

Burlington Youth Cheer



Parent/Athlete Handbook
2026 Season

Welcome & Program Overview

Welcome to Burlington Youth Cheer (BYC)! We are thrilled to officially launch our 2026 season. BYC is a competitive cheerleading program dedicated to promoting teamwork, skill development, sportsmanship, and safety. We are fully focused on preparing our athletes for competitions at the Local, State, Regional, and National levels. Cheerleading is a team sport that requires commitment from every member; absences and lack of preparation can impact the safety, progress, and performance of the entire team.

Families are encouraged to carefully review this handbook prior to registering. It contains important policies, procedures, and expectations that will ensure each athlete has a safe, productive, and enjoyable experience.

Registration Info

Existing BYC Families Only: March 8TH – March 31ST

Due to limited volunteers and coaching staff, team sizes will be capped this season. We are dedicated to having manageable team sizes to ensure safety and strategic success.

After the existing family registration window closes, we will:

- Evaluate available roster spots at each level
- Open registration to new families on a first-come, first-served basis
- We will not hold spots after the Existing Family deadline passes

Once teams reach capacity, additional athletes will be placed on a waiting list.

Registration Cost –

Existing Family Registration: \$385

New Families / Late Registration: \$410 (after March 31ST)

Includes:

- \$325 base registration
- \$10 iSportz fee
- Practice shirt – \$25
- Competition day bow – \$25
- Uniform rental – No charge

*****Please note that cheer sneakers and warm up jacket (required for 8U-14U only) will need to be purchased separately. See page 11 for more details*****

Registration Process

- Registration will be completed online. www.BurlingtonYouthCheer.com
- Incomplete registrations are not eligible to participate.
- Team placements will be announced in early May.

Refund Policy

Partial refunds of 50% will be granted if a family withdraws before June 1st. No refunds will be issued after June 1st.

Hardship Assistance

If any families are facing financial hardship that would restrict their ability to participate, please reach out to Jennifer Carroll at burlingtonyouthcheer@gmail.com to discuss hardship assistance options. We are committed to ensuring all children have the opportunity to be part of this program and will do our best to support families in need.

Team Placement & Eligibility

Team placement is designed to create balanced, competitive teams while **prioritizing athlete safety, skill development, and individual growth**. Several factors are considered in placement decisions, which are made collaboratively by the Cheer Director and Head Coaches.

Age Requirements (AYC Guidelines):

- Minimum age: 4 years old by July 1st of the current season
- Maximum age: 16 years old by July 1st of the current season

Age Cutoff Example:

A child who is 14 on July 1st but turns 15 on July 2nd will compete as a 14-year-old for that season.

Reference: See the included **AYC Age Chart** for a full breakdown of age eligibility by division.

CHEER DIVISIONS

DIVISION	AGES	SKILL LEVELS	AGE WAIVER POLICY
Division 6	4, 5, 6	1 LIMITED	NO WAIVERS ARE PERMITTED.
Division 8	5, 6, 7, 8	1, 2	WAIVER DOWN A 9 YEAR OLD IF NO DIVISION 10 IS OFFERED. WAIVER UP DOES NOT APPLY.
Division 10	7, 8, 9, 10	1, 2, 3	WAIVER DOWN AN 11 YEAR OLD IF NO DIVISION 12 IS OFFERED. WAIVER UP A 6 YEAR OLD IF NO DIVISION 8 IS OFFERED AND NO 11 YEAR OLD IS WAIVED DOWN.
Division 12	9, 10, 11, 12	1, 2, 3	WAIVER DOWN A 13 YEAR OLD IF NO DIVISION 14 IS OFFERED. WAIVER UP AN 8 YEAR OLD IF NO DIVISION 10 IS OFFERED AND NO 13 YEAR OLD IS WAIVED DOWN.
Division 14	11, 12, 13, 14	1, 2, 3, 4	WAIVER DOWN A 15 YEAR OLD IF NO DIVISION 16 IS OFFERED. WAIVER UP A 10 YEAR OLD IF NO DIVISION 12 IS OFFERED AND NO 15 YEAR OLD IS WAIVED DOWN.
Division 16	13, 14, 15, 16	2, 3, 4	WAIVER DOWN DOES NOT APPLY. WAIVER UP A 12 YEAR OLD IF NO DIVISION 14 IS OFFERED.

