



CONTACT READY









Welcome to Contact Ready	4
Programme objectives	7
Six-session overview	8
Teenage girls – What do we know?	10
Creating positive experiences for teenage girls: Programme principles	11
Coaching guidelines	15
5a. Session structure	15
5b. Helpful information	16
5c. Coaching craft	17
Teaching the basics of Ball into Contact, Tackle and Safe Landing	18
Player safety, warm-up and primers	26
Programme promotion	29
References	30

CONTENTS

WELCOME



Welcome to the Contact Ready Programme guide, made for Provincial Unions, clubs, schools and coaches who are implementing this exciting initiative.

What is Contact Ready?

Contact Ready is our nationwide introductory programme designed specifically for teenage girls who are new to rugby, in their first year of playing, or currently involved in non-contact formats of the game.

The programme focuses on building confidence and improving safety as girls transition into contact rugby. It provides a supportive, fun environment where players can learn at their own pace, meet others at a similar level, make friends, and grow their love for the game.

“Not knowing how to play was one of the scariest things. I was most worried about playing with people who already knew what they were doing.”

Developed with the unique needs and motivations of teenage girls at its core, Contact Ready is informed by current research, expert input, and best practice. It has been co-designed in partnership with Provincial Unions nationwide to create a trusted, consistent programme delivered through a collaborative network ensuring positive, high-quality experiences for every girl involved.



What's the challenge?



While the Small Blacks programme caters well for the age and stage of players entering rugby as children (5-12 years old), that is not the only entry point for girls. Women and girls are entering the game as teenagers or young adults and often straight into contact rugby, without the skills that other rugby players have built over time. By way of example, 60% of 13 years olds in 2023 were new to the game, and at ages 14 and 15 we see only a 28% retention rate of players (New Zealand Rugby Participation Data, 2023). The development of Contact Ready seeks to bridge the gap for those transitioning into contact rugby as teenagers, through the development of "basic and safe techniques".



ACC data (2023) tells us that there is a high volume of injury claims for girls aged 15-19, with knees, ankles, and concussions being the highest injury areas. From ongoing NZR concussion research studies on community players, it shows most concussions occur in the tackle contest and that 'head-to-ground' is one of the most common concussion mechanisms for women and girls, and occurs at a higher rate than males. Furthermore, there is less evidence of safe and confident tackling and ball carry in the community game compared to their male counterparts. Contact Ready has been designed in response to the unique anatomical needs and injury patterns of girls. The programme provides a safe girls-only learning environment for players to learn with those of similar abilities.



Quality of coaching and skill development was voted among 'The Top 10 changes' needed to the current rugby experience by women and girls. Contrastingly, coaches have highlighted the challenge of coaching such a vast range of abilities and experience within a team. Contact Ready provides coach development that encompasses best practice and research in one place, specific to girls, and the programme itself provides a safe place and time to develop players of similar abilities, thus increasing the player and coach experience.



"Fun, fitness and

FRIENDS."

THE CONTACT READY PROGRAMME

What support does New Zealand Rugby provide?



National Programme

A tailored six-session programme for girls aged 12-17 years old, who are new, in their first year of rugby, or are transitioning from a non-contact format.



Education

A suite of guidelines, assets, tools and face-to-face training to support coaches to confidently deliver a high-quality experience to girls.



Shared assets

A shared programme name and visual identity that has been developed with teenage girls, for teenage girls! Inclusive of local promotional assets, merch and NZR promotion.



A collaborative delivery network

The formation of a collaborative delivery network and raise awareness of our collective commitment to a safer game.

Programme Objectives

Contact Ready is a national programme designed to build the confidence, competence and safety of teenage girls as they move into contact rugby.

Across six sessions, girls will learn:

- How to land safely
- How to take the ball into contact (BIC)
- How to tackle safely
- How to prepare their bodies for contact
- How to apply these skills through modified games

The programme is more than just skill-building. It creates a fun, inclusive environment where girls can develop their love of rugby through games, friendships and feel-good moments. The design prioritises connection and enjoyment, using game-based learning as the preferred approach.

While being 'contact ready' can cover a wide range of skills, this programme has intentionally prioritised safety over performance outcomes. As most injuries in girls, occur in the tackle contest, the focus is on key contact skills like ball carrying and tackling. There is scope for future modules to expand the focus, but the immediate goal is to build a strong, safe foundation with others of similar ability.

6 SESSION OBJECTIVES SUMMARY

The Contact Ready sessions are carefully crafted to meet the age and stage of the players participating. From skill progressions, session theming and game design, all have been specially designed with teenage girls in mind.

SESSION 1

Safe Landing

OBJECTIVES

- Build connections and get to know each other.
- Be introduced to the contact-ready warm-up and understand the importance of warming up.
- Learn the fundamentals of landing safely through a range of techniques (sideways, backwards, and forwards).

SESSION 2

Ball Carrier

OBJECTIVES

- Strengthen team connections by continuing to build friendships and teamwork.
- Be introduced to Rugby Strong, a safe and strong body position that forms the foundation for many movements in rugby.
- Learn and apply safe ball-carrying techniques, including using 'step to space' to evade contact and ways to stay safe when taking the ball into contact.

SESSION 3

Introduction to Tackle

OBJECTIVES

- Develop independence by beginning peer-led warm-ups using warm-up cards.
- Learn the fundamentals of safe tackling on mats, including correct tackle height, proper head positioning, and techniques to keep both the tackler and ball carrier safe.
- Practice safe landing and ball-in-contact techniques to build confidence and ensure safety during contact situations.

SESSION 4

Contact Confidence

OBJECTIVES

- Continue building confidence by practicing safe tackling techniques through side-on and front-on tackles on mats.
- Further develop ball-in-contact skills.
- Be introduced to the concept of 'pre-loaded tackle' through a controlled 7v7 game environment.

SESSION 5

Contact Confidence +

OBJECTIVES

- Deepen understanding of key skills, through observation, constructive feedback, and supportive teamwork.
- Develop independence by leading their own contact-ready warm-up.
- Continue building contact confidence by practicing safe landing, tackling, and ball-in-contact (BIC) skills in 1v1 activities and controlled modified games.

