

2011-12 AACCA School Cheer Safety Rules

Note: The format has changed from previous years. As always, read thoroughly and direct any questions to the applicable rules interpreter or the AACCA office.

Due to the reorganization, there may be updates to ensure that the new rules have not inadvertently allowed or restricted something that should not be allowed or restricted.

Rule changes are in bold text. For the current version and rule interpretations, visit <http://www.aacca.org>.

A. Glossary

Base: A person who is in direct contact with the performing surface and is supporting another person's weight.

Basket Toss: A stunt in which a top person is tossed by bases whose hands are interlocked.

Bracer: A top person that provides stability to another top person.

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.

Cupie/Awesome: A stunt in which both feet of the top person are in one hand of a base.

Dive Roll: A forward roll where the feet leave the ground before the hands reach the ground.

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.

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.

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.

Helicopter: 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.

Inverted: A body position where the shoulders are below the waist.

Knee Drop: Dropping to the knees without first bearing the majority of the weight on the hands or feet.

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.

Pyramid: Connected partner stunts.

Post: A person on the performing surface who may assist a top person during a stunt or transition.

Prop: Any object which can be manipulated or used as a base (ex: poms, signs, flags, megaphones, etc.)

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.

Released Pyramid Transition: A pyramid transition in which the top person is connected to a bracer while being released from their bases and is in a descending mode before being caught in a cradle, stunt or loading position.

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's head, neck and shoulders when coming off a stunt or pyramid or landing in a cradle. Spotters must have their attention focused on the top person in order to be considered a spotter. Momentarily looking away in order to assess environmental safety factors (poms, signs, another stunt, etc.) is allowed as long as their focus returns to the top person.

Stunt/Partner Stunt: One or more persons supporting one or more top persons off of the ground.

Suspended Roll: A skill in which a person in contact with bases or posts performs a foot-over-head rotation.

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.

Tic-Toc: A stunt that is held in a static position on one leg, the base(s) takes a downward dip and release the top person as the top person switches the weight to the other leg and lands in a static position on the opposite leg. The dip may or may not pass through prep level before release.

Top Person: A person who is not in contact with the performing surface and is being supported or stabilized by another person or has been tossed into the air.

Toss: An airborne stunt where the base(s) executes a throwing motion from below shoulder level to increase the height of the top person and the top person becomes free from all bases, posts or bracers.

B. General

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. An appropriate warm-up routine should precede all cheerleading activities.
8. 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 should not be performed on concrete, asphalt, wet or uneven surfaces or surfaces with obstructions.
9. Programs should qualify cheerleaders according to generally accepted teaching progressions. Appropriate spotting should be used until all performers demonstrate mastery of the skill.
10. All jewelry is prohibited during participation. Religious medals and medical medals are not considered to be jewelry. A religious medal without a chain must be taped and worn under the uniform. A medical alert medal must be taped and may be visible.

11. Supports, braces and air casts which are hard and unyielding or have rough edges or surfaces must be appropriately covered. A participant wearing a plaster-type or other hard, heavy cast shall not be involved in stunts, pyramids, tosses, tumbling or spotting.
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.
14. 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*.

C. Inversions

1. The top person may not be in an inverted position with the following exceptions:
 - a. Suspended forward rolls are allowed provided that all of the following conditions are met:
 - 1) The top person begins in a non-inverted position from the performing surface or a stunt.
 - 2) The top person has continuous hand-to-hand contact with two primary bases or with two posts who are controlling the top person. The top person cannot have contact with one base and one post or with bracers.
 - 3) The bases or posts cannot be involved in any other skill during the suspended roll.
 - 4) The top person lands in a double-based cradle or the performing surface. They may not land in a loading position for a stunt.
 - b. The top person may begin a stunt in an inverted position provided that all of the following conditions are met:
 - 1) The top person begins with at least one hand on the performing surface.
 - 2) The top person is loaded into a non-inverted position shoulder height or below.
 - 3) A base or spotter must maintain contact with the top person until they are in a non-inverted position.
 - 4) A base or spotter must be in a position to protect the head, neck and shoulder area of the top person.
 - c. ***The top person can be placed on the performing surface in an inverted position provided that all of the following conditions are met:***
 - 1) ***The inversion begins from a cradle or prone position below shoulder level. The cradle or prone position must be established prior to the inversion. In other words, the skill cannot simply "pass through" the cradle or prone position on the way to the inversion.***
 - 2) ***The inversion goes immediately to the performing surface with both the top person's hands supporting his or her weight.***
 - 3) ***Two original bases or an original base and a spotter must maintain contact with the top person in a position to protect the head, neck and shoulder area of the top person. This contact must be maintained until the top person's hands are on the performing surface.***

