

## Back to School!



It is back to school time and also an excellent opportunity to review your current cheerleading safety standards, revise those measures if needed, and replace the last year's safety rules with this year's safety regulations. Safety is the utmost importance of coaching. Cheerleaders are tossed in the air, extended above each other's heads in stunts plus they jump, dance, and tumble. Cheerleading is a high-risk activity and you, as their coaches, must take every precaution to provide a safe environment. Below is a list of

cheerleading safety priorities.

- Cheerleaders should be **trained and supervised by a qualified coach** who is safety and stunt certified.
- Coaches must have a current **First Aid and CPR card**. Also they should carry a first aid kit specific to cheerleading.
- Provide a **safe environment** for both practice and performance areas.
- Verify that each member of the squad has all the **required documentation** to participate. Always have with you everyone's medical release forms, an accident form, an emergency plan of action and contact numbers.
- Have and practice an **Emergency Action Plan** developed especially for your team and in conjunction with supervisory and available medical staff such as certified athletic trainer and/or school nurse. Two excellent outlines are available at these web sites.  
<http://www.aacca.org/content.aspx?item=Resources/EmergencyPlan.xml>  
and <http://www.nationalcheersafety.com/>
- Be sure to pick up your copy of the **National Federation of High Schools Spirit Rules** from your athletic director. According to this rulebook, "In order to maintain participant safety, spirit coaches have a professional responsibility to read the NFHS Spirit Rules Book, including the situation rulings, and fully comprehend all rules in order to safely and correctly teach the appropriate skills to their athletes..."

- Attend **NFHS Spirit Rules Clinic** if offered in your area. WA has an online mandatory clinic.
- Also online, that cheer coaches need to know, are the **new head injury guidelines and procedures**. It provides policies for the management of concussion and head injury in youth sports, plus information for coaches, parents, athletes, health care providers, and resources for schools.  
<http://www.wiaa.com/ConcussionManagement/default.htm>
- You must assure that **your athletes are conditioned and performance ready**. Assess your athletes' physical and mental preparedness. Have a practice plan that implements your goals. Document your steps and procedures. At the end of every practice, have your cheerleaders sign it. Online are several excellence examples of practice plans and templates.  
<http://www.oakharborcheer.com/PracticeConditioningStuntsSafety.html>
- Squad members need to **perfect proper technique** and build confidence by mastering basic stunts. Identify your team's skill level and direct team members to follow proper progression in learning new skills. Here is another chart to verify their skills.  
<http://www.oakharborcheer.com/StuntProgression.html>
- Get a copy of your **district's handbook** in order to know and understand the rules at games and activities. Ask your athletic director for a one.

Safety is a big concern in the cheerleading arena. Using this checklist will help to assure the safety of each of your cheerleaders and help you to obtain a successful, fun year.

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