SESSION 6

Contact Ready Mini-Festival

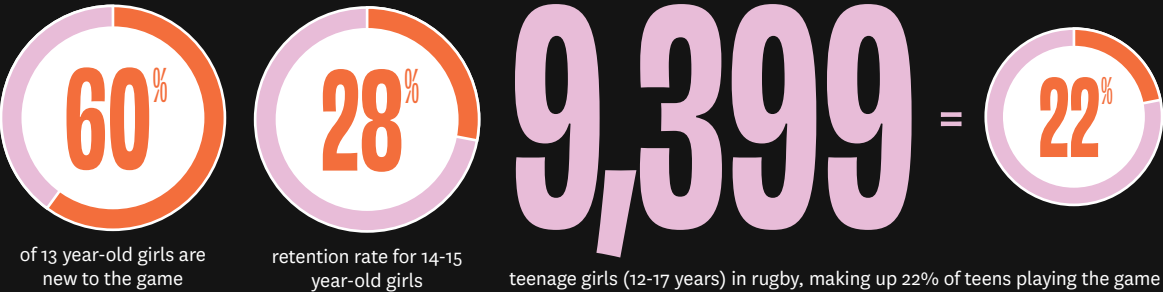
OBJECTIVES

- Develop skills in safety and technique during 1v1 activities, with one player acting as an observer to provide constructive and supportive peer feedback.
- Apply safe tackling and Ball into Contact (BIC) techniques in small-sided modified games, celebrating individual and team progress.
- Build strong team bonds by participating in the Contact Ready festival.

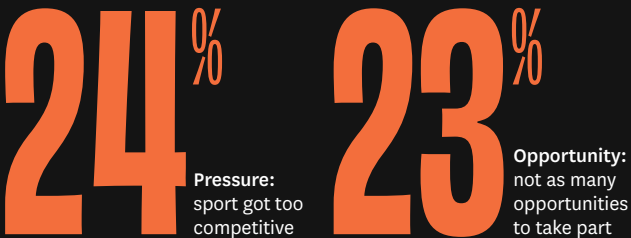


WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT WOMEN AND GIRLS?

TEENAGE GIRLS IN RUGBY, NEW ZEALAND¹



TOP FIVE REASONS GIRLS DISENGAGE FROM SPORT²



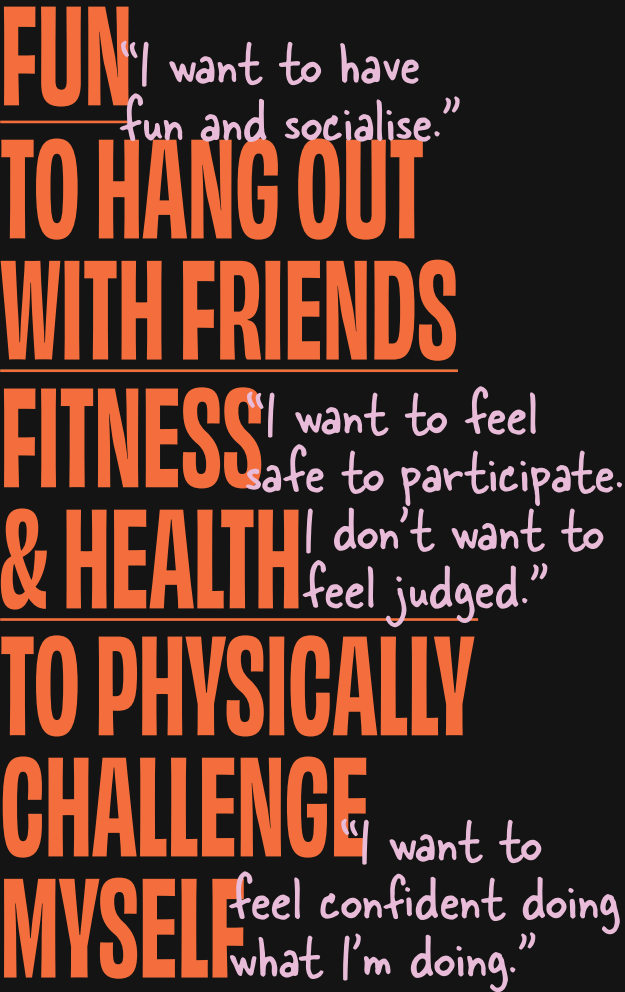
TOP FOUR BARRIERS FOR WOMEN & GIRLS ENGAGEMENT IN RUGBY⁴



TOP THREE ASPECTS WOMEN & GIRLS ENJOY MOST ABOUT RUGBY³



TOP FOUR MOTIVATORS FOR TEENAGE GIRLS (12-18 YEARS) TO PLAY SPORT⁵



(1+5) Sport New Zealand, 2021. (2) Women in Sport, 2020. (3+4) New Zealand Rugby, 2023.

CREATING POSITIVE EXPERIENCES FOR TEENAGE GIRLS

Guiding principles

The design of Contact Ready is underpinned by our four guiding principles. The principles respond to the unique needs and motivations of teenage girls. Below are the guiding principles, with some practical examples of how to bring them to life through coaching, design and environment.

PRINCIPLE 1

SAFETY

How have you considered the players emotional, cultural and physical safety?

"Physicality and fear of injury and a judgemental environment are barriers to participation."

61%

of teenage girls feel judged when participating in sport

PRINCIPLE 2

CONNECTION

How have you prioritised connection and opportunities to form strong bonds?

"I enjoy playing with girls, we all have fun and make heaps of jokes."

69%

of young girls 12-17 participate in sport to have fun and be with friends

PRINCIPLE 3

CONFIDENCE

How have you considered the learning environments to support players to build confidence?

"Not knowing how to play was one of the scariest things, I was worried most about playing with people who knew how to play already."

'Physicality and fear of injury from tackling' was one of the top four barriers to rugby participation.

78%

don't feel confident

PRINCIPLE 4

FEEL GOOD MOMENTS

How have you fostered moments of individual and collective progress and enjoyment?

"Fun, fitness and friends are the lead motivators for young women to participate in physical activity."

12 to 17

For girls – the average time spent participating decreases as they go from 12 years-old to 17.

BRINGING THE PRINCIPLES TO LIFE

PRINCIPLE 1

SAFETY

Safe participation is all-encompassing and includes the physical, emotional and cultural safety of the girls. Physical safety is about reducing the risk of injury and protecting girls from physical harm or abuse, while emotional safety is about creating environments where they feel comfortable to learn, participate, express their feelings and share their opinions free from judgment or consequence. Cultural safety emphasises creating an inclusive and respectful environment that recognises and embraces the diversity of participants.

IN PRACTICE THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Prioritising safety outcomes over performance

outcomes: Programme design is age and stage appropriate to progress skill development, activities and games at a suitable pace.

Evidence-based warm-ups: The warm-up activities have been developed by a physiotherapist, informed by the unique physiological needs of girls.

Well maintained facilities: Programme location should have well-lit areas, and privacy for changing, along with clean restrooms and accessible sanitary bins.

Coach-to-player ratios: A maximum of a 1:10 coach to player ratio is implemented to maximise engagement, and personalised feedback.

Accredited coaches and safeguarding practices: Safeguarding practices are followed, and all coaches are trained to deliver the programme to a high standard.

Girls-only learning environments: Providing a space for practice and play among peers of similar abilities, free from perceived judgment.

