

# Cheerleading (Acrobatic)

## SECONDARY - INTERSCHOOL 2025

- This activity includes additional safety standards specific to Qualifications and First Aid (previously designated High Risk).
- Consult [Risk Management](#).
- The safety standards for this activity must be presented to the activity provider prior to the activity taking place. The activity provider must meet the minimum requirements listed in the safety standards. For more information on planning trips using outside providers, consult [Outside Activity Providers](#).
- Also consult [Cheerleading \(Spirit/Dance\)](#).

## Equipment

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- Determine that all equipment is safe (for example, no sharp corners, cracks, or splinters) and all assistive devices (e.g., a walker) are in good working condition and properly adjusted for the height and mobility needs of the student prior to participation.
- Protective equipment must not be altered (for example, cutting a portion off the back of mouth guards, adding padding to a protective helmet).
- Only use cross-link polyethylene foam cheer mats, 1  $\frac{3}{4}$ " – 2" in thickness.
- Mats must:
  - offer proper foot control and a safe surface;
  - not move;

- be aligned so separation does not occur;
  - be regularly checked for wear and tears.
- Velcro connections on Velcro mats must be kept clean to provide maximum adhesion.
- Megaphone handles must be screwed in tightly, and burred edges must be trimmed or filed.
- The use of mini-trampolines, springboards 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.
- Only the following props are allowed:
  - flags
  - banners
  - signs
  - pom-poms
  - megaphones
- Props with poles or similar support apparatus may not be used in conjunction with any stunt or tumbling.
- All props must be safely cleared from the competition floor when not in use.
- Any electrical equipment used must be in good working order and have wires taped to the floor or contained within walls.

Refer to the [\*\*First Aid\*\*](#) section for first aid equipment requirements.

## Clothing/Footwear/Jewellery

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- Appropriate clothing must be worn (for example, standard cheerleading uniforms - tops, bottoms, socks and shoes).
- Soft-soled shoes must be worn (for example, aerobic-type running shoe with proper ankle and arch support and a simple tread). Jazz shoes, boots and gymnastics slippers are not allowed.
- No hats or sunglasses permitted.
- Length and style of hair must not hinder vision or the progress of stunts.
- The wearing of jewellery during practices and competitions must meet the rules of the governing body of the sport/activity, [OFSAA](#), and local athletic association. Consult the [General Safety Standards for Clothing, Footwear, and Jewellery](#) when jewellery is not addressed by the governing body of the sport/activity, OFSAA or the local athletic association.
- Students must not participate when the length of fingernails poses a safety risk to themselves or others.

## Outdoors

- Heavier sweatshirts and/or wind suits must be fitted.
- No gloves or mitts permitted while stunting.

## Facilities

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- Determine that all facilities are safe and accessible for the students participating. Students must be encouraged to report facility problems to the coach.
- Playing surface and surrounding area must be free of all obstacles and must provide safe footing and traction.

- Activity surface and surrounding area must be free of all obstacles (for example, tables, chairs), and must provide safe footing and traction.
- Hardwood gym floor, rubberized gym floor, spring-assisted floor, carpeted studio, grass – track surfaces [all-weather]) must be dry, flat and free of loose objects and obstacles, clothing, towels, and water bottles.
- Stunt cheerleading is not permitted on gravel or other loose surfaces, concrete, terrazzo or ice surfaces, or a school stage.
- Ground bound cheerleading is permitted on gravel or other loose surfaces, concrete and terrazzo surfaces.
- Walls, stages, equipment, trees, and posts must not be used as turning points, finish lines, end zones, or boundaries. Establish a clearly delineated boundary line away from the hazards, using visual markers (for example, lines, pylons), to prevent contact/collision.
- Consult [General Safety Standards for Facilities](#) for the opening and closing of gymnasium divider doors/curtains.
- When walking, running, or wheeling takes place off school site for a warm-up, conditioning and/or is an integral part of the activity:
  - Coaches must do a safety check in order to identify potential problems prior to initial use of route or course.
  - Coaches must outline to the students the route or course (for example, notice of areas to approach with caution) before the start of the activity.
  - Coaches must determine that students are not crossing busy intersections unless directly supervised.

