

# Concussion Education Materials for Cheerleading

## Introduction

Concussions are a serious concern in youth cheerleading. As participants, parents, and coaches, it is essential to understand the risks, prevention methods, symptoms, and recovery process associated with concussions. This guide aims to provide comprehensive information to ensure the safety and well-being of our cheerleaders.

## 1. Understanding Concussions

A concussion is a type of traumatic brain injury (TBI) caused by a blow to the head or body, a fall, or another incident that jars or shakes the brain inside the skull. Concussions can have serious, long-term consequences if not properly managed.

### Potential Consequences:

- Memory problems
- Difficulty concentrating
- Mood changes
- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Long-term cognitive impairment

## 2. Prevention and Preparedness

While it is impossible to eliminate the risk of concussions entirely, the following steps can help minimize the risk:

### a. Proper Equipment:

- Use proper mats, safety gear, and spotters during stunts and tumbling.
- Ensure all equipment is in good condition and set up safely.

### b. Safe Techniques:

- Teach proper tumbling, stunting, and dismount techniques.
- Prohibit dangerous stunts or techniques that exceed the team's skill level.
- Always use trained spotters for stunts.

### c. Educate and Train:

- Educate cheerleaders, parents, and coaches about the risks of concussions.
- Train coaches to recognize and respond to concussion symptoms.

### d. Environment:

- Ensure practice and performance surfaces are appropriate, level, and well-maintained.
- Monitor weather conditions to avoid heat-related stress or icy surfaces.

### **3. Recognizing Concussion Symptoms**

Symptoms of a concussion may not appear immediately and can vary. Prompt recognition and response are crucial.

Common Symptoms:

- Headache or "pressure" in the head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Double or blurry vision
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Feeling sluggish, foggy, or groggy
- Confusion or memory problems
- Feeling "off" or unusually emotional

### **4. How to Respond to a Suspected Concussion**

If a concussion is suspected, follow this action plan:

a. Remove the Cheerleader from Activity:

- Immediately stop participation in stunts, tumbling, or other physical activities.
- Do not allow the cheerleader to return to practice or performance the same day.

b. Seek Medical Attention:

- Have the cheerleader evaluated by a healthcare professional experienced in treating concussions.
- Follow all medical advice and instructions.

c. Obtain Written Clearance:

- Require written clearance from a licensed physician before the cheerleader can return to activity.

d. Inform and Educate:

- Inform the cheerleader's parents/guardians about the injury.
- Provide resources on concussion symptoms and recovery steps.

e. Monitor Symptoms:

- Observe the cheerleader for ongoing symptoms over the next several days.

- Avoid physical and cognitive activities that could worsen symptoms.

## **5. Steps for Returning to Activity**

Returning to cheerleading after a concussion should follow a gradual, physician-approved protocol:

### **a. Rest and Recovery:**

- Full rest from physical and mental activities until symptoms resolve.

### **b. Gradual Return-to-Play Protocol:**

1. Symptom-Limited Activity: Light physical activities, such as walking.
2. Light Aerobic Exercise: Moderate intensity activities that do not provoke symptoms.
3. Non-Stunting Activity: Begin basic cheer movements (no stunts or tumbling).
4. Stunt Practice with Spotters: Gradual introduction of stunting and tumbling with safety measures.
5. Full Practice: Resume regular practice and activities.
6. Return to Performance: Participate fully in performances and competitions.

### **c. Monitoring and Assessment:**

- Continuously monitor symptoms during each step.
- Ensure a healthcare professional evaluates the cheerleader before full return.

## **Conclusion**

Understanding and managing the risk of concussions is crucial in youth cheerleading. By focusing on prevention, recognizing symptoms, responding appropriately, and following a structured return-to-activity protocol, we can help keep our cheerleaders safe and healthy.

### **For More Information:**

- CDC Heads Up: Concussion in Youth Sports
- USA Cheer: Concussion Awareness and Education
- National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS): Concussion Resources

By staying informed and proactive, we can minimize the risk of concussions and promote a safer environment for all participants in our cheerleading program.

## **Attendance Policy**

Purpose:

To ensure consistent attendance at practices and games, promoting team cohesion, skill development, and a strong work ethic among cheerleaders.

### **1. Policy Overview**

This policy outlines the expectations for cheerleader attendance at practices and games, as well as the consequences for unexcused absences.

### **2. Attendance Expectations**

Practices: Cheerleaders are expected to attend all scheduled practices. Regular attendance is crucial for the development of individual skills and team dynamics.

Games: Cheerleaders are required to attend all scheduled games. Missing games disrupts team performance and affects overall team morale.

### **3. Reporting Absences**

Excused Absences: Parents or guardians must notify the coach at least 24 hours in advance if a cheerleader will be absent due to illness, family emergencies, or other valid reasons.

Unexcused Absences: Failure to notify the coach in advance will result in the absence being considered unexcused.

### **4. Consequences for Unexcused Absences**

First Offense: The cheerleader will receive a verbal warning and a reminder of the attendance policy.

Second Offense: The cheerleader will be benched for the next game.

Third Offense: The cheerleader will be suspended from participating in two consecutive games.

Fourth Offense: A meeting will be held with the cheerleader, parents, and coaching staff to discuss further disciplinary actions, which may include suspension for the remainder of the season.

### **5. Tardiness**

Cheerleaders are expected to arrive on time for practices and games. Repeated tardiness will be addressed as follows:

First Offense: Verbal warning.

Second Offense: Additional conditioning or practice drills.

Third Offense: No activity for part of the next game.

### **6. Communication and Documentation**