Fostering familiarity: The sessions are delivered with the same coaches, follow the same structure and weave familiar games throughout, this minimises 'unpredictable' experiences, contributing to emotional safety.

Innovative and interactive learning captures: A variety of methods are employed to capture the voice of the participants and assess learning, enhance engagement and understanding.

Appropriate equipment: Utilisation of equipment such as crash mats and smaller rugby balls are used to boost confidence and enjoyment while learning.

PRINCIPLE 2

CONNECTION

The top motivator for teenage girls to participate in sport is to be with their friends and have fun. That motivation is a priority of the programme. Contact Ready sessions intentionally make space for girls to connect, make friends and form strong bonds. Coaches play an important role in fostering environments where girls can be part of a team and have a sense of belonging.

IN PRACTICE THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Coaches engaging with whānau

and players: At the beginning of the session allow for rugby balls to be thrown with players and whānau creating time to learn about your players and their families, cultural background, and what is important to them.

A welcoming environment:

Friendly coaches, music playing and the programme assets visible (such as branded tear drop flags) forming a sense of connection to the programme.

Purposeful connection activities:

Connection games are incorporated into all six sessions, allowing girls to get to know each other, make friends, and share laughter.

Learning in small groups: A variety of games are played as a whole group and smaller groups to foster closer connections among girls, with groups changing each session to help form strong bonds with different individuals.

A variety of games: There's a wide variety of games allowing players to work in teams or pairs to build connections and have fun!



BE PART
OF A TEAM

PRINCIPLE 3

CONFIDENCE

Confidence is a powerful attribute that can inspire players to continue participating in rugby. Confidence can be built through positive reinforcement, a focus on effort over outcomes, and developing skills and competence. Feeling connected with teammates and coaches supports an environment for confidence to flourish and a safe space for everyone to grow and learn together at their own pace.

IN PRACTICE THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Removing the fear of the unknown: The programme's promotional campaign covers what to expect before attending, reducing any fear of the unknown for participants before they arrive.

Predictability: Similar games with progressions are purposefully weaved across sessions, giving the girls the time to learn and become familiar with the activity to build confidence.

Fostering independence: The curriculum is designed to be stage-appropriate, featuring familiar modified games and activities with progressive challenges that instil a sense of pride and accomplishment. This ensures players are entering each session applying their prior knowledge with confidence as well as learning something new.

Positive reinforcement: Coaches focus on highlighting the players effort, and improvements with positive feedback to create a supportive environment.

Intentional questioning techniques: Encourage girls to first discuss answers with a peer instead of putting them on the spot, not only does it allow for connection, but it also ensures the player feels safe to answer the question first.



PRINCIPLE 4

FEEL GOOD MOMENTS

Feel good moments are about personal achievement, freedom and fun. It is when motivations and needs are met and provide rewarding moments the girls can share. By prioritising the programme principles, we can contribute to environments where feel-good moments can organically occur! These moments naturally arise from the girl's progress, but they can be even more powerful with the encouragement and feedback from the coaches. Together, the girls celebrate achievements, boost each other's confidence, and create an atmosphere where everyone shines!

IN PRACTICE THIS LOOKS LIKE:

Building strong connections and bonds: Is a key focus in the design of our sessions and games, as well as in how learning questions are presented.

Positive learning environments: With a 1:10 coach-to-player ratio, feedback from coaches is frequent and primarily positive, emphasising specific progress and fostering a sense of pride in each player.

Time to reflect: At the end of every session, we take time to reflect on the feel-good moments, helping everyone recognise their achievements and growth.





"Skill-build and injury
prevention programmes for

SAFE & CONFIDENT

entry or transition into tackle rugby."

COACHING GUIDELINES

Session structure

The Contact Ready programme follows a consistent flow and structure, helping the girls feel confident and aware of what comes next.

Each session includes:

Recap

A quick refresh of key skills and safety cues from the previous session, and an outline of what to expect today.

Connection Game

A fun activity to help girls bond, feel included, and build team spirit.

Warm-Up and Primers

Prepares the body for contact through dynamic movement and skill-specific activation.

Skill Development

Focused learning of key contact skills, delivered through games and activities that promote confidence and enjoyment.

Modified Game

An opportunity to apply new skills in a safe, game-like setting.

Cool Down and Learning Reflection

Ends with physical recovery and a short reflection to capture learning and check in on how the girls are feeling.

Blended learning approach

Due to the nature of the skills being learnt in Contact Ready, a blended approach to learning is applied. For safety, isolated skill development is being utilised however, using games to learn and practice these skills in varying contexts is an absolute priority. A balanced approach is key, the games allow for more connection, fun, problem solving and enquiry.

“Learning is facilitated through games where possible. This caters to the girl’s key motivator of ‘fun, fitness and friends’ and also helps girls apply what they have learned in various contexts.”

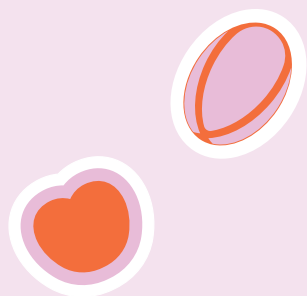
Girls first learn skills in a fixed, predictable environment, for example, practicing tackles on a crash mat and building confidence through repetition. Then they apply these skills in varied, game-based scenarios that are more unpredictable.

Coaches first demonstrate the full skill so girls understand the complete movement. For complex skills, the technique is then broken down into smaller parts for practice. Once confident, girls practice the full skill in both controlled and game-based settings.

HELPFUL INFORMATION

Pre-session Preparation

- **Coach Coordination:** Meet as a coaching team before the session to establish clear roles based on the number of coaches, participants, and each coach's experience and skill set. Clarify responsibilities such as timekeeping, setting up and packing down, introducing activities, and demonstrating skills. Each coach should prepare and become the 'leader' for their allocated section.
- **Equipment and Logistics:** Source all necessary equipment and ensure it is transported to the venue.
- **Music and Atmosphere:** Prepare music playlists in advance and have them ready to use. We have an official Contact Ready Playlist if you would like to use it!
- **Venue Setup:** Set up all programme assets (e.g., flags, mats) so they are visible and create a welcoming environment.
- **Communication:** Send a reminder email to participants prior to the session.



Group Management

- Manage the group effectively to create a positive learning environment and deliver the best possible session.
- Maintain a ratio of 1 coach to every 10 girls (maximum) to ensure participant needs are met, safety is prioritised, and engagement remains high. This ratio also enables individual feedback and maximises time on task.
- The Contact Ready programme runs best with 10–30 players. Running with fewer than 10 players is not recommended, as it reduces activity quality, variety, and overall experience.

When running sessions with 15 players or fewer

- Run games and activities consecutively rather than in stations, completing them as one or two groups depending on the task.
- When using mats, minimise lines and maximise time on task by forming smaller groups or using additional mats or hit shields.
- If the programme includes three stations, split into two groups with one station left empty, rotating through within the same timeframes.