## Competitions and Practices

- The floor must be marked so that perimeter and centre are highly visible.
- A safe, matted practice area must be provided for warm-ups.
- The ceiling height and above-head obstructions in performance area must not present a safety concern.
- A floor manager must be present to control warm-ups.

## Special Rules/Instructions

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- Be aware of students whose medical condition (for example, asthma, anaphylaxis, casts, previous concussion, orthopaedic device) may affect participation. Consult [Medical Conditions](#).
- Prior to participation students must receive concussion information through the appropriate Ministry of Education's Concussion Awareness Resource or the school board approved concussion resources. Students must also receive information on:
  - the Concussion Code of Conduct;
  - concussion prevention strategies specific to the activity and inherent risks of the activity (that is, outline possible risks and ways to minimize the risks);
  - procedures and rules for safe play; and
  - the importance of reporting symptoms related to a suspected concussion.
- Students must confirm their review of the concussion awareness resource and Concussion Code of Conduct prior to participation.
- Refer to school board policies and procedures (i.e., transportation, excursion/field trip) for communication with parents/guardians, the location of an off-site activity, means of transportation, supervision ratios, and parent/guardian permission.
- Previous training, fitness level, and the length of time and intensity of physical activity must be taken into consideration.

- Activities must be based on skills that are taught.
- Skills must be taught in proper progression.
- A warm-up and cool-down must be included.
- Emphasize controlled movement when requiring students to walk or run backwards. Backward-running races are not permitted.
- When involved in practice drills, students must not be required to close their eyes or be blindfolded.
- Fair play and rules of the sport must be taught and strictly enforced.
- Adequate liquid replacement (personal water bottles, water fountains) must be accessible for students before, during, and after physical activity to prevent dehydration.
- Students must be informed that they are not to share water bottles.
- Any student with a playing cast must provide a doctor's note or parent/guardian signed permission indicating it is safe for them to participate.
- Supports, braces and soft casts which are unaltered from the manufacturer's original design/production do not require any additional padding. Supports/braces that have been altered from the manufacturer's original design/production must be padded with a closed-cell, slow-recovery foam padding no less than one-half inch thick if the participant is involved in partner stunts, pyramids or tosses. A participant wearing a plaster cast or a walking boot must not be involved in partner stunts, pyramids or tosses.
- An exposed orthopaedic apparatus must be soft or padded and must be approved by the person in charge prior to the commencement of the activity.
- Mats must be used during practice and competition warm-ups.
- Strength and conditioning must be an integral part of the training of acrobatic cheerleaders.

- Coaches must recognize a squad's particular ability level and must limit the squad's activities accordingly. "Ability level" refers to the squad's talents as a whole and individuals must not be pressed to perform activities until safely perfected.
- Students must not perform skills beyond their ability level until the requisite precursor skills are mastered.
- All cheerleaders must receive appropriate training before attempting any form of cheerleading gymnastics (tumbling, partner stunts, pyramids and jumps).
- Safety and spotting skills must be addressed first.
- Appropriate spotting must be used until students demonstrate mastery of the skill.
- Drops, including but not limited to knee, seat, thigh, front, back and split drops from a jump, stunt, or inverted position onto the performing surface, are prohibited unless the majority of the weight is first borne on the hands/feet, which break the impact of the drop.
- 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.
- Tops and bases of the pyramid must learn the responsibilities of other members in spotting/catching.
- Mascots may be incorporated into the routine safely but must not be included in stunts and pyramids or as spotters or catchers.
- In adverse weather conditions no stunts, pyramid or tumbling are allowed.
- Refer to the AACCA School Cheer Safety Rules from [Cheer Rules](#) for a glossary of terms for acrobatic cheerleading along with safety requirements for the following performance elements:
  - Partner Stunts

