

Risk Management Guideline

Cheerleaders – High School

Background:

Cheerleading in the United States can now be observed within all K-12 school levels, local recreational sports venues as well as colleges, universities and professional sports teams. With more than 3 million participants nationwide, this sport can present itself in a recreational or competitive form at the K-12 school level.

CRISG recognizes cheerleading as an athletic spirit and entertainment activity in support of competitive school athletic programs. This intent should not be confused to include competitive cheerleading programs.

Recommendation:

All cheerleading activities should undergo an approval process that includes an evaluation by an administrator who can verify compliance with the CRSIG Risk Management Guidelines.

Guidelines:

- 1) Student participants should be enrolled in the Cheerleading Program just as other school athletes are enrolled; parent permission slips, grade performance requirements, medical clearance if required by the school prior to participating in practices or spirit leading activities.
- 2) At a minimum, the school cheerleading coach should provide verification of his/her training and certification by the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators and be screened just as other coaches are screened. (Note: Certification Course information may be found at www.aacca.org.)
- 3) Coaches should be familiar with the contents of the AACCA Cheerleading Safety Manual and limit the squad's activities according to the National Federation of State High School Associations Spirit Rule Book. (Note: The NFHS can be found at www.nfhs.org)
- 4) Coaches should ensure the following safeguards for every practice and athletic event:
 - Proper permission, assumption of risk and emergency information from a parent is on file
 - There is coach supervision at all practices and games
 - There is adequate matting provided
 - The squad follows a conditioning and flexibility program
 - The current AACCA High School Safety Rules are adhered to. (2009-10 Rules are provided beginning on the next page.)
 - There is an emergency plan in place

2009-2010 AACCA High School Safety Rules

A. Definitions

1. Base - A person who is in direct contact with the performing surface and is supporting another person's weight.
2. Basket Toss – A stunt in which a top person is tossed by bases whose hands are interlocked.
3. Bracer – A top person that is supporting another top person in a pyramid.
4. Cradle - A dismount from a partner stunt, pyramid or toss in which the top person is caught in a face-up, piked position before being placed on the performance area or remounting into another stunt, pyramid or loading position.
5. Cupie/Awesome - A stunt in which both feet of the top person are in one hand of a base.
6. Dive Roll - A forward roll where the feet leave the ground before the hands reach the ground.
7. Double Based Suspended Roll - Dismount or transition with a foot-over-head rotation.
8. Elevator/Sponge Toss – A stunt in which the top person loads in to an elevator/sponge loading position and is then tossed into the air.
9. Extended Stunt – A stunt in which the entire body of the top person is extended in an upright position over the base(s). Chairs, torches, flatbacks and straddle lifts are examples of stunts where the bases' arms are extended overhead, but are NOT considered to be extended stunts since the height of the body of the top person is similar to a shoulder level stunt.
10. Hanging Pyramid – A pyramid in which the top person's weight is primarily supported by another top person. Examples of hanging pyramids are: a person being suspended between two shoulder stands; a "whirlybird" stunt where one person's weight is being supported by the legs of a top person in a shoulder sit; and a "diamond head" where two persons are suspended from one shoulder stand.
11. Helicopter Toss - A stunt in which the top person is tossed into the air in a horizontal position and rotates parallel to the ground in the same motion as a helicopter blade.
12. Inverted – A body position where the shoulders are below the waist.
13. Knee Drop – Dropping to the knees without first bearing the majority of the weight on the hands or feet.
14. Loading Position - A position in which the top person is off the ground in continuous movement that puts the bases and top in a position to end the movement in a stunt.
15. Post - A person on the performing surface who may assist a top person during a stunt or transition.
16. **Prop – Any object which can be manipulated or used as a base (ex: poms, signs, flags, megaphones, etc.)**
17. **Quick Toss – A toss technique where the top person begins the toss with both feet on the ground. The bases can apply an upward force on any part of the body other than under the feet.**
18. Released Pyramid Transition – A pyramid in which the top person in a braced stunt is released from their bases and is in a descending mode before being caught in a cradle, stunt or loading position prior to being transitioned to another stunt.
19. Spotter - A person who is responsible for assisting or catching the top person in a partner stunt or pyramid. This person cannot be in a position of providing primary support for a top person but must be in a position to protect the top person coming off of a stunt or pyramid.
20. Stunt - One or more bases supporting one or more top persons off of the ground.
21. Tension Drop - A dismount from a stunt or pyramid where the top person(s) are directed toward the ground while their feet are held by the base(s) until just before the landing.
22. Top - A person who is either being supported by another while off of the performing surface or who has been tossed into the air by another person.