When running sessions with 15–30 players

- Run the session as planned, following the standard station format.

Your Coaches Guide

Your Coaches Guide includes a tailored six-session programme designed specifically for Contact Ready. This is an evidence-based programme, so avoid changing the content unless there is a clear safety reason to do so.

- Inside the Coaches Guide you'll find features designed to support your delivery:

1. Top Things to Look For / Observe

Skills are complex, and it can feel overwhelming to observe everything at once. Many of the game cards have an 'observe' section to utilise when observing players' skill execution. All main skills are accompanied by "top things to look for"

2. Coaching Questions

Each game or activity includes example questions you can use to check for player understanding and support learning. All cool-down cards within the programme include session-specific questions that can be used while stretching and reflecting.

3. Videos

Each game card includes a QR code linking to a video demonstration of the activity. Use these as a visual reference if needed.

COACHING CRAFT

Coaching Craft refers to the practical skills and techniques coaches use to create safe, positive, effective learning environments. It's the art of how we coach, not just what we coach. Coaching Craft focuses on the ways we communicate, guide, question, and support players to discover and understand things for themselves.

Great Coaching Craft means players don't just complete an activity, drill, or game - they understand what they're doing, reflect on their learning, and continue to improve.

Show Me

Physically answering a question

Showing or demonstrating understanding by doing. 'Show Me' is a hands-on technique where players learn and demonstrate understanding by displaying the solution to a problem or game-like situation.

It is good practise for coaches to demonstrate new content each time it is introduced. This ensures girls have time to observe, practise and build confidence before being asked to do any demonstrations to the group contributing to their emotional safety.

It is important to always ask the players if they are happy to demonstrate in front of a large group. No one should be put on the spot.

[Show me | Video example](#)

Noticing

What to look and listen for, coaching what you see

Noticing is paying close attention to what players are doing, saying, and showing verbally and non-verbally. It's about observing purposefully, picking up on key moments, behaviours, or patterns, and using that information to guide your coaching decisions. It means being intentional in what you see and hear.

[Noticing | Video example](#)

Feedback

Between Coach to Player and Player to Player

Feedback is the skill of providing constructive, mana-enhancing input that helps players grow and improve. It can be coach-to-player, player-to-player, coach-to-coach, or even player-to-coach.

Coaches provide positive corrective feedback as needed but avoid overwhelming players to maintain their confidence. i.e. *"Almost there, you did great by using your same shoulder, and leg to get in close, now remember to position your head to the side of the BC to keep yourself safe"*.

Feedback is focussed on the objectives of the game, session, or activity. For example, if the game is focusing on head position and tackle height, the coach gives specific feedback on those areas.

[Feedback group | Video example](#)

Questioning

Asking rather than telling

Questioning is the practice of using well-timed, purposeful questions to engage players, check understanding, and encourage deeper thinking.

Questioning is used to:

- Check learning.
- Measure success against the sessions' learning outcomes and success indicators.
- Engage with the girls.
- Build self-confidence.

Coaches use a mix of open and closed questions during sessions.

Closed questions are used for quick checks of understanding, while open questions encourage players to apply their knowledge to different game situations.

Coaches implement scaffolding questions to deepen understanding. Examples include:

- "Can you explain that?"
- "Can you give me an example?"
- "How does that help?"
- "Does anyone have a question about that answer?"
- "What would happen if...?"
- "How is this similar to...?"
- "Can you see a possible solution to...?"
- "What changes would you suggest?"
- "What is one thing you will remember after this session? Why will you remember it?"

[Questioning | Video example](#)



TEACHING THE BASICS

The Contact Ready programme focuses on three key skills:

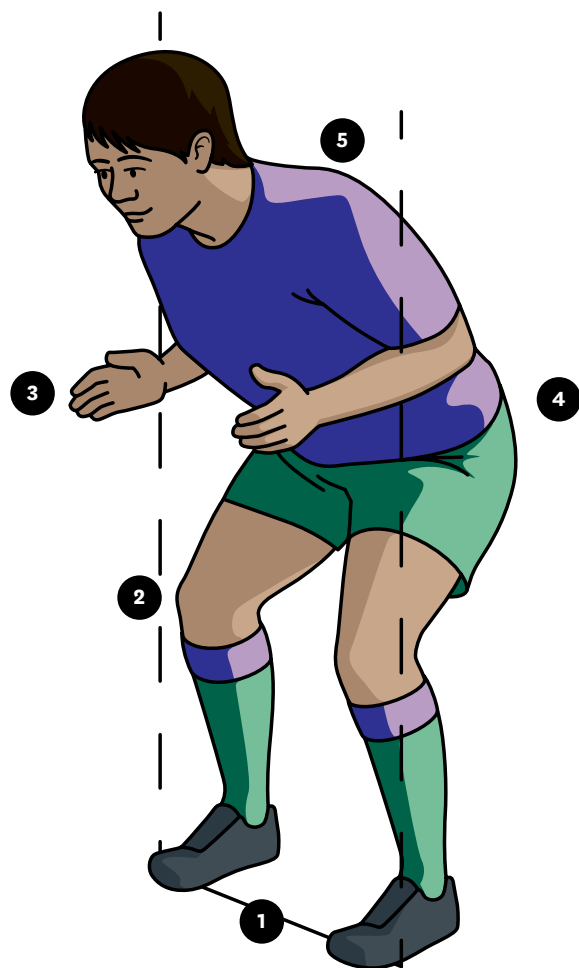
1. Landing safely
2. Ball into contact
3. Tackling

Players learn these skills through a range of activities and games, so they have time to practice and apply what they have learnt in different contexts.

The programme prioritises safety over 'effectiveness' and acknowledges the stage of the players development when learning these skills. Remember, it's about building the basics, keeping the players safe, and growing the love of rugby – keep it simple.

Below we have broken down the complete skill into simple instructions along with some optional 'cues' to support learning if needed, players will develop and grow confidence at different rates and respond to cues differently. In addition to key 'prompts' and basic instructions we have provided some 'top few' things to observe, while everything is important, these provide a good starting point when observing players.

