CARA Gymnastics Safety Awareness Training:
Safety Awareness Training is a credential for a gymnastics professional, but is not a guarantee of safe conduct. This is only a means of enhancing a gymnastics professionals' awareness of safety issues and injury trends.

- **Major factors of safety throughout a gymnastics program:**
  - There are seven major safety factors that every gymnastics professional deals with on a daily basis. These factors must be understood and cared for correctly if the gymnastics professional, program participants, and others are going to operate and maintain a safe environment.
    - Philosophy
    - Legal
    - Program Factors
    - Rules of the Sport
    - On Site Care and Responsibilities
    - Performer Readiness
    - Environmental Safety Factors

- **I. Philosophy**
  - C.A.R.A. Philosophy
  - Know your agency’s philosophy
  - Coaching Philosophy
  - An easy to remember acronym for COACH is:
    - C - Comprehension, It is important that you understand the basic skills and progressions of gymnastics.
    - O - Outlook, Your perspective and goals - what you are seeking as a coach.
    - A - Affection, A genuine concern for the safety and well-being of the gymnast.
    - C - Character, What kind of role model are you?
    - H - Humor, A sense of humor may sometimes put in perspective the balance required to making it fun and educational.
  - The primary consideration and foremost responsibility of the coach centers on two functions, they are safety and education.

- **II. Legal**
  - What are your programs policies and procedures regarding safety responsibilities?
  - Top 9 Legal Responsibilities:
    - 1. Provide a safe environment. Facilities must be safe for both the users and all others involved in the activity. You must provide appropriate supervision, depending on the situation and the sort of activities. The more dangerous the activity the closer the supervision must be.
    - 2. Properly plan the activities. Develop clear, written rules for training and general conduct, including lesson plans, skill progressions and staff policies. Recognize and understand the necessary progressions and the time it takes to
go through them. It is imperative to use appropriate progressions in the teaching of new skills, especially potentially dangerous skills.

- 3. Provide adequate and proper equipment. Existing codes and standards for equipment should be met and all equipment should be maintained. Equipment should be inspected and repaired periodically-keep adequate records of inspections.

- 4. Match or equate the gymnasts to proper skill levels. Coaches must understand the training and background of each student including his/hers limitations. In matching athletes, consideration should be given to age, height, maturity, skill level and experience. Coaches must recognize the effect of mental preparation and readiness.

- 5. Warn of inherent risks in gymnastics. Warning gymnasts and parents of the inherent risk in the participation of gymnastics is recommended by legal experts. “Failure to Warn” is most often a legal problem for gymnastics coaches involved in an allegation by the injured party. Coaches must be familiar with the ordinary risks involved with this sport and general facilities. Risks that are inherent to the activity must be explained in terms that the participants can understand.

- 6. Evaluate gymnasts for injury or incapacity. Athletes must be evaluated for injury and incapacity. Coaches should be knowledgeable of basic emergency, first aid, injury prevention and injury management procedures.

- 7. Know emergency procedures and basic first aid measures. Emergency procedures must be kept up to date. The facilities general information must be posted by the emergency phone, such as: Dial 9 to get an outside line, and then dial 911 for emergencies. The address of the facility, The phone number from which they are calling

- 8. Keep adequate records. Adequate records are useful aids and should be kept on all athletes. These include relevant and general medical information, progress reports and injury reports. Examples of what an individuals file should include are the following:
  - a. Registration forms, class information, communications
  - b. Pre-participation exam, physical abilities, any restrictions
  - c. Waiver, release and consent forms
  - d. Progress reports/ skill achievement reports
  - e. Injury / illness reports, doctor's release, treatment / rehabilitation reports
  - f. Maintenance / inspection reports

- 9. Continually educate. Coaches have a responsibility to regularly update their coaching knowledge concerning proper techniques and keep themselves informed of new developments within their sport.

- You can take steps to help protect yourself from potential liability; however any case causing injury must prove that the actions given were of reasonable and prudent care.

- Negligence occurs when an individual fails to use reasonable and prudent care that results in injuries or damages of another party.
Comparative Negligence is when the negligence or fault for a given circumstance is prorated among all persons involved in the accident.

Contributory Negligence prevents a person from recovering damages if that person contributed toward causing his own injury.

Assumption of Risk is if a party voluntarily places himself in situation which he knows to be dangerous, then that party assumes the risk of injury. This must be documented in order to be useful in a successful defense.

There are two forms of consent –

- Implied consent means the person has not signed a written agreement, but voluntarily chooses to participate, and the inherent risks of the activity he/she is well aware of.
- Express consent means the person contracts to not use any future injuries that may be caused by negligence against the given party, therefore releasing them from liability.

III. Program Factors

Many factors play a key role in providing a safe and rewarding experience for the participants.

