



# **Parent and Cheerleader Handbook**

## ***Mission and Goals of Reston Youth Cheer (RYA CHEER)***

Cheerleading is a team sport designed for girls and boys in K through 12th grade. Participants must be at 5 years old by October 1<sup>st</sup>. No experience required and no tryouts to make a team. All that is required is enthusiasm, spirit, and regular practice to master cheers and chants, and build on teamwork. Cheerleading offers young athletes a chance to learn cheerleading skills involving motions, jumps, stunting, tumbling, and dance—possibly to pursue high school cheerleading. Squads are organized by grade and skill level to ensure team compatibility, safety and skill development. Cheerleading is an athletic sport, involving strength for stunting, and stamina while you jump, cheer and dance. The cheerleaders get the teams fired up with personalized cheers, signs and banners, tunnels at the end of games and special crowd chants. The goal of Reston Youth Cheer is to offer quality cheer instruction to youth athletes and work towards building a strong and dynamic youth program that will be long lasting and provide a foundation for upcoming Reston youth interested in cheerleading.

### **Mission**

Our mission is to train youth athletes in all aspects of the sport of cheerleading in order to prepare them for high school cheerleading. Training includes motion technique, stunting, tumbling, jumps and dance. We work towards achieving our mission through committed volunteers, committed parents and committed cheerleaders. Participants must be committed to attending and being on time for practices and games; improving cheer skills, working on flexibility and perfecting jumps, outside of practice; and to being focused at practices and games, listening to the coach, and paying attention when learning new cheer material.

## ***General Participation Rules and Regulations***

- Parents agree to provide support, care and encouragement of children while participating in the Cheer Program.
- Parents will encourage good sportsmanship by demonstrating respect and positive support of all cheerleaders, coaches and parents at games, practices or other events.
- Parents will carefully review the rules and regulations with their child and adhere to the rules.
- Parents understand that a violation of these rules may result in the suspension or termination of their child's participation in RYA CHEER.
- Cheerleaders will treat team members, other cheerleaders, football players, coaches, officials, and fans with kindness and respect, regardless of race, gender, creed, or ability by refraining from rude or abusive language, actions or gestures. Parents should help encourage this behavior throughout participation in the program.
- Cheerleaders agree to have a positive attitude among the team, teammates, and coaches and demonstrate the positive aspects of youth sports while participating in RYA CHEER.

- Cheerleaders will observe good sportsmanship by demonstrating positive support of team mates, coaches and parents at every game, practice, or other events.
- Cheerleaders should practice healthy eating habits and avoid sugary snacks, drinks and sodas while at practice or games. These types of foods are known to be dehydrating to the body. Cheerleaders should always bring a water bottle to practice and games.
- Cheerleaders will pay attention to coaches and follow their directions, respecting that coaches are volunteering their personal time to coach and instruct.
- Cheerleaders will carefully review the rules and regulations with their parent and adhere to the rules.
- Cheerleaders understand that a violation of these rules will result in the suspension or termination of their participation in RYA CHEER.

### ***Spirit/Sportsmanship***

RYA CHEER encourages team spirit and sportsmanship by awarding a team spirit award at the end of the season. Spirit means following the rules. Spirit means respecting yourself, your coach, your team and your community. Spirit means optimizing your cheer experience by meeting other team cheerleaders in the area and sharing cheer experiences. Spirit means learning the sport of cheerleading and pursuing better skills and not just saying, "I'm a Cheerleader". Spirit means to always have integrity when communicating with your connections and make interactions positive and uplifting for others. Spirit means looking beyond yourself and putting your team first.