RUGBY STRONG

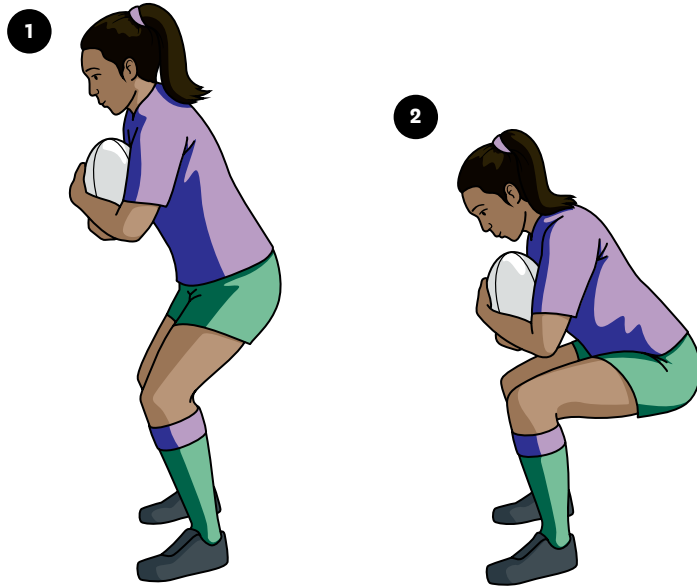


'Rugby Strong' is a strong body position that forms the foundation of many movements in rugby, and is utilised throughout the programme.

The Rugby Strong position requires feet shoulder width apart for a balanced and stable base - a square stance or split stance may be required depending on the action required. Bend at knee and hip to get low and ready to generate power and/or change direction. An engaged core for the transfer of that power, neck is neutral and eyes up for situational awareness.

1 Feet shoulder width apart	2 Knees slightly bent
3 Hands up	4 Core engaged – pelvic tilt, belly button to spine
5 Shoulders back, neck neutral	OPTIONAL CUES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chest over toes. • Hand above elbows. • T-rex arms. • Look over your sunglasses.

BASICS OF LANDING – BACKWARDS



Teaching safe landing technique is essential for reducing head injury risk in rugby. Studies show that women face a higher rate of concussions than men, with female players experiencing 70% more concussions during matches (Shill et al, 2024). This is partly because women are more likely to suffer uncontrolled whiplash injuries, which make up more than half of their head impacts (Williams et al, 2021). By teaching safe falling techniques, we can lower the chance of head-to-ground impacts and help prevent concussions (Otomo & Fukubayashi, 2015).



What is important about the chin-tuck?

Tucking the chin when falling in rugby can help to mitigate the risks by protecting the head. A tucked chin posture helps to maintain cervical spine alignment and reduce the likelihood of whiplash events. This is taught in a controlled environment to help reinforce the movement skill before introducing live, so that it becomes second nature.



1 Sink

- Lower your centre of gravity.
- Bend at your knee and hip.

2 Tuck

- Tuck your arms to chest.
- Tuck chin to protect your head.

OPTIONAL SUPPORT CUES:

- *Chin to chest.*

3 Roll

- Land on large part of the body.

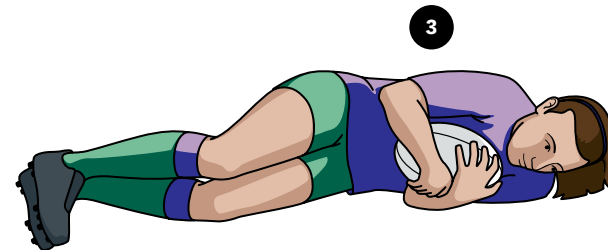
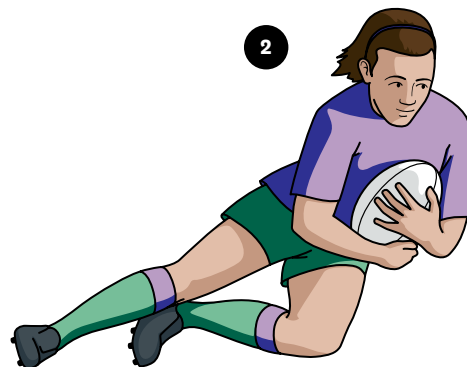
The top few things to look for:

- Spreading the force of body by landing/rolling on big parts.
- Head is protected through correct chin tuck.

Why are we teaching players to land backwards:

Contact Ready includes backward landing because it is a realistic game scenario – whether from a dominant tackle or during ball carry, we want players to practice how to protect their head when falling backwards, so they are prepared and confident in these situations.

BASICS OF LANDING – SIDEWAYS



1

Sink

- Lower your centre of gravity.
- Bend at your knee and hip.

2

Tuck

- Tuck your arms to chest.
- Tuck chin to protect your head.

OPTIONAL SUPPORT CUES:

- Head nod – neutral.
- Give yourself a double chin.

3

Roll

- Land on large part of the body.

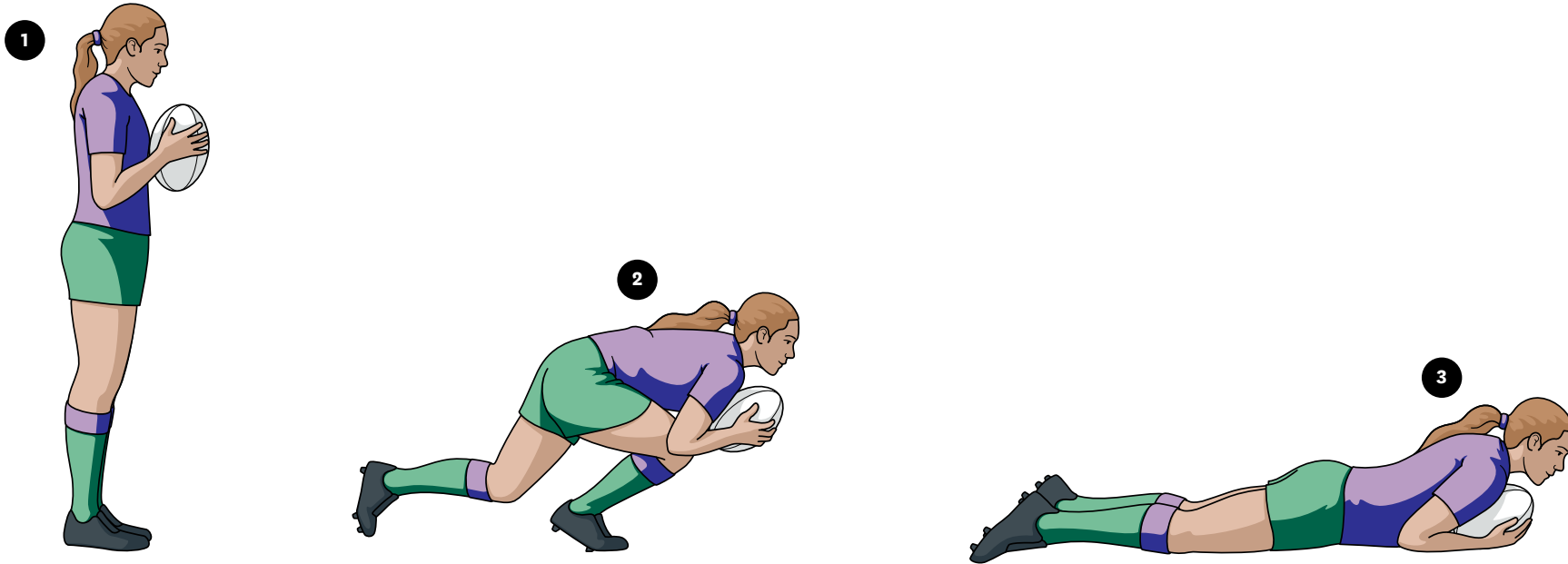
OPTIONAL SUPPORT CUES:

- Knee, hip then shoulder.