- Inversions
  - Pyramids
  - Tosses
  - Tumbling and Jumps
- All team members must be trained to employ hands-on spotting at all times for all skills, until they are mastered.
  - Coaches must employ hands-on spotting at all times, until skills are mastered.
  - Coaches must secure a safe cheering environment (for example, keep fans away from team space at games).
  - Parents/guardians must be informed of the school board's policy related to initiation/hazing activities.
  - The presence and location of spectators must not present a safety concern. A school is responsible for supervising its own spectators. The ratio of supervisor to spectators must address safety concerns.
  - Students must be informed that the use of equipment and the gymnasium are prohibited without supervision. In addition to verbal communication, the doors must be locked or signs must be posted indicating that students are not allowed to use the gym unless appropriately supervised.

## Practices and Performances

- The following skills are only allowed on a mat, grass or rubberized track surface (Taken from the 2015-16 School Cheerleading Safety Rules of the [American Association of Cheerleading Coaches and Administrators](#).):
  - Basket tosses, elevator/sponge tosses and other similar multi-based tosses.
  - Partner stunts in which the base uses only one arm to support the top person.

- Twisting tumbling skills (Arabians, full twisting layouts, etc.). The exception to this rule is the following: cartwheels, roundoffs and aerial cartwheels are allowed on surfaces other than a mat, grass or rubberized track.
- Refer to [Ontario Cheerleading Federation](#) policies and procedures for safety rules with regard to Tumbling, Stunts/Pyramids and other recognized competitive groupings.

## Supervision

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- All activities must be supervised.
- The type of supervision must be commensurate with the inherent risk of the activity. The level of risk is related to the number of participants, the skill level of the participants, the type of equipment used, and environmental conditions.
- Direct Supervision is required during the safety and initial skill instruction.
- A Community Coach may not be a participant in the activity.
- Cheerleading:
  - Direct Supervision is required for all elevated inversions, aerial rotations and inverted skills and for the duration of the activity.
- Standing Pyramids:
  - Direct Supervision is required during the application of skills for the duration of the activity.
- Other Pyramids:
  - Direct Supervision is required during the initial skill acquisition.
  - On-Site Supervision is required after students' demonstration of proficiency.
- On-Site Supervision is required for the duration of all other components of the activity (e.g., equipment setup and take down, warm-ups/cool downs, application of the skills and games).

- The Community Coach Liaison must be accessible to the Community Coach and students (at practices and competitions). The level of support will be commensurate with the expertise and qualifications of the Community Coach as determined by the Principal/Designate.
- As a minimum the Community Coach Liaison will provide In-the-Area supervision for all practices and competitions. Direct Supervision is required if a Community Coach is under the age of 18.
- When students are competing outside their school district (e.g., travel tournaments, regional/ provincial competitions):
  - a Community Coach Liaison from the same school board must be accessible to the Community Coach; and
  - consult school board and local athletic association rules and regulations with regard to Coach, Community Coach, and Community Coach Liaison duties and adhere to the higher standard of care.
- Where a Qualified Instructor is used, the Qualified Instructor must provide safety and initial skill instruction and monitoring for the safe application of skills and student behaviour for the duration of the activity.
- A Volunteer, under the direction of a Coach, can monitor students during practices and competitions. Refer to your school board's policy on volunteers assisting with students' physical activities.
- Responsibilities must be clearly outlined for additional Coaches and Volunteers who are monitoring the activity.

## Qualifications

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- Game/match official(s) must be certified and/or experienced in officiating the sport.
- The Head Coach must demonstrate knowledge of the sport, skills, and strategies to the Principal or Designate.
- All Coaches must be familiar with and implement, where applicable, the criteria outlined in [Coaches Expectations](#).