B. General Guidelines

1. Cheerleading squads should be placed under the direction of a qualified and knowledgeable advisor or coach.
2. All practice sessions should be supervised by the coach and held in a location suitable for the activities of cheerleaders (i.e., use of appropriate mats, away from excessive noise and distractions, etc.).
3. Advisors/coaches should recognize a squad's particular ability level and should limit the squad's activities accordingly. "Ability level" refers to the squad's talents as a whole and individuals should not be pressed to perform activities until safely perfected.
4. All cheerleaders should receive proper training before attempting any form of cheerleading gymnastics (tumbling, partner stunts, pyramids and jumps).
5. Professional training in proper spotting techniques should be mandatory for all squads.
6. All cheerleading squads should adopt a comprehensive conditioning and strength building program.
7. All jewelry is prohibited during participation.
8. An appropriate warm up routine should precede all cheerleading activities.

9. Prior to the performance of any skill, the immediate environment for the activity should be taken into consideration including, but not limited to proximity of non-squad personnel, performance surface, lighting and/or precipitation. Technical skills such as tumbling, partner stunts, pyramids and jumps should not be performed on concrete, asphalt, wet or uneven surfaces or surfaces with obstructions.
10. As a general rule, all programs should qualify cheerleaders according to accepted teaching progressions. Appropriate spotting should be used until all performers demonstrate mastery of the skill.
11. Supports, braces, etc., which are hard and unyielding or have rough edges or surfaces must be appropriately covered. A participant wearing a cast (excluding a properly covered air cast) shall not be involved in stunts, pyramids, tosses or tumbling.
12. Squad members must wear athletic shoes (no gymnastic slippers).
13. When discarding props (signs, etc.) that are made of solid material or have sharp edges/corners, team members must gently toss or place the props so that they are under control.

C. Partner Stunts, Pyramids and Tosses

1. All pyramids and partner stunts are limited to two persons high. "Two high" is defined as the base having at least one foot on the ground.
2. The top person in a partner stunt, pyramid or transition may not be in an inverted position and cannot transition to another stunt, the ground or a dismount in an inverted position. Exceptions to this rule are the following:
 - a. Double based suspended forward rolls where the top person has continuous hand-to-hand contact with two primary bases or with two posts who are controlling the top person are allowed to a cradle or the performing surface. They may not land in a loading position for a stunt. The top person cannot have contact with one base and one post.
 - b. The top person in a stunt may begin in an inverted position on the performing surface and be loaded into a non-inverted position shoulder height or below provided that they have constant contact with a base or spotter until they are in the non-inverted position. A base or additional spotter if necessary must be in a position to protect the head, neck and shoulder area of the top person.
3. Suspended splits in a transition are allowed provided there are a total of four bases that support the top person; at least three of the bases must support under the legs of the top person, and the fourth base may support under the legs or make contact with the hands of the top person. Top person must have hand contact with bases during transition.
4. Partner stunts and pyramids higher than shoulder stand level must have a continuous spotter for each person over shoulder stand level. Spotters are considered part of the squad with regard to the squad member maximum limitation. For single-based extended stunts, the spotter may hold at the ankle of the top person and / or the wrist of the base. If the spotter is supporting under the sole of the foot in any way, they are considered to be a base and would require an additional spotter.
5. When one person is bracing another (including overlapping of arms), one of the individuals must be at shoulder height or below. Exceptions to this rule are the following:
 - a. Extensions (double or single based) may brace other extensions.
 - b. Double Cupies/Awesomes (two cupies/awesomes being held by the same base) are allowed. If the stunt is dismounted to cradles, there must be three people for each top person being cradled. This exception does not include variations such as Double Heel Stretches.
6. If a person in a partner stunt or pyramid is used as a brace for an extended stunt, that brace must not be supporting a majority of the top person's weight. (To demonstrate this, the foot of the top person's braced leg must be at or above the knee of their supporting leg.)
7. Extended Straddle Lifts must have an additional spotter for the head and shoulders of the top person (similar position to a Double Based Elevator/Extension Prep).
8. The bases of any extended stunt must have both feet in direct weight-bearing contact with the performing surface.
9. Hanging pyramids must have a continuous spotter for each shoulder stand involved in suspending another person. Hanging pyramids are not allowed to rotate.
10. In a Released Pyramid Transition the following rules apply:
 - a. At least 3 bases must be under the top person throughout the transition.
 - b. Bracers at shoulder level must have a spotter in place during the transition movement. Exception: Shoulder sits and double based thigh stands do not require an additional spotter.
 - c. The top person must be in hand/arm to hand/arm contact with at least one bracer during the entire transition.
 - d. The top person may not be supporting their weight on any other body part of the person(s) assisting (i.e. Shoulders of the bracer).
 - e. The top person must be continuous in motion and cannot be supported so that they pause at the top of the transition.
11. Basket tosses, toe pitch tosses, elevator/sponge tosses or similar tosses are limited to no more than four tossers and must be dismounted to a cradle position by two of the original bases, plus an additional spotter at the head and shoulder area. These tosses may not be directed so that the bases must move to catch the top person. The top person may not hold any objects (poms, signs, etc.) during the toss. (Rule 11 does not apply to a "Quick Toss.")

