

SPIRIT

Cheerleading / Dance are extracurricular activities designed to serve as a component of the athletic program. Its primary purpose is to foster school spirit, sportsmanship and a positive atmosphere at competitive events. Cheerleading, as an extracurricular activity, is not a competitive activity as sponsored by the Montana High School Association.

Being the most recognizable representative of a school, spirit groups are in a position of great influence; therefore, high standards of conduct are essential. Positive personal behavior and team cohesiveness demonstrate these standards. Appropriate behavior will help earn the respect of the student body, which is the core of developing effective school spirit and student involvement.

The MHSA will conduct mandatory spirit coach/advisor rules clinics for all MHSA member schools. All **cheer** coaches (head, assistant, volunteer) and all dance/drill team coaches (head, assistant, volunteer) must complete the clinic requirement. MHSA member schools' **cheer/dance** squads are allowed to perform stunts ONLY if spirit coach(es) at every level have completed and are current with the AACCA Safety Certification Course.

All provisions of the National Federation Spirit Rule Book as well as regulations listed in the MHSA Handbook shall be in effect for all spirit team activities including practices, games, performances and competitions (dance/drill included). Violations of these regulations are subject to penalties as outlined in Article VIII, Section (2) of the MHSA By-Laws. An individual school district may place further restrictions on their spirit squads than what is placed by the National Federation and the MHSA.

A spirit participant and coach must not commit an unsporting act. This includes, but is not limited to, acts or conduct such as: (a) disrespectfully addressing or contacting a game official or gesturing in such a manner as to indicate resentment; (b) Using profane or inappropriate language, music, or gestures; and (c) Baiting or taunting an opponent. The MHSA disapproves of any form of taunting which is intended to embarrass, ridicule or demean others under any circumstances including on the basis of race, religion, gender or national origin.

Schools' administrators and **cheer** / dance / drill team coaches need to make certain that the music being played during half-time entertainment is lyrically appropriate. Spirit teams are required to keep dance movements non-offensive and non-suggestive. High school contests are family events and music should be appropriate for an audience of all ages.

It is important to note that it is the coach's responsibility to follow all rules found in the National Federation Spirit Rule Book as well as the rules found in the MHSA Handbook. – Listed below are the areas where MHSA has been more restrictive in the spirit rules than what the National Federation has set forth.

- (1) No individual shall participate in a **spirit-related activity** until he/she has a minimum of ten (10) days of practice with one practice session per day on ten (10) different days (no practice permitted on Sunday) prior to the date of the first allowable game.
- (2) The Association prohibits spirit teams from participating in any spirit related activity on a Sunday.
- (3) Participation at games/contests is limited to a school's spirit team (no children younger than the sixth grade for those schools that don't have an adequate student population) except for performances prior to the game or during intermission. Participation in spirit team activities during interscholastic contests must be limited to bona-fide students of the school district who are designated as members of the school's spirit team. A bona-fide student is one who has not graduated and is eligible to participate with and/or compete for a designated school according to the rules of the MHSA. All team members must be in position of close proximity to the playing field (team members may not be brought out of the stands).
- (4) Spirit team members are prohibited from throwing any type of object into or from the spectator section.
- (5) Whether stunting or not, all members of a team shall wear their hair away from the face and off the shoulders (i.e. wearing a side ponytail would not meet the intent of the rule "off the shoulders". Hair devices (ornamental and functional) shall be safe and secure. No head covering is allowed unless being worn as part of a costume during a non-stunting half time performance. The team is to remove hats or bandanas before they resume spirit activities.
- (6) When standing at attention, apparel must cover the midriff. Skirts, pants or shorts are to remain zipped and/or buttoned and should be worn in the manner intended.
- (7) The formation of "rally lines" by spectators, fans and/or students on or near the playing field/floor during the introduction of players or at any other time before, during, or after a game is prohibited. Props which players run through are legal if being held by spirit squad members in an appropriate area of the playing surface, however, no stunting is allowed while holding the player run-through.
- (8) Megaphones are permitted when being used appropriately by spirit squads to magnify the words of a cheer or chant.