- Providing proper instruction is one of the legal responsibilities of coaching and extends to the entire organization. The base of providing proper instruction starts with curriculum development. Follow your agencies specified curriculum program.

A method of introducing a new skill is an easy to remember acronym: I.D.E.A.

- I - Introduce (verbal explanation)
- D - Demonstrate (visual)
- E - Educate (whole/part, drills)
- A - Act (doing the skill)

Knowing how to communicate with your participants is a must. Know how to communicate with coworkers, parents, participants by using verbal and nonverbal communication.

Keeping the practice at a positive level is a responsibility of the coach.

A compliment sandwich:

- Giving a compliment, a positive observation of the performance, a correction that the performance of the skill needs, how to make the correction, a different positive observation of the same performance.

Every curriculum must include the Warm Up.

- A directed and thorough physical warm up should be incorporated prior to any physical activity the gymnasts participate in. The objective of the warm up is to raise the core body temperature which results in muscles that contract and relax more efficiently. An increased metabolic rate and an appropriate state of neuromuscular arousal. During warm up is an opportune time to practice simple movements that may be beneficial in later training skill mastery.

- Many kinds of activities may be used for warm up, jogging, dancing, calisthenics, etc. The activity should be mildly vigorous without extreme ranges of motion, demanding enough to cause the participant to breathe heavy, simple enough that skill does not play a major role in the performance of the activities.
The warm up should include specific movements/positions for the skills being performed, (stretching). If a gymnast is not active for a period of 30-40 minutes a new warm up should commence that will return the body temperature to an elevated state.

- **Cool down**
  - After any physical activity the gymnasts should conclude each session with a period of conditioning and stretching. Muscle strength and endurance will help your gymnasts develop the ability to perform skills successfully. The cool down lets gymnasts build their physical strength and increase their flexibility. The objective of the cool down is to help the body to slowly return to the resting core temperature and will help avoid stiffness of the muscles.

- **Progressions**
  - For the safety of the gymnast progressions of skills should be followed. It is of high importance to match the skills with the abilities (physical and mental) of the gymnast. It is the responsibility of the Administrators, Coaches and even judges to always act at or above the Standard of Care.
  - Standard of Care is the standard that a reasonably prudent individual would follow under the same or similar circumstances. The teaching and learning of skills slowly and in a progressive manner is, without question, a necessity to success and safety in a gymnastics activity. Teaching with progressions ensures that a gymnast should be able to clearly demonstrate mastery over a broad spectrum of basic gymnastics skills before advancing to more complex movements.
  - The core of gymnastics training is developing greater body awareness. In all activity, even the most complex skills stem from the continuous refinement of even the most basic skills. Body awareness, landings and movement education are all foundations for utilizing progressions in gymnastics. Once basic skills and concepts are mastered, a performer may then proceed in a progressive manner, to more complex skills.
  - The benefits of body awareness training include: general control, potential for successful skill learning and safety. The primary goals of movement education include: understanding the principal of movement, knowing what their bodies can and can not do and knowing where their bodies are during movement. Falling and landing skills are among the most important skills to learn in gymnastics. Gymnasts need to practice these basic drills until they can land using the basic safe landing position every time. These safety skills can be used in other activities. Landing drills should be practiced under direct supervision. No matter what drill is practiced, emphasize that a feet first landing is the ultimate goal. Falling drills must to be practiced to ensure that the gymnast does not invite injury by placing their arms behind them and to protect their head and neck by learning to tuck and roll.

- **Spotting Methods**
  - There are several spotting methods which include: manual spotting, hand belt spotting, over head belt spotting. Prerequisites for the spotter - full understanding of the skill or series, Mental visualization of required body position, knowing possible performance errors, knowing when and how much to
spot, knowing the correct position of the hands, sufficient strength, agility and coordination to execute the spot, knowing when and how to follow through, knowledge of the positioning required, knowledge of the gymnast's physical and mental strengths weaknesses and quirks.

- There is sensitivity as to how coaches spot. This is of special concern when the gymnast is a young girl and the spotter is a male. Some guidelines include:
  - spot only as much as is required avoiding unnecessary touching, the most effective spot is executed near the center of gravity, spotting an appendage (arm or leg) may also be used, make every effort to avoid spotting or touching the gymnasts - chest, buttocks or other sensitive areas. In the case of an accidental touch of one of these areas acknowledgment and an apology is usually most acceptable.

### IV. Rules of the Sport

- A variety of organizations have published guidelines for competition in gymnastics. Each of these affects the safety responsibilities of the gymnastics professionals and athletes participating in competition. Rules and regulations published by various organizations provide guidelines for competition as well as setting the standards for participants, the structure of competitions and the conduct of officials.