- All Cheerleading – Acrobatic Coaches must possess one of the following qualifications:
  - Trained in the American Association of Cheerleading Coaches Administrators (AACCA) Spirit Safety Certification (online course or in person), every four (4) years.
  - Trained and certified in an International Cheer Union (ICU) coaches course discipline, every three (3) years.
  - Attendance at a cheerleading clinic or workshop, provided by an instructor who is knowledgeable of the activity and where safety is addressed, within the last three years that is recognized by the Ontario Cheerleading Federation.
  - Past experience within the last 3 years as a coach in acrobatic cheerleading, having knowledge of the activity (for example, appropriate skills and progressions) and current safety practices as outlined in the Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards in Education
- Teams incorporating any and all tumbling elements in a routine (for practice and competitions) must be fully trained and supervised by a gymnastics Coach with one of the following qualifications:
  - NCCP Community Sport Coach – Gymnastics Foundations Course
  - Certified in the ICU Global Coaching Techniques (GCT) and ICU Rules Comprehension Course at a level determined by the skill incorporated, every four (4) years.
  - Completion of gymnastic NCCP level 1 and/or level 2 certification in the past
  - Accreditation as a NCCP Gymnastics Learning Facilitator
  - Attendance at a clinic or workshop within the last three years provided by an instructor who is knowledgeable of the activity (for example, appropriate skills and progressions), and where safety is addressed as outlined in the Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards in Education

- Past experience within the last 3 years as a coach in gymnastics, having knowledge of the activity (for example, appropriate skills and progressions) and current safety practices as outlined in the Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards in Education.
- For more information on sport-specific NCCP training please visit [coach.ca](https://coach.ca).

## First Aid

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- A fully stocked first aid kit must be readily accessible. (Consult [Sample First Aid Kit](#))
- A working communication device (for example, cell phone) must be accessible.
- The designated individual who takes responsibility for providing first aid to injured students must:
  - as a minimum, have a current first aid certification from a recognized first aid provider (for example, St. John Ambulance, Red Cross) that includes CPR B or C and training in head, neck and spinal injury management;
  - be in the area and readily accessible during the entire practice/competition;
  - be aware of the school's first aid emergency action plan and follow their first aid emergency response (consult First Aid Plan and First Aid Emergency Response) including specific direction for participants with accessibility needs, and use of assistive devices or medications;
  - follow their school board's concussion protocol for a suspected concussion;
  - and not be a participant in the activity.

## Definitions

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- **Coach** (i.e. Teacher Coach/Community Coach):

- An individual who volunteers to coach a school team and is approved by the Principal/Designate.

- **Community Coach:**

- An individual approved by the principal who volunteers to coach a school team. An individual acting in the role of a Community Coach must be assigned a Community Coach Liaison.
- Examples of a Community Coach are:
  - teachers not under contract by the board;
  - retired teachers;
  - early childhood educators, teacher candidates, educational assistants;
  - co-op students, other secondary students;
  - parent/guardian;
  - individuals/coaches from the community.

- **Community Coach Liaison:**

- A Teacher, Principal, or Vice Principal with a current certification from the Ontario College of Teachers and under contract by the school board who is responsible for carrying out all the duties required of a Teacher pursuant to the Education Act and the safety standards. The level of support will be commensurate with the expertise and qualifications of the Community Coach and will be determined by the Principal or Designate.

- **Monitor:**

- A Volunteer and/or Qualified Instructor who assists the Teacher Coach with a group of students and has a responsibility to monitor student behaviors for the duration of the activity.
- A Community Coach who has a responsibility to coach and monitor student behaviors for the duration of the athletic season and/or a Qualified Instructor(s)/Volunteer(s) who assists the Community Coach during practices and competitions.

- **Monitoring:**

- The role of monitoring is to observe, identify, act, and report:
  - Observe: Observe with attention to detail the actions of the students.
  - Identify: Identify the student and the unsafe behaviour.
  - Act: Take appropriate actions to safeguard students and others (e.g., stop the activity).
  - Report: Provide the name of the student and the unsafe behaviour to the Coach for management and direction.

- **Qualified Instructor:**

- An individual who provides safety and skill instruction, and monitoring for an activity, and possesses the required qualifications (e.g., experience, certifications). This role could be fulfilled by a teacher, volunteer, or an employee of an outside provider. An instructor does not have the authority to supervise.