### ***Uniforms/Accessories***

- The uniforms that are loaned to all cheerleaders include a skirt and top. The cheerleader is responsible for purchasing hair bow, turtleneck, bloomers, socks and shoes. To ensure uniformity, the cheerleader is to wear items purchased through RYA CHEER only.
- Cheerleaders must act appropriate while wearing the uniform. Cheerleaders must remember that they represent the organization and their community. The uniform and accessories that are chosen by the cheerleading coaching staff are mandatory. The uniform is to be worn at games.
- Cheerleaders will not make any alterations to their game uniform unless approved by the Commissioner. Uniforms must be returned at the end of the season. If any alterations are made or equipment is not returned, Cheerleader/Parents will be held financially responsible.
- Cheerleaders will be issued practice uniforms which they are required to wear at all practices.

- During practice and games, Cheerleaders must be in uniform and have their hair pulled back away from the face. No jewelry in or on any part of the body, including toe, belly, ear, and tongue. Nails must be kept at a sports length. Chewing Gum is prohibited.
- Effective fall 2012, a valid credit, debit card or cash deposit in the form of a held check will be required upon receiving a uniform. If the cheer uniform is not returned at the end of the season, the credit card will be charged \$50.

## ***Practices and Games***

### **Practices**

Practice attendance is mandatory. Practices are designed to teach cheerleaders cheers and chants and other important information they will be using at the games. Therefore, it is imperative that the cheerleader attends all practices.

Parents must have the cheerleader arrive 10 minutes early and be ready to start practice on time. Parents must return for pick up 10 minutes before practice completion for announcements or in case of early dismissal.

Parents who will be late to pick up your cheerleader need to call your coach and alert them to any emergency situation.

The following steps will be taken for cheerleaders who are not picked up by the end of practice:

- 1) Contact parent or guardian listed, if no response then;
- 2) Contact emergency contacts to take custody of cheerleader, if no response then;
- 3) Contact Fairfax County Police to take custody of cheerleader

If this action is required three times, we will dismiss your cheerleader from the program without a refund.

Cheerleaders are to participate in all aspects of practice. Practices include but are not limited to, cheer/chant review, running, stretching, strength training, stunting, tumbling and jump conditioning.

Cheer shoes are to be worn throughout the entire practice.

Cheerleaders are to wear their practice uniforms and hair should be pulled back into a pony tail. No jewelry or gum is allowed during practices. Any violations of these rules will result in the cheerleader not being able to participate in practice thereby forfeiting her participation in the week's game or event.

### **Summer Practice**

Summer practice begins when Fairfax County Fall Athletic practice begins, usually the first week in August.

Practice is held on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday during the month of August. Practices are held on the basketball courts at Langston Hughes MS opposite the football fields where the RYA football teams practice. Practice times are 6:00 PM–8:00 PM.

### **Fall Practice**

Fall practice schedule starts once school starts. Practices are one day a week and held on Tuesday with games on Saturday. Practices are held in the Auxiliary Gym at South Lakes HS. RYA CHEER competition team may hold additional practices. We follow FCPS Extracurricular Activities Participation Policy which states that if the cheerleader didn't attend school for any reason they may not participate in practices or games.

Parents must remain outside of practice area once practices begin. It is our experience that cheerleaders are easily distracted when parents and siblings are inside the gym, and this can become a safety issue.

Climbing on equipment in the auxiliary gym is prohibited for safety reasons. Please do not allow any children to climb on the equipment at any time.

Parents are asked to help keep the practice area clear of trash by reminding their cheerleader to pick up any trash and collecting their water bottles and other belongings.

### **Games**

We cheer at all home games which are played at South Lakes High School. The older teams may cheer up to 2 games on their game day, depending on the schedule. This is to ensure cheerleaders are present at most/all of home games. The games usually start at 9am and the last game, of the day is usually at 4:30 PM.

Cheerleaders will be required to arrive ONE HOUR prior to game, unless told otherwise by coach. Cheerleaders' game schedule will have an arrival time and game time. Cheerleader must arrive by arrival time to not be marked tardy. We use the extra time to practice half-time and quarter break cheers. If cheerleader is not at the game on time, she may not be included in the half-time or quarter cheers.

