

Lower Your Liability: Document!

by Jeanne Ehn

We live in a world where the simplest mistake can cause a lawsuit. To protect yourself and your cheerleaders, try to document as much as you can before you forget. Here are some simple ideas to help protect yourself and would show a jury that you have tried to protect your cheerleaders.

Keep a notebook/folder with all of the following information in it. Save it until the youngest cheerleader on this year's squad has been out of high school for a number of years.

- Have an emergency plan & fill out emergency forms for cheerleaders with contact numbers. Practice the emergency plan.
- Have your rules written down. Present them to the cheerleaders, their parents, and your AD/Principal at a Parents' Night.
- Stunt progressions – note the stunt, the position (base, back, flyer, front) of each cheerleader and the date they could do the stunt solidly five times in a row. Be sure to note dates of cradle dismounts. Remember that just because a cheerleader is a flyer in an extension doesn't mean the cheerleader can automatically be a base in an extension without having done all the progressions to it as a base. Each cheerleader needs to check out of each progression in the positions that they will do as they advance in the progressions. (If a base is never going to fly an extension, they don't need to check out as a flyer.)
- Sign in & out of practice – This shows when cheerleaders were in practice and when they left.
- Make & keep practice schedules – when you talk about safety at practice, make sure it is on the schedule. If someone is injured, note it and what you did for the injured cheerleader.
- Contact parents & fill out injury reports when there is an injury. Contact your AD/Principal, also.

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- Take responsibility as a coach. Ask yourself these questions: “Are they ready to advance to something more difficult (especially in stunting)?” If the answer is no, they don’t advance until you can answer, yes. Do YOU know how to explain what they are doing on the next level? If your answer is no, then they shouldn’t even try it until they are trained by someone who does have the necessary knowledge (this wouldn’t be a cheerleader in your program).
- Attend an ICCA/IHSAA cheerleading rules meeting. Attend the ICCA Conference or a coaches’ education course. These show your desire for knowledge and obtaining it, thus lowering your liability.

All of these things show your accountability as a coach. Accidents happen and we can never be 100% protected, but by using the suggestions above, you are taking great steps to protect yourself in an unfortunate situation.