No Tryouts / Skill Evaluations

BYC **does not hold tryouts**. All eligible athletes are welcome to participate regardless of prior experience or ability. Skill evaluations **may be** conducted **solely for team placement purposes** and:

- Must be administered fairly, objectively, and consistently
- Must assess all athletes equally
- Cannot be used to eliminate or dismiss an athlete

The goal of evaluations is to:

- Promote athlete safety
- Ensure balanced and competitive teams
- Support individual skill development
- Align athletes with teams that best fit their age, skill level, and prior experience

Placement Considerations

Placement decisions take multiple factors into account, including but not limited to:

- Age eligibility (per the AYC Age Chart)
- Skill level and prior cheer experience
- Maturity level
- Athlete safety
- Overall roster balance
- Roster size (ensuring manageable numbers for coaches and competitive advantage)

Process: Preliminary team assignments will be emailed in early May. Each year is independent, and athletes may be placed in any team division that aligns with their age eligibility, skill, and prior experience.

This process ensures that all athletes have a positive, safe, and developmentally appropriate experience, whether they are participating in exhibition, state, or national tracks.

Team Division & Competition Tracks

Burlington Youth Cheer (BYC) organizes its teams based on age and competition track, ensuring a safe, competitive, and developmentally appropriate experience for every athlete. Each team follows a clearly defined path that determines which competitions they will attend and what level of competition they are eligible for.

6U Teams – Exhibition Track – Ages 4-6

The 6U program is designed as an introductory, non-competitive track for younger athletes. These athletes will participate in two primary events:

- **Local Competition-** (October 24th – date/location- TBD)
- **Burlington Showcase** (tentatively Sunday, November 1st at BHS)

6U athletes will **exhibit routines** rather than compete, giving them the opportunity to develop foundational skills, experience performing in front of an audience, and gain confidence on the mat. While these teams do not advance beyond local exhibitions, participation in all practices, showcases, and events is required to ensure safety, teamwork, and routine consistency.

8U Teams – State Track- Ages 6-8

Athletes in the 8U division compete at the **State Track**, which includes:

- **Baystate Invitational**-Framingham High- October 17th (all teams will advance)
- **Local Competition** - (October 24th – date/location- TBD)
- (only teams placing 1st-3rd will advance)
- **Burlington Showcase-** (tentatively Sunday, November 1st at BHS)
- **State Competition-** Tsongas Arena, Lowell- November 7th

Teams in the State Track **do not advance to Nationals**, but they are expected to maintain a high level of commitment and performance. This track allows athletes to experience the competitive environment while focusing on skill development, teamwork, and performance quality. All

athletes must attend required practices, choreography sessions, and competitions to ensure routine readiness and safety.

10U–14U Teams – National Track- Ages 10-14

Athletes aged 10 through 14 compete on the **National Track**, which includes:

- **Baystate Invitational**-Framingham High- October 17th (all teams will advance)
- **Local Competition** - (October 24th – date/location- TBD)
- (only teams placing 1st-3rd will advance)
- **Burlington Showcase**- (tentatively Sunday, November 1st at BHS)
- **State Competition**- Tsongas Arena, Lowell- November 7th
- **Regional Competition**- University of Rhode Island – November 14 (only teams placing 1st-3rd will advance)
- **AYC Nationals** -Silver Spurs Arena, Kissimmee, Florida, Dec. 2nd-6th

To advance from one competition level to the next (e.g., local to state, state to regional), teams must place **1st through 3rd** at each stage. Teams that qualify at Regionals earn the opportunity to compete at AYC Nationals. Participation in all competitions, choreography sessions, and practices is mandatory to ensure team safety, cohesion, and competitive readiness.

National Track athletes will receive more advanced coaching, will participate in stunts and pyramids appropriate for their age and skill level, and will be expected to maintain high attendance standards due to the safety requirements of complex routines.