Upon arrival, they should be ready to begin warm up and stretching with the coach. Cheerleaders should always arrive at games in proper uniform, including turtleneck, hair bow and cheer shoes, with their warm up. If a cheerleader is not in an appropriate uniform, she will not be allowed to participate. Cheerleaders are not permitted to wear leggings or tights under their bloomers & skirts, as they can be a safety hazard while stunting. If you have concerns, speak to your coach.

During games, cheerleaders are to stay in formation and in ready position at all times. Games are not a time to socialize with team mates. Cheerleaders must always be focused on the game and the coach in order to be prepared to lead the fans to cheer for the players.

The game schedule is determined after the final weigh-ins which are usually the first week of September. A game schedule will be provided. Game schedules and updates are also posted at <http://www.fcyfl.org>.

Parents are asked to help keep the bleacher areas clean and trash free.

### ***Inclement weather***

Summer practices are held outdoors on the basketball courts at Langston Hughes MS. Practices will be held when there is a chance for rain. If it is raining at 6:00 PM, a decision will be made to continue with practice based on the duration of the rain and whether or not lightning is in the area. If lightning is in the area, we will move practice to South Lakes HS pending space availability, if no space is available, practice will be canceled. Please make sure you or someone is always available to pick up your child in case of an emergency situation. In most emergency situations, we will contact parents on their cell phones. In addition, if practice is canceled, a make-up practice session may be held, in addition to regular practice, on a non-scheduled practice day.

Fall practices are held at South Lakes HS Auxiliary Gym. Please sign up for Keep In Touch (KIT) on fcps.edu website for South Lakes so that you will be informed if evening activities are canceled. If for any reason, evening activities are canceled for all FCPS schools, we will not hold practice or any other event scheduled. We will send out an email and update the website as soon as possible, if practice is canceled.

### ***Cheer skills***

RYA CHEER is a recreation cheer program designed for youth athletes. The skills taught are consistent with universal cheerleading skills which include motion technique, stunt building technique, jump technique, cheer dance technique and cheer tumbling technique. These skills are combined with voice projection, spirit/enthusiasm, crowd interaction, and knowledge of sport, memorization of cheers, chants and routines. Fall cheer focuses on being game ready and learning the importance of cheering for a football team, getting the crowd involved in the game and supporting community events. Spring cheer focuses on tumbling and stunting.

Cheer stunt skills that are at or above shoulder level should not be practiced or performed without the presence of a coach and/or two spotters. This pattern of safety is crucial to the safety of your cheerleader and it is her responsibility to not participate in any activity that does not have a coach and/or spotter present.

## ***Disciplinary Action***

It is the policy of RYA CHEER that disciplinary action will only be invoked as a last resort and that every attempt will be made to avoid situations likely to lead to such action through positive encouragement to correct negative behavior.

A cheerleader may be suspended from games/events for excessive absence without approval or notice, excessive tardiness without approval or notice and excessive subordination to the coach.

A cheerleader may be dismissed from the program **for causing irreconcilable discord among team members, causing negative influence among team members and conduct that negatively impacts the team** or program and as otherwise deemed necessary by the Commissioner and/or RYA CHEER Board of Advisors.

Any violation of rules that are deemed necessary may constitute a phone call to parent by coach or Commissioner. If cheerleader requires a second call to parent, the cheerleader will be dismissed from the program.

## ***Attendance***

- Cheerleaders are required to attend and be on time for ALL practices, games and performances.
- Practice attendance is crucial. Practices are only one day a week and are mandatory. If your cheerleader cannot attend practice for any reason, her game participation may be limited, at the coach's discretion. The cheerleader is still expected to attend the game to support her team. She must attend the game in full uniform.
- If your cheerleader will be late for practice, we ask that you text, email or call your coach so that she will be informed of the tardy and will be able to adjust practice.
- If your cheerleader will not be able to attend practice, we ask that you text, email or call your coach.
- Parents who will be late to pick up your cheerleader need to call your coach and alert them to any emergency situation.

