



Prioritizing Athlete Wellness: USA Cheer Urges Thoughtful, Body-Positive Uniform Guidelines

USA Cheer is distributing new guidance to members in the cheer community on uniform guidelines. As the governing body for cheerleading in the United States, USA Cheer is committed to fostering an environment that prioritizes athlete safety, wellness, and positive body image. At the same time, uniform traditions in cheerleading have evolved over the years, and emerging research and athlete feedback point to the need for a more modern, inclusive, and athlete-centered approach. After many months of reviewing current guidelines and recommendations with respected industry leaders and athletes, we are sharing recommendations as you plan your next season.

This position statement serves as a recommendation for parents, athletes, coaches, and program leaders to review their uniform choices with an emphasis on body autonomy, comfort, and sport-appropriate attire. Our goal is to encourage thoughtful decision-making that supports the overall health, confidence, and performance of cheer athletes.

Key Considerations for Uniform Choices

Supporting Athlete Comfort and Confidence

- [A University of South Carolina body image study](#) found 68% of cheer athletes reported feeling self-conscious in their uniforms; 74% said uniform standards negatively affected their body image.
- USA Cheer recommends that teams consider uniform designs that provide options for athletes, including full-body tops and boy-cut shorts instead of briefs under skirts. Skirts should be at a minimum, longer than the shorts underneath. Providing alternative styles, less form-fitting

tops, or uniforms with more coverage can foster greater confidence among athletes.

- Age-appropriate attire should be prioritized, particularly for younger athletes (ages 5-12), with a focus on comfortable, modest designs that allow for freedom of movement without unnecessary exposure.

Practice and Non-Competition Attire Guidelines

- Encourage comfortable, supportive options for practice: full-length tops, tank tops, leggings, or athletic shorts.
- Programs should avoid mandating crop tops or other revealing attire for practice sessions, ensuring athletes have the choice to wear full-length tops or additional layers.
- When athletes are not actively competing, they should have access to team-branded attire (such as jackets, sweatshirts, or track pants) to promote a polished, professional image while ensuring comfort and coverage—a great option to be worn at award ceremonies.

Social Media Considerations and Athlete Consent

- A social media policy should be implemented to guide the posting of athlete images. Photos featuring revealing uniforms or athletic poses should be reviewed by the coaching staff and the athletes before being publicly shared.
- Athletes should have the right to give or withhold consent for their images to be posted, empowering them to control their digital presence and request that published images be removed if so desired.
- Organizations should strive to represent cheerleading positively and professionally by focusing on images that highlight athleticism, teamwork, and skill, rather than unnecessarily revealing content.
- [See the photography recommended guidelines on our website.](#)

Alignment with Other Sports and Governing Bodies

- Gymnastics: USA Gymnastics and the French Gymnastics Federation now allow unitards and shorts for increased comfort and movement coverage.
- Swimming/Diving: FINA provides greater uniform flexibility.
- Wrestling: Compression shirts and shorts are now widely accepted alternatives.
- Track & Field: 43% of surveyed female athletes reported discomfort in standard uniforms, prompting revised attire policies with the inclusion of longer shorts and looser tops as acceptable alternatives.
- For 20+ years, the NFHS has required full-top uniforms for all high school cheerleaders to align with other high school sports.
- The International Cheer Union and IASF require full tops uniforms for all teams competing.
- Cheerleading can follow suit by evaluating apparel standards.

Mental Health and Body Image Support

- The University of South Carolina cheerleading study found that 52% of cheer athletes reported anxiety linked to body image, and 30% feared judgment based on uniform appearance.
- USA Cheer encourages programs to incorporate body image education into athlete development. Providing resources on self-esteem, body neutrality, and mental health awareness can significantly impact athletes' overall well-being.
- Where possible, ensure access to mental health professionals, peer support, and educational materials to support athlete well-being.

Body Neutrality and Language

- Coaches and program leaders should use body-neutral language, avoiding discussions focused on weight, appearance, or body shape.
- Praise should center on skill development, teamwork, and effort rather than physical attributes.
- Research shows athletes thrive when praise focuses on ability rather than body image.

Engaging Parents and Guardians in Uniform Choices

- Encourage open dialogue between athletes, families, and coaches around uniform concerns.
- Parents play a key role in promoting confidence and helping athletes navigate body image in sport.

Regular Review of Attire Policies

- Uniform standards should be reviewed regularly with feedback from athletes, coaches, and mental health experts.
- Include modest, professional options for travel and team appearances, in alignment with athlete comfort.

Guidance for Coaches in Discussing Uniform Choices

- To ensure a supportive and open dialogue, coaches can use the following script as a guide:
- *“For this upcoming season, we have several uniform options available, including full-length and crop-top styles, as well as shorts and skirts. Our goal is for every athlete to feel comfortable and confident in what they wear. If you have any concerns about fit or preference, please reach out to me or have your parent/guardian contact us. We are here to ensure that you feel your best in both practice and competition.”*

- This approach empowers athletes to make choices that support their comfort and body confidence without unnecessary pressure.

Call to Action

USA Cheer recognizes that uniforms are an integral part of cheerleading's tradition and culture. However, as we look toward the future, it is essential to ensure that uniform choices reflect a commitment to athlete well-being, inclusivity, and body confidence.

We encourage all stakeholders—parents, athletes, coaches, apparel companies, and event producers—to take an active role in evaluating uniform options that promote comfort, confidence, and body autonomy. By embracing more inclusive and athlete-centered uniform choices, we can contribute to a healthier, more positive cheerleading experience for all participants.

As cheerleading continues to grow, USA Cheer will remain committed to advancing recommendations that support the holistic well-being of cheer athletes at all levels. Let's work together to create a future where every athlete feels strong, confident, and empowered.