The top few things to look for:

- Spreading the force of body by landing/rolling on big parts.
- Head is protected through correct chin tuck.

BASICS OF LANDING – FORWARDS



1 Sink

- Lower your centre of gravity.
- Bend forward at your knee and hip.

2 Tuck

- Tuck your arms to chest.
- Eyes forward, neutral neck, brace for contact.

3 Roll

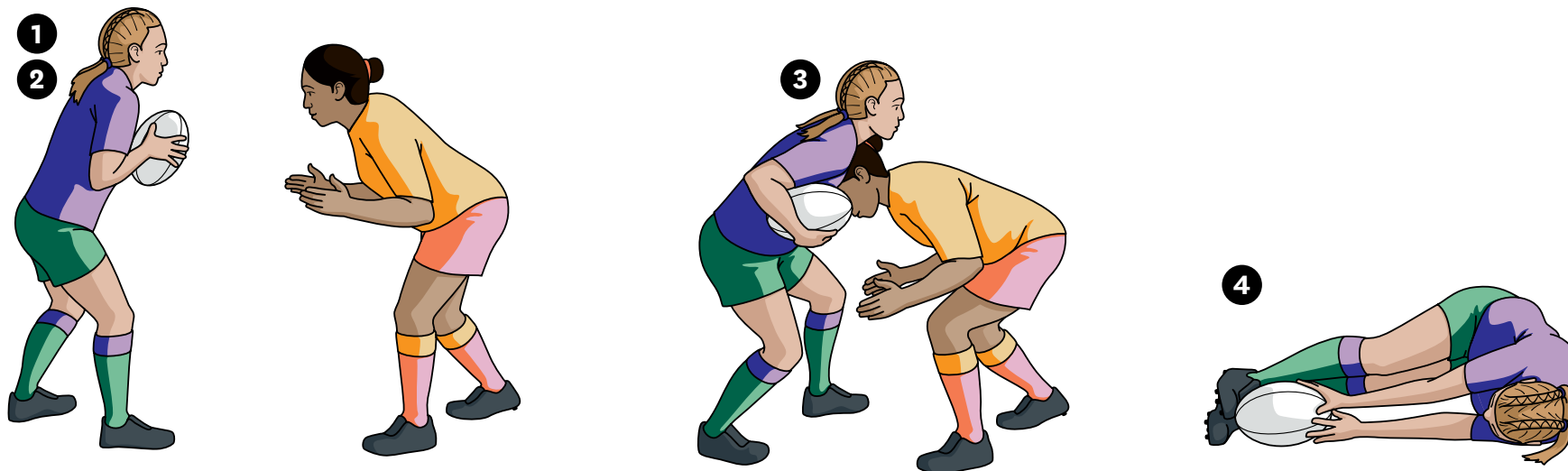
- Land on your knees and flat part of forearms to spread the load.

The top few things to look for:

- Player is spreading the force of impact.
- Players use full length of the forearm from the elbow to finger tips to spread the load. Avoid landing on elbows.
- Players protect their head and neck through engaging neck muscles, avoiding a bobble head.

BASICS OF BALL INTO CONTACT (BIC)

There is less evidence of safe and confident tackling and ball carry in the girls and women's community game compared to their male counterparts. Girls tell us that they are fearful of physicality and injury in the tackle, it is important to build confidence and safe technique when taking the ball into contact, particularly the player landing as this is a daunting aspect of the game.



1

Approach

- Hold the ball with two hands.
- Keep your eyes up & look for space to the side of the tackler.

OPTIONAL SUPPORT CUES:

- *Spaces not faces.*

2

Footwork

- Shorten your steps.
- Step to the side of the tackler.

OPTIONAL SUPPORT CUES:

- *"Feet alive" or "fast feet".*

3

Forward

- Shift the ball to the side of your body (away from the tackler).
- Get low and drive forward.

OPTIONAL SUPPORT CUES:

- *Rugby Strong position.*

4

Finish

- Land on a large part of the body.
- Place the ball in the direction of your team.

OPTIONAL SUPPORT CUES:

- *Staple.*
- *Score the try.*

The top few things to look for:

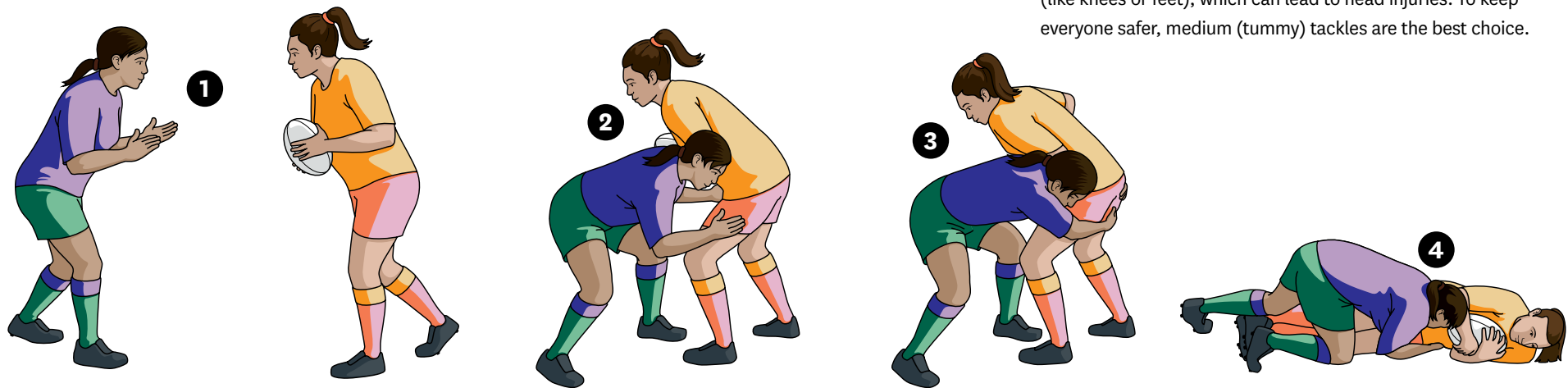
- Evading direct contact where possible.
- Protecting the ball in contact.
- A balanced, strong position ready for contact with a tackler.
- Safe landing.