D. Partner Stunts

1. Partner stunts (free-standing or as part of a pyramid) higher than shoulder stand level must have a separate, continuous spotter for each person over shoulder stand level.
2. In single-based extended stunts, the spotter may not support under the heel or sole of the top person's foot. They may hold at the ankle of the top person and/or the wrist of the base or any combination thereof.
3. The top person in a partner stunt must receive primary support from a base or a bracer who is on a base.
4. The bases of any extended stunt must have both feet in direct weight-bearing contact with the performing surface.
5. Bases may not hold props in their hands if the hands are the primary support for the top person.
6. The total number of twists in a dismount from a stunt cannot be greater than two and one quarter rotations.
7. Partner stunts and pyramids may not pass over, under or through other partner stunts or pyramids.
8. Cradle dismounts from partner stunts or pyramids shoulder height or above to the original base(s) require an additional spotter in position to protect the head, neck and shoulders of the top person.
9. Cradle dismounts from partner stunts to another set of bases must be caught by three bases who are standing near the original base(s). Any type of gymnastics movement (1/2 turn, twist, toe touch, etc) after the top person has left the base(s) hands is prohibited.
10. The top person cannot be caught in a prone position from a release unless connected to a bracer.
11. Non-braced suspended splits in a transition are allowed provided all of the following conditions are met:
 - a. There are a total of four bases that support the top person.
 - b. 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.
 - c. The top person must have hand contact with bases during the split portion of the transition.
12. Free-standing tic-tocs are prohibited.
13. 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).
14. 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 Flatback, etc.)
15. When the top person falls away from the bases to a horizontal, straight-body position, a minimum of three catchers are required. The bases may not be counted as part of the required catchers.
16. When the top person is transitioned to a straight-body position between two bases, an additional catcher is required. *At least one of the catchers must control the upper torso.*
17. Tension drops are prohibited.
18. Helicopters are allowed provided all of the following conditions are met:
 - a. The top person makes no more than a 180 degree rotation (half-turn).
 - b. Four bases must be in position during the entire release.
 - c. There must be a base at the head/shoulder area during the initiation of the toss as well as the catch.
 - d. The bases are not allowed to change positions during the release.
 - e. The top person must begin and end in a face up position.
 - f. The top person cannot perform a twisting skill.

19. Single-based split catches are prohibited.
20. A single-base may not be the only primary support for two extended top persons. The exception to this rule is the following:
 - a. Double Cupies/Awesomes are allowed. If dismounted to cradles, there must be three people for each top person being cradled.
21. Dismounts to the performing surface require assistance from a base or spotter. This assistance must be sufficient to slow the momentum of the top person. The exception to this rule is the following:
 - a. Cradles may be set out to the performing surface without continuous contact.

E. Pyramids

1. The top person in a pyramid must receive primary support from a base or be connected to a bracer who is on a base.
2. In braced pyramids, at least one bracer of each pair must be at shoulder height or below. The exception to this rule is the following:
 - a. Extensions (double- or single-based) may brace other extensions.
3. Partner stunts and pyramids may not pass over, under or through other partner stunts or pyramids.
4. If a person in a 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.)
5. Hanging pyramids must have a continuous spotter for each shoulder stand involved in suspending another person. Hanging pyramids are not allowed to rotate.
6. In a Released Pyramid Transition the following rules apply:
 - a. At least three original 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. (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 his or her 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 during the transition.

