gymnasiums.
- g. Teams should be made aware of the designated size of the performance area and the performance surface in advance of registration for the event.
- h. The use of trampoline, mini-tramp, double mini-tramp or other type of projectile device is not recommended for cheerleading activities.
  - 1) Use of trampoline or mini-tramp is excluded from VCSSFA coverage.
  - 2) Refer to VCSSFA Liability Coverage Memorandum, Section E: Exclusions and Gaps in Coverage, paragraph 2, Gaps in Coverage, subparagraph a.

## 10. EQUIPMENT

### a. Apparel

- 1) Apparel for practice and performance situations should be snug-fitting and yet should allow for a reasonable freedom of movement
  - a) Loose fitting garments, especially v-neck shirts, pocketed shirts, and shirts with wide collars are not recommended because of their potential to entangle with another performer.
- 2) Jewelry, including hard hair accessories such as large barrettes is prohibited in all practice and performance settings.
  - a) Medical alert jewelry may be worn, but is to be removed from the neck or wrist and secured to the body with tape.

### b. Footwear

- 1) Proper footwear can minimize risk of injury and enhance performance: Considerations include:
  - a) Cushioning,
  - b) Lateral support,
  - c) Fit/comfort.

### c. Spotting Belts

- 1) Spotting belts help protect the performer during the execution of a skill by preventing a high-impact fall.
- 2) Belts and corresponding rigging should be inspected regularly, adequately maintained, and replaced at the first sign of undue wear.
- 3) Whenever metal clips are used to attach the ropes to the belt, they should be locked and/or taped in the “closed” position in order to minimize the possibility of becoming unfastened during use.
- 4) Always ensure the belt is tight and snug.
- 5) Always use proper matting when using spotting belts.
- 6) Whenever using overhead spotting rigs, be sure that the spotter weighs as much as, and preferably more than, the performer.
- 7) Spotting belts should never be considered as a replacement for proper learning progressions and performer readiness.

### d. Mats

- 1) If the skills involved call for a mat, it should be carpet-bonded foam at a minimum of 1 -3/8” (one and three-eighths inches) thickness.

- a) Use additional mats where appropriate. Whenever new and difficult skills are being performed, provide additional matting. As skill proficiency increases, the amount of matting can be decreased accordingly.
- 2) Always follow the manufacturer's guidelines. Reputable manufacturers provide important information regarding selection, use, installation, care and maintenance of mats.
- 3) Never depend on matting as the primary safety device. Mats must never be used as a safety device in place of performer readiness, appropriate skill progressions, proper spotting, and competent instruction and supervision.

## 11. SKILLS SAFETY

- a. Copies of 2013-14 AACCA School Cheer Safety Rules (see attached) are to be distributed to all squad members and any administrators involved with the cheerleading or spirit program.  
<http://www.vcssfa.org/RiskControl/BestPractices/tabid/2068/Default.aspx>
- b. All guidelines are to be understood and accepted by all parties involved in the cheerleading or spirit program including coaches, supervisors, advisors, assistants, squad members, parents, and administrators.
- c. Skills Progression
  - 1) Proper execution techniques of the basics serve as a major criterion for determining whether or not a cheerleader should be permitted to advance to the next and more difficult level.
  - 2) Performers should be able to demonstrate a wide variety of basic body shapes and positions.
  - 3) Proper landing techniques should be taught at ground level.
    - a) Start low and build up.
  - 4) Good landing techniques should be practiced until they become automatic.
  - 5) Tumbling should serve as the basis for every cheerleading activity.
  - 6) Performers should always master basic tumbling skills first before progressing to the more difficult ones
  - 7) Partner stunts require all participants to be physically prepared to participate and be reasonably well-grounded in body positioning, balance, and basic tumbling activities

## 12. SPOTTING

- a. The primary purpose of any spotting situation centers upon protection of the performer's head and neck.

- b. The spotter(s) should be in constant contact with the person being spotted and in a position to break a potential fall and/or catch the performer at any time.
- c. Cheerleaders should learn to spot the most basic partner stunts first using lighter members of the squad as performers.
- d. Cheerleaders should practice spotting one another from regions of lower locatin first and insure consistent, effective spotting before moving to regions of progressively higher locations
- e. Never rely on spotting in place of adequate skill progressions and/or performer readiness.

### **13. HAZARDOUS WEATHER (AS APPLICABLE)**

- a. Review weather conditions and information prior to each practice and/or competition and be aware of any warning. Evaluate the weather and event:
  - 1) National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)  
805-278-0760
  - 2) National Weather Service  
805-988-6610
- b. Heat
  - 1) Even being out for short periods of time in high temperatures can cause serious health problems.
  - 2) Monitor activities and time in the sun to lower the risk for heat-related illness.
  - 3) If outside in hot weather for most of the day make an effort to drink more fluids.
  - 4) Avoid beverages and drinks high in sugar, and stay away from caffeinated and carbonated beverages.
  - 5) Whatever the outdoor activity, have water on hand to decrease the risk of dehydration.
- c. Sun protection
  - 1) Competitive Team Sport Clubs members are to use waterproof sun block with a Sun Protection Factor (SPF) of 30 or higher.
  - 2) Canopies and/or umbrellas are also recommended to provide protection from the sun.
- d. Thunderstorm
  - 1) Upon seeing lightning or hearing thunder, immediately move all students and staff indoors. Do not wait for the rain to begin falling.



- 2) While indoors, stay away from windows and doors; refrain from using telephones, electrical appliances, computers, or plumbing fixtures; and do not lie on concrete floors or lean against reinforced masonry walls.
- 3) Remain indoors for at least 30 minutes after the last lightning is observed or the last thunder is heard.
- 4) For additional information, refer to Thunderstorm Safety Information Sheet.

<http://www.vcssfa.org/RiskControl/InformationSheets.aspx>