- An official shares the responsibility of the participants and the sports professional. They have the responsibilities to ensure:
  1. All rules and regulations of the event are enforced.
  2. Starting and or stopping the event.
  3. Communicating with their colleges, the participants and professionals of any decisions made that are not clearly outlined in the rules and regulations.
  4. Alertness and able to take actions to any obvious safety hazards and to report them immediately.
  5. Recommending the enactment of rules that minimize the risk of injuries and recommendations that may enhance the participants overall performance.
  6. Maintaining the required certifications and familiarizing themselves of the rules and regulations with continuing education.
  7. Have the knowledge that as an official they to are held at a standard and can be named as a liable party in the case of injury.

- Specific rules and regulations for C.A.R.A. gymnastics participation can be found in:
  - C.P.R.A. rule book
  - C.A.R.A gymnastics rule book
  - National Federation of State High School Association rule book
  - Continuing Education may not necessarily be a rule of the sport, but it is a must in safety awareness.

- There are many different organizations that are available for sports professionals to enhance their knowledge base. Some of these organizations are:
  - The American Red Cross
  - National Youth Sports Coaches Association
  - USA Gymnastics offers several courses - [www.usa-gymnastics.org](http://www.usa-gymnastics.org)
V. On Site Care and Responsibilities

After hiring, both the employee and the employer have responsibilities for training and education of the professional. It is a strong recommendation to have an employee handbook that details the responsibilities, and explains the organizations expectations, rules, policies and procedures. Gymnastics most commonly is a safe and fun activity; however there are some inherent risks associated with participation in this activity.

Developing and implementing an emergency plan is essential, the plan must involve:

- Gathering information on each participant, telephone numbers including medical info.
- Post the established protocol to follow in case of an emergency Have and maintain a first aid kit, A First Aid Kit should include:
  - Bandages, gauze pads, alcohol/alcohol preps, bandage scissors, blood splatter gown, cotton swabs, elastic tape, goggles, hydrogen peroxide, surgical gloves, nail clippers, non-bacterial ointment, ice pack, powder,
  - safety pins, thermometer, tongue blades, tweezers, skin lube

The top priority of safety awareness is the prevention of injury, however knowing the proper procedures for preventing and then dealing with injuries are:

- Prevention of injury includes all of the following:
  - Physical conditioning
  - Facility and equipment inspection
  - Proper apparel for all (coaches and participants)
  - Educating on landing technique and posture
  - Educating on falling to prevent further injury
  - Matching gymnasts with skill ability physically and mentally
  - Knowing what to do in the case of injuries:
  - In the case where a serious injury is suspected a method to remember is:
    - STOP
      - S - Stop (all movement of and around the gymnast)
      - T - Talk (is gymnast responding coherently)
      - O - Observe (is gymnast conscious and breathing)
      - P - Prevent further injury (decide plan action)
  - In the case where a less serious injury is suspected, a minor strain or sprain, a guideline to follow is:
    - R.I.C.E.
      - R – Rest
      - I – Ice
      - C – Compress
      - E - Elevate and E-Evaluate (referral for medical assessment)
  - In the case where an the athlete is unconscious and E.M.S. is being called these three steps must be enacted:
    - "A.B.C’s"- Method for unconsciousness
    - A - Airway (is their airway blocked)
B - Breathing (are they breathing)
- C - Circulation (do they have a pulse)

- **Shock** - At any time an injured party may go into shock, steps must be taken to give support during that time:
  1. Make sure the party has a secure airway
  2. Control major sources of bleeding
  3. Prevent the drop of body temperature, use blankets to cover

- **Head and Neck injuries** may happen in gymnastics as well as injuries to the central nervous system, these injuries can be most devastating and it is imperative to act quickly in preventing further or more damaging injury. Signs of a head injury include, but are not limited too:
  1. Headache
  2. Loss of consciousness, temporary to any length of time
  3. Confusion
  4. Amnesia
  5. Dizziness / Slurred speech
  6. Nausea / vomiting
  7. Increased sleepiness
  8. Non responsivenes...s of pupils to light

- **Cervical injuries** can occur from direct trauma to the neck, but more commonly occur from a blow on the position of the neck at the time of injury. Any individual with even the slightest suspicion of a suspected neck injury must be immobilized immediately. Any unconscious party must be treated as if he/she had a serious neck injury until such a problem has been dismissed by a qualified medical professional.

- **Method of care for minor scrapes and cuts** - stop bleeding, cleanse, protect.