TEACHING THE BASICS OF SAFE TACKLE

Focusing on rugby tackle technique is essential for improving player safety and preventing injuries, especially head injuries, which are common in the sport. Research (West et al, 2024) shows that the tackle contest is the leading cause of match injuries in youth rugby, with 55% in males and 71% in females.

Why tummy tackle?

We recommend coaching medium (tummy) tackles because they are the safest option for both the player with the ball and the tackler. Research shows that torso “tummy” tackles reduce the chance of head acceleration events compared to low or high tackles (Woodward et al, 2024). Low tackles can be risky because the tackler’s head might hit the ball carrier’s lower body (like knees or feet), which can lead to head injuries. To keep everyone safer, medium (tummy) tackles are the best choice.



1 Approach

- Keep your eyes on the ball carrier’s belly button.
- Shorten your steps.

OPTIONAL SUPPORT CUES:

- Eyes up.
- T-Rex Arms.

2 Get low

- Get low and lean forward to make shoulder contact.
- Use your same leg and same shoulder to get in close.

OPTIONAL SUPPORT CUES:

- Get ‘Rugby Strong’.
- Bend at the knee and hip.
- Shoulder below the ball.

3 Wrap

- Position your head tight into the side (or behind) the ball carrier.
- Wrap and squeeze arms tightly.

4 Push and Roll

- Land safely.
- Drive forward and attempt to land on top of ball carrier (then roll away).

OPTIONAL SUPPORT CUES:

- Land on top.

The top few things to look for:

- Head is safely on the side or behind the ball carrier, never in front.
- Tackle height below the sternum (tummy tackle).
- Same leg and shoulder used to get in close.
- Wrap and squeeze.

TACKLE HEIGHT

Tackle height research (Cross et al, 2019) shows that lowering the tackle height protects both the ball carrier and tackler from head-to-head contact.

70%

of concussions occur in the tackle. (Tucker et al, 2024)

4.2x

higher risk of concussion when the tackler's head is above the ball carrier's sternum in the tackle.

The programme's intended impact is to reduce head injury and risk of concussion for the tackler and ball carrier.

Tackle height law

The first tackler must target, and initially contact below the sternum. i.e. "the tummy" or below.

If a second tackler arrives, this player will be subject to the standard high tackle rugby law (no higher than the shoulder line of the ball carrier).

If two or more tacklers arrive at the same time, at least one must target and initially contact below the sternum i.e., "the tummy" or below, whilst the other/s will be subject to the existing high tackle rugby law (no higher than the shoulder line of the ball carrier).



PLAYER SAFETY

Preparing for contact (warm-ups & primers)

Rugby is a fast-paced team sport that involves:

- Sustained running.
- Full-body contact.
- Tackling.
- 360° spatial awareness.
- Rapid changes in direction.
- Sudden deceleration.

These dynamic movements can place the knee ligaments and structures in vulnerable positions if not executed with proper technique or without adequate warm-up. Also, insufficient neck strength, neck activation prep, and poor technique during tackling or falling can increase the risk of concussion events during contact (Hislop et al, 2017; Patterson et al, 2022).

Statistics show that female rugby players experience more serious knee and head injuries than males (ACC, 2023). This might be due to differences in body mechanics, strength, and hormones, which can affect how stable joints are and how prone players are to injuries, especially in high-impact sports like rugby. Women are also more likely to suffer ligament injuries, such as ACL tears, partly because wider hips can increase strain on the knees (Patterson et al, 2022).

To address these risks, tailored injury prevention programmes and warm-ups are essential to lower injury rates for women and girls. Research shows that effective warm-up routines can reduce injury rates by up to 50%, but many players do not consistently follow them (Patterson et al, 2022).

New Zealand Rugby (NZR) gathered feedback, as part of NZR projects, from women's and girls' rugby teams to understand barriers to effective warm-ups and ways to make them more enjoyable.

KEY CHALLENGES INCLUDED:

LACK OF TIME.

UNCERTAINTY ABOUT WHAT TO DO.

NOT KNOWING WHY A PROPER WARM-UP IS IMPORTANT.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT INCLUDED:

ADDING MUSIC.

ALLOWING PLAYERS TO LEAD ACTIVITIES WITH COACH SUPPORT.

EDUCATING PLAYERS ON THE REASONS BEHIND THE EXERCISES.

This feedback was used to shape the warm-up sessions in the Contact Ready programme, which includes effective injury-prevention exercises specifically for women and girls.

The Contact Ready warm-ups focus on:

- Improving muscle function and movement during direction changes.
- Activating and strengthening neck muscles to prepare for safe contact.
- Educating players on the importance of warming up.

These warm-ups aim to prepare young wāhine for rugby both physically and mentally, targeting areas where women and girls are at higher risk of injury. The goal is to reduce these risks and ensure they are ready to perform at their best.

How our warm-ups work?

Over the six-sessions, the same warm-ups are used along with session specific primers. The warm-ups include 4 parts:

- 1 **FIRE UP**
- 2 **SWITCH ON**
- 3 **STRONG & STEADY**
- 4 **GAME READY**
 - 4A **Neck Activations**
 - 4B **Session Specific Primers**

The warm-up progressions change over the six sessions from coach-led to player-led utilising the warm-up cards in the Contact Ready coaches kit, but it's essential for coaches to actively observe warm-ups, even when players are leading them. Coaches may need to provide technique tips or cues to correct unsafe movements and ensure proper form helping to prevent injuries.

Primers

Primers are specific movements that prepare players bodies for contact.

They are fun, dynamic and participated in partner or group activities that often bring out the competitive side of players, so expect lots of laughing and giggling.

They are important because they prepare crucial parts of the body for contact that are often missed within a regular warm-up. Think shoulders, core, neck! The programme has tailored the primers to the content of each session, intentionally progressing them throughout the programme.

There is a full list of primers in the coaches' kit, along with the warm-up and cool down cards.



PLAYER WELFARE & SAFETY



Player Profile and injury screening

Ensures training is tailored and safe.

- Pre-season/Pre-event record emergency contacts, medical conditions, current and past injuries, fitness, and skills.
- Check before each session or game for any new injuries.



Concussion – 4 R's

- **Recognise** signs (confusion, headache, dizziness, memory issues etc)
- **Remove** immediately from play
- **Recover** via NZR's Graduated Return to Play (GRTP)
- **Return** only after completing GRTP & medical clearance



Serious Injury

- Stop play → Call 111 → Get medical help
- Notify PU → NZ Rugby → NZ Rugby Foundation
- Ongoing player/family support
- Report: nzrugby.co.nz/serious-injury



Injury Management

- Do no further harm, control situation, minimise movement to injured area
- Soft tissue management:
 - Apply R.I.C.E.D. (*Rest, Ice - to assist with pain management, Compression, Elevation, Diagnosis*)
 - Avoid for the first 48hrs - *Heat, Alcohol, Massage, Anti-inflammatory medications, Aggravating movements*
- If unconscious: Suspect neck injury, check ABCs (airway, breathing, circulation), call urgent help, don't move player

Everyone – coaches, parents, teammates and refs share responsibility for player welfare.