X-Factor Bid Eligibility

All 10U–16U teams will declare for AYC X-Factor Bid. The AYC X-Factor Bid is a special bid that may be awarded to one (1) team per age division that did not otherwise qualify for Nationals through standard placement criteria.

If selected, the team must be prepared to accept the bid and compete at AYC Nationals. Families should understand that acceptance of an X-Factor Bid would require participation in Nationals and all associated travel, time, and financial commitments.

Practice Schedule & Expectations

Cheerleading is a team sport that depends on every member working together. **Before committing to the season, please carefully consider the level of dedication expected by the program. These guidelines will be upheld to ensure fairness and the overall success of the team.**

Practice Requirements-

Frequency

- **10U–14U teams:** Three practices per week from August through early December (if the team qualifies for Nationals).
- **8U team:** Three practices per week from August through the end of October.
- **6U team:** Two practices per week from August through the end of October.

Attendance Expectations

- Attendance is mandatory for all practices, the season showcase, and all competitions.
- Athletes are expected to arrive on time, prepared, and ready to fully participate.

Importance of Attendance

- Consistent attendance is critical for stunt group formation, skill development, and overall team cohesion.
- Stunt groups rely on timing, trust, and coordination. Missing members disrupt practice, slow progress, and may compromise safety and competition readiness.

Practice Locations & Schedule

Outdoor Practices

- Begin **July 27th** at MSMS Field (to be confirmed)
- Practice days and times will be shared with team assignments
- Competitive teams typically practice **2 hours, 3x per week**
- Younger teams may practice **1–1.5 hours, 2x per week**

Indoor Practices

- Begin in **September** at Burlington High School (BHS)
- Practice days and times will vary by team

Please Note

- Practice schedules will likely change once we move indoors
- Adjustments may occur due to gym availability, field scheduling, or school holidays
- Coaches will communicate any schedule changes promptly
- Final team schedules will be announced after registration closes and teams are formed

Parent Guidelines

- Parents are welcome to stay and observe **outdoor summer practices**
 - Parents are **not permitted in the gym** during indoor practices due to insurance and safety regulations
 - Only rostered, **CORI-certified coaches** are permitted in indoor practice spaces
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Attendance Policy

1. General Rules

- Missing more than **7 absences** total may result in dismissal from the team. *See Summer Absence Policy below*
- **No absences or late arrivals are allowed the week leading up to a competition.**
- **Excused Absences:** Sickness or school-related events impacting grades
- **Unexcused Absences:** Vacations, part-time jobs, family events, dances, concerts, banquets, or recitals.

2. Notification and Punctuality

- Notify the coach in advance of any absence.
- Consistent tardiness may result in an unexcused absence.

3. Injury and Illness

- Absences due to illness or injury lasting more than two days require a doctor's note to return.
 - The note must clear the athlete for **full participation** with no restrictions.
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Summer Attendance Policy for Competitive Teams (8U-14U)

For **competitive teams** summer practices are **essential to preparing the team for a successful season**. During the summer, coaches will focus on **forming stunt groups and perfecting and building skills**, ensuring athletes are fully prepared for **professional choreography sessions**.

Summer Attendance Policy:

- Competitive athletes may have **no more than 4 absences** over the summer.
- **Exceeding 4 absences** will result in the athlete **not being included in the end-of-August choreography sessions**, as consistent preparation is required for safe and effective participation.

Choreography Requirements (10U-14U)

This year, Burlington Youth Cheer is making a significant financial investment in professional choreography. The choreographers will teach the entire routine during these sessions, so attendance is mandatory for all athletes—no exceptions.

Mandatory Choreography Dates for 10U–14U Teams:

- August 29–30 (Saturday & Sunday) – times TBD
- September 12-13 (Saturday & Sunday) – times TBD

Families should plan vacations and absences around these dates to ensure their child can fully participate.

8U Choreography Dates will be scheduled during regular practice times.