- **Methods for dealing with blood and body fluids** comes from procedures known as Universal Precautions:
  1. Wearing sterile gloves
  2. Containing the blood or body fluids
  3. Removing the blood or body fluids
  4. Decontaminate the area
  5. Dispose of all blood or body fluid contaminated materials

- **Three major concerns** when dealing with blood borne pathogens are:
  1. Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, HIV

- **What policies and procedures are in place in case of serious injury?**
  1. Have the availability of a phone, (to phone EMS)
  2. Post the facilities address and contact phone number.
  3. Do not move injured athlete
  4. Know the A.B.C. method
  5. Know how to administer CPR
  6. Remain with the athlete until EMS arrive
  7. Contact the gymnasts’ parents

- **When an injury occurs within the facility** the injury site should be:
  1. Preserved, Photographed, Documented.
Some types of injury to gymnasts may include but are not limited to the following:

- **Stress fractures** - this injury is most commonly from repeated landings, having an adequate landing surface may help in prevention
- **Overuse injury** - this is most commonly from the accumulation of stress in a tissue and helpful prevention is knowing when the athlete should partake in moderation of specific physical activities according to specified pain
- **Fatigue** - this is from exhaustion due to prolonged exertion
- **Heat Injuries**
  - Three types of heat injury are Exhaustion, Cramps and Heat Stroke.
  - These types of injury may be prevented by: acclimatizing the individual (this may take 7-10 days), adjusting clothing of the individual, recognizing dangerous climate conditions, making sure athletes are replacing their fluid loss. In the case of a severe heat injury, the individual must be seen and treated by a medical professional.

**VI. Performer Readiness**

- There are two main components in performer readiness; they are being physically and mentally prepared.
- **Physical Readiness** - Physical readiness includes but is not limited to the following:
  - **Medical fitness**, Is the performer of sound health, free of illness, free of previous injury and ready to resume training. If the gymnast is returning from an injury do they have the proper medical release and or medical evaluation.
  - **Physically fit** - this includes; the characteristics required from the gymnasts to the degree or level required to safely perform the skills in their training, strength, power, flexibility, muscular endurance, cardio respiratory endurance, skill.
  - **Body Composition** - Nutrition is always a consideration in the athlete's ability to safely perform. The athlete must understand the term "body composition", the importance of muscle and all other tissues which make up the total body weight. There are two eating disorders that are commonly seen among female athletes, but are not exempt from male athletes:
    - Anorexia nervosa, and Bulimia. Make sure to educate all participating parties on the dangers of these disorders. A recommendation is to implement a program that emphasizes performance and eating goals rather than any type of weight loss.

**VII. Environmental Safety Factors**

- Typical facilities have the same safety considerations which include but are not limited to: Supervision, Security, Posting proper signage - such as warnings and instruction signs posters etc., Instructor to student ratio, Routine equipment checks, Maintenance and repair of all property.
- Gymnastics apparatus and matting should be continuously maintained. A routine inspection of all properties/apparatus is a must.
- Equipment inspections must be done routinely and should include the following:
• Are the cable anchors secure, Are the turnbuckles and load binders tight, Spin locks and t-handles secure, Apparatus at appropriate heights (this must equate to the users age, size and skill level), Moving parts well maintained, surfaces clean and free of hazards, Repairs made when necessary.

➢ There is a variety of gymnastics equipment available to use as a training option, these specific options have specified safety recommendations and guidelines that apply. It is essential that all parties go through a training and continuing education process before implementing equipment in the teaching of the athletes.

➢ Some gymnastics equipment may include but is not limited to: loose foam training pits, spotting belts, overhead spotting systems, and solid foam training pits, in-ground or above ground training pits, tumble tracks, trampolines, etc.

➢ These systems used correctly and in proper conjunction with progressions are to assist in developing skills with flight.

• The participant also has a responsibility in making sure their environment is safe. The personal equipment of a gymnast contributes to a safe environment. There are several types of personal equipment:
  ● Clothing - the apparel should be appropriate to the age and level of the participant, the activity and environment.
  ● Jewelry - the wearing of jewelry by participants is highly discouraged, data suggests that the wearing of jewelry may have severe injury results
  ● Grips - The use of grips is usually reserved for the advanced gymnast (at a competitive level) the risk of wearing grips can occur when the grip binds against itself, not letting the gymnasts’ wrist rotate. This situation can result in severe injury.
  ● Footwear - It is important that the program has established rules on footwear implemented to enhance the safety for the participants
  ● Hair - It is important that the athletes’ hair is kept out of their eyesight so as to not impair vision.
  ● Braces and or bandages (including tape) - Any type of support should be used under the supervision and recommendation of a trained physician/trainer. If used improperly the athletes may develop weakness that may lead to further injury. It is the programs responsibility to ensure that all of the parties involved (participants, professionals, parents) are aware of the rules and guidelines of personal equipment.

➢ Be aware! Awareness can prevent injuries which are predicable, reduce the likelihood of injury, ensure if an injury does occur it is handled properly, and raise the knowledge of liability and negligence.