CONTACT READY PROGRAMME PROMOTION

NZR are committed to supporting the visibility and awareness of Contact Ready nationally to drive engagement locally. The combination of national and regional promotion using a shared name and shared assets, will contribute to a recognised and trusted programme and awareness of our collaborative efforts towards a safer game.

The NZR team is here to help with resources and support tailored to your specific needs. Advice on establishing your programme, promoting your programme and what to offer next is readily available through our Women and Girls Rugby Managers. There is also a range of promotional materials such as social media assets, pre-designed posters, and poster templates, along with potential giveaway options and Contact Ready merchandise.

Central Website

A central landing page on the NZR website has been established to give prospective players and caregivers all the information needed to learn about Contact Ready. In addition, players can find their nearest programme and all the details needed to register. **All Contact Ready Programs should be registered via NZ Rugby and visible on the Contact Ready landing page.**

New Zealand Rugby Socials

Starting in 2025 NZR will begin to centrally raise awareness of Contact Ready through social media and other platforms and direct traffic to the Contact Ready landing page. Ensure your programme is registered with NZR and on the website to take advantage of this promotion.

Provincial Union Promotion

While NZR will promote the programme nationally and have a list of available programmes on the central landing page, Provincial Unions will still need promote their own programme through their own channels. NZR will provide social media tiles, posters, and video content for promotional support.

It is important to have up to date programme information and dates on your website as well as the RX registration link.

Recommended social media channels to share content and promote the programme:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- X
- TikTok
- LinkedIn

Brand Guidelines and assets

The brand guidelines and assets will sit on the NZR website under our centralised Women and Girls webpage.

Rugby Xplorer (RX)

Registering to Contact Ready can be facilitated through RX, this way we can collectively track engagement and capture the player's ongoing journey. The usage of RX makes for an aligned and cohesive registration process across the country.



REFERENCES

Accident Compensation Corporation. (2023). *2023 sports injury data report: Rugby and community sports analysis* [Unpublished]. ACC.

Auckland Rugby. (2019). *"Girls Only" in school delivery pilot 2019* [Unpublished report]. Auckland Rugby.

Barden, C., Hancock, M. V., Stokes, K. A., Roberts, S. P., & McKay, C. D. (2022). Effectiveness of the Activate injury prevention exercise programme to prevent injury in schoolboy rugby union. *British journal of sports medicine*, 56(14), 812-817

Bussey, M. D., Salmon, D., Nanai, B., Romanchuk, J., Gomez, R. M., Tong, D., ... & Falvey, É. (2024). Assessing Head Acceleration Events in Female Community Rugby Union Players: A Cohort Study Using Instrumented Mouthguards. *Sports Medicine*, 1-14.

Cross, M. J., Tucker, R., Raftery, M., Hester, B., Williams, S., Stokes, K. A., ... & Kemp, S. (2019). Tackling concussion in professional rugby union: a case-control study of tackle-based risk factors and recommendations for primary prevention. *British journal of sports medicine*, 53(16), 1021-1025.

Hislop, M. D., Stokes, K. A., Williams, S., McKay, C. D., England, M. E., Kemp, S. P., & Trewartha, G. (2017). Reducing musculoskeletal injury and concussion risk in schoolboy rugby players with a pre-activity movement control exercise programme: a cluster randomised controlled trial. *British journal of sports medicine*, 51(15), 1140-1146.

New Zealand Rugby. (2023). *New Zealand women's & girls in rugby system strategy 2023-2033*. New Zealand Rugby. WG-SystemStrategy-Full-web.pdf

New Zealand Rugby. (2023). *NZR participation data* [2023 Provincial Union Participation Benchmarking booklet]. New Zealand Rugby

Otomo, M., & Fukubayashi, T. (2015). Concussions in junior rugby football athletes and their prevention. *Sports Injuries and Prevention*, 53-59.

Patterson, B. E., Donaldson, A., Cowan, S. M., King, M. G., Barton, C. G., McPhail, S. M., ... & Crossley, K. M. (2022). Evaluation of an injury prevention programme (Prep-to-Play) in women and girls playing Australian Football: design of a pragmatic, type III, hybrid implementation-effectiveness, stepped-wedge, cluster randomised controlled trial. *BMJ open*, 12(9), e062483.

Shill, I. J., West, S. W., Sick, S., Schneider, K. J., Wiley, J. P., Hagel, B. E., ... & Emery, C. A. (2024). Differences in injury and concussion rates in a cohort of Canadian female and male youth Rugby Union: a step towards targeted prevention strategies. *British journal of sports medicine*, 58(1), 34-41.

Sport New Zealand. (2021). *Girls and young women profile* [PDF document]. Sport New Zealand. <https://sportnz.org.nz/media/1551/girls-and-young-women-profile.pdf>

Tucker, R., Hester, B., Hendricks, S., Brown, J., & Falvey, É. C. (2024). Sanctioned illegal high tackles significantly increase concussion risk to both tacklers and ball carriers in elite men's Rugby Union. *BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine*, 10(2), e001932.

West, S. W., Shill, I. J., Bailey, S., Syrydiuk, R. A., Hayden, K. A., Palmer, D., ... & Emery, C. A. (2023). Injury rates, mechanisms, risk factors and prevention strategies in youth rugby union: what's all the ruck-US about? A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Sports medicine*, 53(7), 1375-1393.

Williams, E. M., Petrie, F. J., Pennington, T. N., Powell, D. R., Arora, H., Mackintosh, K. A., & Greybe, D. G. (2022). Sex differences in neck strength and head impact kinematics in university rugby union players. *European journal of sport science*, 22(11), 1649-1658.

Women in Sport. (2020). *Reframing sport for teenage girls: Tackling teenage disengagement* [Report]. Women in Sport. <https://womeninsport.org/resource/reframing-sport-for-teenage-girls-tackling-teenage-disengagement/>

Woodward, J., Tooby, J., Tucker, R., Falvey, É. C., Salmon, D. M., Starling, L., & Tierney, G. (2024). Instrumented mouthguards in elite-level men's and women's rugby union: characterising tackle-based head acceleration events. *BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine*, 10(3).

Acknowledgments

NZR would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Provincial Union representatives on the Contact Ready co-design team.

North Otago Rugby Football Union, Manawātū Rugby Union, Waikato Rugby Union, King Country Rugby Football Union, Mid Canterbury Rugby Union, Taranaki Rugby Football Union, North Harbour Rugby Union, Northland Rugby Union, Auckland Rugby Union, Otago Rugby Football Union and Wellington Rugby Football Union.