Why Stunting Requires 100% Attendance

- **Safety:** Stunts need every member. Missing athletes make practicing unsafe and waste practice time.
 - **Consistency:** Stunts rely on repetition to build muscle memory. Absences slow progress.
 - **Team Impact:** Teammates sit out, routines must be reworked, and the group loses valuable time.
 - **Competition Readiness:** Precision and timing suffer when the full group isn't present.
 - **Fairness:** Cheerleaders who frequently miss practice may not be placed in stunting roles to keep it fair for everyone.
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2026 Competitive Season Calendar & Key Dates

- Practices Start- Monday, July 27th
- **Choreography Dates** for 10U-14U- August 29-30th and September 12-13th – Times TBD
- **Baystate Invitational - October 17th**- Framingham- This is an invitational competition and a chance for teams to get judged and get feedback before locals. Teams 8U-14U will participate.

- **Local Competition-** October 24th - (date/location- TBD) 6U will exhibit. All competing teams (8U-14U) will participate and any teams placing 1st-3rd will advance to States.
- **Burlington Season Showcase- November 1st** (tentative) all teams will participate. This will take place at BHS.
- **State Competition- November 7th** – Tsongas Arena, Lowell- 1st-3rd will advance to States.
- **New England Regional Competition: November 14-** University of Rhode Island- teams placing 1st-3rd will advance to Nationals.
- **National Championships: December 2nd-6th** – Silver Spurs Arena, Kissimmee, Florida
See the **Nationals** section of this handbook for more detailed information.

Advancement and Attendance

- **All cheerleaders are expected to attend Nationals if their team advances.**
- If a cheerleader does not participate in locals, states or regionals, they will not be eligible to advance to the next level of competition if their squad qualifies.
- The only exception is a documented injury with a **doctor's note**. No other exceptions will be made. If a cheerleader cannot compete at any competition level, written notice must be submitted to the Cheerleading Director in advance to allow the team to compete.

Competition Attire and Uniform Policy:

Cheer Uniforms

A cheer uniform consists of a skirt and top. The cheer uniform is the property of Burlington Youth Cheer and must be returned to the organization either at the end of the season or upon a cheerleader's departure from the association prior to the end of the season. Uniforms are not to be worn outside of league-sponsored functions (e.g., Halloween).

Once a cheerleader receives their uniform, it is their responsibility to care for and clean it. Uniforms that are not returned or are returned damaged will be the financial responsibility of the cheerleader's parent or guardian. The price for a uniform replacement is \$250. Failure to return the uniform or to meet this financial responsibility will result in ineligibility to participate in future seasons until the obligation is fulfilled.

Cheer Sneakers

Cheer sneakers must be purchased separately. You may purchase any all white cheer-designated sneaker. Please reach out if you have any questions or need recommendations. We have historically purchased Chasse or GK from Omni Cheer. You can use this vendor and those brands, or feel free to use Amazon or any other cheer company you prefer.

Warm-Up Jackets

Warm-up jackets are **required for all competitive teams (8U–14U)**. For **6U athletes**, jackets are **optional but encouraged**. All competitive teams will be required to have a jacket moving forward, so we encourage 6U families to purchase one now to take advantage of this year's bulk pricing.

We plan to use the **same jacket design for several seasons**, making this a **one-time purchase**. A new jacket would only be needed if an athlete is new to the program or needs a larger size in future seasons.

Cost of Jacket for the 2026 Season- **\$35.00**. Prices are expected to increase in future years.

Order forms will be sent out in the spring once team assignments have been released.

Bow

The cost of the competition bow is included in your registration fee and will be provided to the girls at the first competition.

Uniform Fittings

Stay tuned for more info on Uniform Fittings

National Championship Participation & Expectations

Nationals will be held in Florida this year, from **December 2nd to December 6th**. If your cheerleading team advances to Nationals, **all cheerleaders are required to attend**.

We understand that it may be a financial burden for some families, but rest assured, we have a strong fundraising plan in place to help every cheerleader attend and experience Nationals.

Estimated Costs

Given we are new to the AYC league this year, we do not have the benefit of history to determine an estimate of the costs for the trip.