F. Tosses (including tosses from the performing surface)

1. In all single-based tosses that land in a stunt all of the following rules apply:
 - a. The top person must land in a stunt on the original base.
 - b. The toss may not be directed so that the base must travel to catch the top person.
 - c. The top person cannot travel over or under another person.
 - d. The top person cannot be caught in a prone position.

2. In all single-based tosses that land in a loading position all of the following rules apply:
 - a. Must be caught in a loading position that includes the original base and a spotter who must be in position to protect the head, neck and shoulders.
 - b. The toss may not be directed so that the base must travel to catch the top person.
 - c. The top person cannot perform any skill (twist, toe touch, ball-up, etc.) during the toss.
 - d. The top person cannot travel over or under another person.
 - e. The top person cannot be caught in a prone position.
3. In all single-based tosses to a cradle all of the following rules apply:
 - a. Must be caught by at least three catchers that include the original base, one of whom must be at the head and shoulders.
 - b. The toss may not be directed so that the base must travel to catch the top person.
 - c. The top person may not hold any objects (poms, signs, etc.) during the toss.
 - d. The top person cannot travel over or under another person.
 - e. The top person cannot perform any skill (twist, toe touch, ball-up, etc.) during the toss.
 - f. Tosses to cradles are prohibited on surfaces other than a mat or grass (real or artificial).
4. In all multi-based tosses to a cradle the following rules apply:
 - a. No more than four tossers are allowed.
 - b. Must be caught by at least three of the original tossers, one of whom must be at the head and shoulders.
 - c. The toss may not be directed so that the bases must travel to catch the top person.
 - d. The top person may not hold any objects (poms, signs, etc.) during the toss.
 - e. The top person cannot travel over or under another person.
 - f. The total number of twists cannot be greater than two and one quarter rotations.
 - g. Tosses to cradles are prohibited on surfaces other than a mat or grass (real or artificial).
5. In multi-based tosses that land in a stunt or loading position the following rules apply:
 - a. Must be caught by at least two of the original tossers and a spotter who must be in position to protect the head, neck and shoulders.
 - b. The toss may not be directed so that the bases must travel to catch the top person.
 - c. The maximum distance allowed between the highest point of the base and the lowest point of a top person's body cannot exceed approximately twelve inches.
 - d. The top person cannot perform any skill (twist, toe touch, ball-up, etc.) during the toss. This rule does not apply to a "Quick Toss", which can perform skills on the way up.
 - e. The top person cannot travel over or under another person.
 - f. The top person cannot be caught in a prone position.
 - g. The top person may not land in a basket toss loading position from a toss.

G. 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 perform aerial tumbling or rebound over an individual or prop. (Cartwheels, rolls and walkovers are allowed.)
6. 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.)

7. Landings for all jumps 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.)
8. Knee drops 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.
10. Airborne drops to a prone position on the performing surface are illegal. (Examples: A back flip or a jump landing in a pushup position is illegal. A handspring to a pushup position is legal as it is not airborne prior to the prone landing.)

H. Specific Basketball/Indoor Court Restrictions

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.

1. Basket tosses, elevator/sponge tosses and other similar multi-based tosses are prohibited.
2. Partner stunts in which the base uses only one arm to support the top person are prohibited.
3. Released twists into or from stunts or pyramids are prohibited.
4. Inversions in partner stunts and pyramids are prohibited. The exceptions to this rule are the following:
 - a. Inversions that begin on the ground and go to an upright position where the top person is in constant contact with a base or spotter are allowed.
5. Twisting tumbling skills (Arabians, full twisting layouts, etc.) are prohibited. The exception to this rule is the following:
 - a. Cartwheels, roundoffs and aerial cartwheels are allowed.

I. Additional Restrictions for Elementary, Middle and Junior High School

The following restrictions for elementary, middle school and junior high teams are in addition to the above rules for high school teams:

1. Basket tosses, elevator tosses and similar multi-based tosses are prohibited.
2. The total number of twists in a dismount from stunts cannot be greater than one and one quarter rotation.

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.

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 rule, contact us at 800-533-6583.

Publish Date: 7/18/2011