The following steps will be taken for cheerleaders who are not picked up by the end of practice:

- 1) Contact parent or guardian listed, if no response then;
- 2) Contact emergency contacts to take custody of cheerleader, if no response then;
- 3) Contact Fairfax County Police to take custody of cheerleader

If this action is required three times, we will dismiss your cheerleader from the program without a refund.

- The cheerleader's fall attendance record will determine the type of end of season award received.

## ***Awards and Recognition***

### **Participation Award**

Each cheerleader will receive a participation award at the end of the season either in the form of a certificate and/or rosette and/or trophy. Certificates are awarded to cheerleaders who have no more than 3 absences; certificates and rosettes are awarded to all cheerleaders who have no more than 1 absence; certificate, rosette and trophy are awarded to cheerleaders who have no absences.

### **Academic All-Star Award**

Medals will be given to cheerleaders who have no Ns, Cs, Ds or Fs.

### **Spirit Award**

This is a team voted award to the cheerleader who has the best attitude and shows the best sportsmanship toward her team mates.

### **Most Valuable Cheerleader Award**

This is a team voted award to the cheerleader who has presented themselves as most valuable. The team would not be the same without her presence at a game or event.

### **Coach Award**

This is an award decided on by the coach and is given to the cheerleader who has demonstrated a marked improvement in skills and dedication to her team.

### **Award of Excellence**

This award is given to the cheerleader who has served at least 4 years with Reston Youth Cheer and is graduating out of the program to high school.

## ***Volunteer***

RYA CHEER is a volunteer organization made up of parents of the cheerleaders and former RYA cheerleaders. Volunteers are crucial to the ongoing operation of the program. We ask that parents volunteer for at least one role during the season. The following roles are available, head



coach, assistant coach, team mom, team photographer, special events coordinator, and End of Season Banquet coordinator.

### ***Fund Raising/Donations/Scholarship***

RYA CHEER will participate in a minimum of one fundraiser per year. Your child is expected to participate in the fund raising and raise the required amount of funds. In addition, RYA CHEER is a youth recreational program and is eligible for community/business donations. We are always seeking business donations to help improve our program and work towards our mission. As a registered Fairfax County Youth Program, we are eligible to offer registration scholarships. Donation can be made via the RYA web site at <http://www.restonseahawks.org>.

### ***Community Events***

Supported activities include but are not limited to:

- RYA Football Games
- RYA Pep Rally
- Fundraisers
- South Lakes HS Youth Night
- South Lakes HS Homecoming Parade
- South Lakes Volleyball – Dig Pink Game
- South Lakes Women’s Basketball Half-Time Performance
- Reston Town Center Holiday Parade
- Fairfax County Youth Cheer Performance Day
- Recreational Competition Event

### ***Communication***

We will make every effort to communicate with game schedules, upcoming events, changes in schedules, practices, cancelations and other important information. Most important and pertinent information will be posted on our web site or will be sent out via email and text.

Below are important email and web sites:

- All information available on web site – [www.restonseahawks.org](http://www.restonseahawks.org)
- Other information – [commissioner@restonyouthcheer.org](mailto:commissioner@restonyouthcheer.org)

***Pledge***

**Reston Youth Cheer and Parent Pledge**

**“I understand that Cheerleading is a commitment of my time and energy and I will make every effort to attend every game and practice. I will notify my coach in advance of any absence that is unavoidable. I am willing to dedicate myself to this sport during the season, and do so, in a positive and appropriate manner. I will support RYA CHEER and my team, and be kind and respectful to others at all times. I will abide by all guidelines and regulations at all RYA CHEER events. I understand if my behavior is inappropriate, or not to the standards set forth, disciplinary action will be taken.”**

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**I have read and understand the Reston Youth Cheer Parent and Cheerleader Handbook. I hereby agree to abide by these rules and the guidelines set forth for Parents and Cheerleaders.**