Based on direction from our League Director, she estimated the costs to be approximately **\$1500 per cheerleader** attending. This is for hotel, registration, admission to the convention center and flights. Fundraising last year for many cheerleaders was able to offset the full cost of their trip!

Hotel Accommodations

Cheerleaders will be required to stay at the AYC-affiliated hotel. Costs may vary depending on the hotel.

Participation in Nationals Fundraising

Participation in Nationals fundraising is **optional**. Families who need assistance are encouraged to participate in fundraising activities. The more time and effort a cheerleader puts into fundraising, the more money they can earn to help cover trip costs.

Hardship Fund

We understand that the Nationals trip may create a financial hardship for some families. To help alleviate this, we will have a **hardship fund** available based on individual needs. Our goal is to ensure that no cheerleader is left out due to financial limitations.

We are committed to making this experience possible for all our athletes and families, and we are here to support you throughout this journey.

Fundraising and Volunteer Requirements

Burlington Youth Cheer is a 100% volunteer-driven program. Our coaches, board members, and committee leaders generously donate their time to provide a safe, competitive, and high-quality experience for our athletes.

Registration fees cover only a portion of our operating expenses. Fundraising allows us to offset essential program costs, including:

- Gym and mat time
- Professional choreography
- Coaches' training and certifications
- Uniforms and music
- Insurance
- End-of-season banquet
- Competition and Nationals expenses

The success and sustainability of our program depends on the participation of every family.

2026 Fundraising Requirement (Mandatory)

For the 2026 season, Burlington Youth Cheer will be enforcing a **minimum \$50 fundraising commitment per athlete**.

Each family must satisfy this requirement in one of the following ways:

- Sell a minimum of **5 boxes of cookie dough**, OR
- Submit a **\$50 buyout contribution** at the conclusion of the September cookie dough fundraiser.

Uniforms will not be distributed until the \$50 fundraising minimum has been fulfilled.

This policy ensures fairness and guarantees that every family contributes equally to supporting the program.

Corporate Sponsorships

We actively seek sponsorships from local businesses to support the program. Corporate sponsors will be recognized on the official BYC practice t-shirt distributed at the start of the season.

If you know a business interested in sponsoring Burlington Youth Cheer, please contact:

Diana Segool – burlingtoncheerfundraising@gmail.com

Families interested in joining the fundraising subcommittee are also encouraged to reach out.

National Track Fundraising Opportunities

For teams competing on the National Track, additional fundraising opportunities may be organized to help offset Regional and National Championship expenses.

The fundraising team will communicate directly with eligible teams regarding specific opportunities. In the past, these have included:

- Bake sales
- Canning at local businesses
- Raffle calendars
- Community-based fundraising events

Participation details and timelines will be shared if and when applicable.

Nationals Fundraising & Reimbursement Policy

If a team qualifies for Nationals, Burlington Youth Cheer (BYC) may offer fundraising opportunities to help offset travel and participation expenses. Reimbursement checks are made payable to the athlete and will only be released to the individual listed on the required **Parent/Guardian Designation Form** completed at registration. Payments cannot be split, redirected, or reissued once processed.

In shared custody situations, parents/guardians must agree in advance on one designated recipient. If there is no agreement, BYC may require legal documentation and delay payment until it is received.

The designated recipient must sign to confirm receipt of funds. BYC cannot mediate family disputes regarding possession, endorsement, deposit, or use of funds and will follow the written designation form and any legal documentation provided. Fundraising totals and reimbursement details are confidential and will only be shared with the designated recipient unless required by law

Athlete Conduct and Practice Guidelines

To foster a positive and respectful environment, all cheerleaders and families are expected to adhere to the following guidelines:

1. **Respect:** Treat coaches, teammates, and opponents with respect and dignity. Always compliment good performance and refrain from highlighting mistakes.
2. **Disciplinary Actions:**
The following behaviors will result in disciplinary action and potential dismissal from the program:
 - Profanity or fighting, either physically or verbally.
 - Any negative electronic communication (e.g., social media posts, emails, messages) targeting coaches, athletes, or any related programs.
3. **Injury Reporting:** Report all injuries immediately to your coach for appropriate attention.