12. Participants may not pass over or under other participants from tosses. Exceptions to this rule are the following:
 - a. Single based tosses can go over another person.
13. Free falling flips or swan dives from any type of toss, partner stunt or pyramid are prohibited.
14. Partner stunts, pyramids and participants may not pass over, under or through other partner stunts or pyramids.
15. Single based stunts in which the top person is parallel to the performing surface and the bases' arms are extended must have a continuous spotter at the head and shoulder of the top person. (i.e. Bird, Side T, Single Based Flat back, etc.)
16. Multi-based tosses that land in stunts (i.e. basket to elevator/extension prep, etc.) are allowed; however, they cannot significantly exceed the height of the intended stunt and cannot include a skill (twist, toe touch, etc.) during the toss. Multi-based tosses cannot land in a loading position. Multi-based tosses that include a skill (twist, toe touch, etc.) must be cradled. (Rule 16 does not apply to a "Quick Toss.")
17. A single based toss (one base touching during the toss movement) is allowed into a loading position to that original base.
18. Backward suspended rolls and single based suspended rolls are prohibited.
19. Cradle dismounts from partner stunts or pyramids shoulder height or above require one spotter in addition to the original base(s).
20. **Cradle dismounts from multi-based tosses require one spotter in addition to the original base(s).**
21. Cradle dismounts from partner stunts (other than basket tosses, elevator/sponge tosses or similar tosses) to another set of bases must be caught by three bases. Any type of gymnastics movement (1/2 turn, twist, toe touch, etc) is prohibited.
22. The total number of twists in a dismount from stunts or tosses cannot be greater than two rotations.

Exception to

 - a. Side facing stunts and tosses (i.e. Arabesque, Scorpion, Kick Double Full Basket, etc.) may add a one quarter twist in order to cradle to the front.
23. A minimum of two catchers are required when the top person falls away from the bases to a horizontal, flat-body position.
24. Tension drops are prohibited.
25. Helicopter tosses greater than a 180 degree rotation (half-turn) are prohibited. Helicopter tosses require 4 bases to be in position during the entire release. There must be a base at the head/shoulder area during the initiation of the toss as well as the catch. The bases are not allowed to change positions during the release.
26. Single based split catches are prohibited.
27. The use of mini-trampolines, springboards, spring-assisted floors or any other height-increasing apparatus is prohibited for competition or performance. These devices may be used for skill development and practice under the supervision of a coach trained in their use.
28. Basket tosses, elevator/sponge tosses and similar multi-base tosses are prohibited on surfaces other than a mat, grass or rubberized track.

D. Tumbling and Jumps

1. Dive rolls are prohibited.
2. Flips greater than one rotation are prohibited.
3. Twists greater than one rotation are prohibited.
4. A forward three-quarter flip to the seat or knees is prohibited.
5. Participants may not tumble over, under, or through partner stunts or pyramids, or over or under individuals.
6. **Participants may not tumble over a prop. Exception: A forward roll over a prop is legal.**
7. Participants may not land in a partner stunt or in a catching position from an aerial tumbling skill. (Example : A back flip from a tumbling pass into a cradle is prohibited, however, rebounding from a back handspring into a cradle is allowed.)
8. Landings for all jumps including knee drops must bear weight on at least one foot. (Example : A toe touch jump or kick to a hurdler position, to the seat, knees, or landing with both feet back, or to a push-up position are prohibited.)
9. Any type of hurdler position or the position with both feet back (sitting, landing or lying) is prohibited with the exception of a "Z" sit.

E. Specific Basketball/Indoor Court Restrictions

1. The following skills are prohibited at basketball and other athletic contests conducted on courts, except where the area is free of obstructions and non-cheer personnel, and all skills are performed on a matted surface.
 - a. Basket tosses, elevator/sponge tosses and other similar multi-based tosses.
 - b. Partner stunts in which the base uses only one arm to support the top person.
 - c. Released twists into or from partner stunts.
 - d. Twisting tumbling skills.

Copies of these guidelines should be distributed to all squad members and any administrators involved with the cheerleading program. All guidelines should be understood and accepted by all parties involved in the cheerleading program including advisors, coaches, assistants, squad members, parents, and administrators.

Note: The above safety guidelines are general in nature and are not intended to cover all circumstances. All cheerleading gymnastics including tumbling, partner stunts, pyramids and jumps should be carefully reviewed and supervised by a qualified adult advisor or coach.

Cheerleading jumps, gymnastics and stunts may involve height and inversion of the body and there is an inherent risk of injury involved with any athletic activity. While the use of these guidelines in coordination with the AACCA Safety Course will help minimize the risk of injury, the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators makes no warranties or representations, either expressed or implied, that the above guidelines will prevent injuries to individual participants.

For more information, visit AACCA.org. If you have questions regarding a specific skill, contact us at 800-533-6583.

(<http://www.aacca.org>)