- **Supervision:**

- The vigilant overseeing of an activity for management or direction. Activities, facilities, and equipment have inherent risks, but the more effectively they are supervised, the safer they become.
- The Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards in Education includes three Types of supervision, Direct Supervision, On-Site Supervision, and In-the-Area Supervision. These types of supervision take into consideration the level of risk, which is related to the number of participants, the skill level of the participants, the type of equipment used, the environmental conditions, the age, and developmental stage.
- The three types of supervision described are not hierarchical but represent the type of supervision that activities require and the type of supervision that is inherently possible.
- Some activities in OPASSE transition from one type of supervision to another type of supervision (e.g., Direct Supervision to On-Site Supervision OR On-Site Supervision to In-the-Area Supervision).

- **Teacher Coach:**

- A Teacher Coach is a teacher, principal, or vice principal with a current certification from the Ontario College of Teachers and under contract by the school board.

- **Types of Supervision:**

- **Direct Supervision:**

- Direct Supervision requires that the Coach is physically present at the activity, providing visual and verbal oversight for management and direction of both the activity and student safety.
- **Provisos:**
  - No other activity can occur when part of the activity or the entire activity is under Direct Supervision when there is only one Coach supervising.
  - The Supervision section of the relevant activity safety standards page in the Ontario Physical Activity Safety Standards in Education describes when parts of an activity are under Direct Supervision.
  - Where a Community Coach is providing the safety and initial skill instruction and monitoring, a Community Coach Liaison is accessible for management and direction as determined by the Principal/Designate.
- An activity may be under Direct Supervision:
  - During the entire duration of the activity;
  - During the set up and take down of equipment;
  - During the safety and initial skill instruction;
  - During the performance/practice of the activity skill; and
  - When the activities transition from Direct Supervision to On-Site Supervision.

- **In-the-Area Supervision:**

- The Coach is located in proximity to a combination of locations where the student activities take place, is circulating, and is accessible for providing management and direction of the physical activity and student safety.
  - Provisos:
    - The Coach is circulating between the activities, occurring at separate locations, and is readily accessible, or the location of the coach is communicated to the student.
    - Where a Community Coach is providing the safety and initial skill instruction and is monitoring, a Community Coach Liaison is accessible for management and direction as determined by the Principal/Designate.
    - Students may be out of sight for periods of time.
  - An activity or a component of the activity is under In-the-Area Supervision:
    - Where the same activity is located in separate locations. (e.g., Track and Field, Cross Country Running, Skiing (Alpine));
    - Where two or more activities under In-the-Area Supervision occur in separate locations (e.g., Badminton, Table Tennis, Handball (Wall));
    - Where the skill application of the activity takes place at a different location from the Coach (e.g., Cross Country Running, Skiing (Alpine), Cycling);
    - Where activities occur in double or triple gymnasiums; and
    - Where more than one Qualified Instructor is providing activities at a combination of locations.
- **On-Site Supervision:**
  - The Coach is present at one location where the student activity takes place (e.g., gymnasium, sports field, tennis courts at an Outside Activity Provider's facility) and is accessible for providing management and direction of the physical activity and student

safety.

- **Provisos:**

- Where more than one activity occurs in one location, the Coach is circulating between the activities and is accessible for management and direction.
- Momentary presence in adjoining rooms (e.g., equipment room, outside storage shed, boathouse) is considered to be On-Site Supervision.
- Where a Community Coach is providing the safety and initial skill instruction and monitoring, a Community Coach Liaison is accessible for management and direction as determined by the Principal/Designate.

- **An activity may be under On-Site Supervision:**

- During the entire duration of the activity;
- During the safety and initial skill instruction;
- With activities using multiple stations while the Coach is circulating;
- When combining two or more activities at one location while the Coach is circulating; and
- When activities transition from On-Site Supervision to In-the-Area Supervision.

- **Volunteer:**

- A responsible adult (e.g., Educational Assistants, Retired Teachers, Co-op Students, Parents/Guardians, Teacher Candidates) approved by the Principal/Designate who is under the direction of a Coach and has been instructed on their monitoring responsibilities. Refer to your school board's policy on volunteers assisting with students' physical activities.

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