Team Practice Rules

To ensure a productive and safe practice environment, the following rules apply:

1. Jewelry and Grooming:

- No jewelry (including earrings, belly rings, and necklaces) is allowed during practice.
- Fingernails must be kept at a safe, manageable length.
- Hair must be pulled back in a secure ponytail with no loose or hanging pieces.
- During competition season, unnatural hair colors (e.g., pink, purple, blue) are not allowed to maintain a unified team appearance.

2. Clothing and Footwear:

- Team-designated practice clothing must be worn at all practices. Specifics will be provided by coaches before the season starts.
- Cheer shoes must be worn at all practices. Street shoes are prohibited to ensure safety during stunting, tumbling, and jumping.

3. Cell Phones:

- Cell phones must be turned off and stored in backpacks for the duration of practice. This will be strictly enforced.

4. Behavior and Participation:

- Participation at practices is mandatory. Cheerleaders exhibiting negative behavior or refusing to participate will be sent home, and the incident will be reported to the Cheer Director.
- After three documented incidents, the Cheer Director reserves the right to dismiss the cheerleader from the program.
- All cheerleaders are expected to treat each other with kindness, respect, and support, both in and out of practice. We foster an inclusive team environment where every member is valued and no one is excluded. Gossiping, cliques, and any behavior aimed at alienating or undermining teammates will not be tolerated.
- Disrespectful actions such as back talk, rolling eyes, or any other form of negativity towards coaches or teammates are unacceptable. We are a team, and mutual respect is essential to our success and unity.

5. Punctuality:

- Notify the coach in advance of any planned absence.
- Consistent tardiness may result in an unexcused absence.

6. Indoor Practice Rules:

- Due to insurance regulations, parents are not allowed in practice spaces during indoor practices. Please remain in designated waiting areas.
 - Only rostered and CORI-certified coaches are permitted in the gym.
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Spectator & Parent Code of Conduct

Burlington Youth Cheer is committed to maintaining a positive, respectful, and safe environment for all athletes, coaches, officials, and families. Parents and spectators are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that reflects the values of our program at all practices, events, and competitions.

Spectator Expectations

- Misconduct toward coaches, athletes, officials, volunteers, or other families will not be tolerated.
- Unsportsmanlike behavior, disruptive conduct, or negative interactions are grounds for removal.

Consequences for Misconduct:

1. **First Offense:** Immediate removal from the event or competition.
 2. **Second Offense:** Permanent removal from the cheerleading program.
 3. **Physical assault of any coach, official, or volunteer:** Immediate one-year ban from the program and removal of the athlete for that duration.
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Parent Code of Conduct

As a parent or guardian of a BYC cheerleader, I agree to uphold the principles of sportsmanship, respect, and teamwork by committing to the following:

1. I will not force my child to participate and will respect their well-being and interest in the sport.
 2. I understand that cheerleading is about development, teamwork, and growth—not just competition results.
 3. I will model good sportsmanship by demonstrating positive and respectful behavior toward all athletes, coaches, officials, and spectators.
 4. I will not engage in or encourage unsportsmanlike conduct or behavior that jeopardizes the safety or well-being of any participant.
 5. I will encourage my child to resolve conflicts respectfully and treat teammates, coaches, and staff with kindness.
 6. I will emphasize effort, teamwork, commitment, and skill development over winning or individual recognition.
 7. I will respect the authority of the coaches and Cheer Director and address concerns through the appropriate channels.
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Chain of Command for Reporting Concerns

To ensure professionalism and fairness, parents must follow the established chain of command when addressing team-related concerns:

1. **Head Coach** – Concerns must first be communicated directly to the Head Coach (verbally or in writing).
2. **Cheer Director** – If the issue remains unresolved, concerns must be submitted in writing to the Cheer Director. The Director may escalate the matter to the Board or President if necessary.

Under no circumstances should team-related issues be:

- Discussed with other parents,
- Posted on social media, or
- Shared through team messaging platforms.

Failure to follow the chain of command may result in disciplinary action.