



Introducing Contact and Recovery

This guide provides coaches and trainers additional information on how to introduce, teach and develop contact and recovery for new players within the THIS IS ROLLER DERBY curriculum.

Learning to recover is fundamental to success on skates. The objective should always be to encourage safe and controlled recovery without creating additional risk to participants.

Contact is an important part of WFTDA gameplay and one which carries additional risks for both new and long-term participants. It is important that leagues dedicate specific training time to ensure all participants are confident and competent in key skills and values for the safety of themselves, their teammates, and their opponents.

How to use this guide

This guide uses the Introduction > Exploration > Development > Proficiency (IEDP) framework for progression, ensuring that players have a solid foundation on which to build contact and recovery skills. This guide should be used alongside THIS IS ROLLER DERBY.

THIS IS ROLLER DERBY curriculum provides an overview of the appropriate stages for introducing specific skills and rules knowledge to players and officials. The skills and progressions detailed here are reflected in the curriculum but provide further detail and tools to ensure that our sport's approach to contact is consistent and safe.

The ideas and tools in this guide are intended to

- 1) Set out the principles and approach that we suggest coaches take to introduce the elements of contact and recovery.
- 2) Highlight the common values we want all participants in roller derby to adhere to when taking part in the sport.
- 3) Provide options and suggestions for drills and narratives that will support coaches in delivering the recommended approach.
- 4) Address non-engagement recovery, receiving and recovering from contact, and initiating contact.

Principles of coaching contact and recovery

TEACH WITH VALUES IN MIND

Values should be reinforced throughout your sessions. These can be WFTDA values, your league values, and contact values and behaviours that you will find later in this document.

BUILD CONTROL THROUGH FUNCTIONAL MOVEMENT

Start by training each skill off-skates and continue off-skates training throughout recovery and contact progression to build muscle memory and comfort faster.

INTRODUCE CONTACT EARLY AND OFTEN

Training the elements of contact roller derby from the beginning supports player retention and gives participants the opportunity to explore skating as part of the game rather than as isolated skills¹.

Your role as coach or trainer

As a coach or trainer, you can use the different elements proposed in this guide to construct your own training narrative.


When building your new player program, consider the principles of contact and the suggested progressions shared here. These are good practice and can help minimise injury while building confident, controlled derby players.

Before training contact, make sure that your participants are aware of and give their consent to the following:

For skaters:

- Contact from opponents' legal blocking zones to your legal target zones during practice drills, scrimmages, and games

¹ This guide will give you tools and ideas of safe ways to implement this.

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- Potential incidental or accidental contact from a teammate, opponent, or coach including to and from body areas that are not part of the legal target and blocking zones

For Skating Officials, Non-Skating Officials, coaches and other participants:

- Potential incidental or accidental contact from a player or other Skating Official inside or outside of the track boundaries

Each player will develop at their own rate and some may need more time than others to master the initial steps. The decisions to progress a player through the stages of contact should be based on a number of factors including safety, awareness, skills and ability, and the willingness of the individual.

Coaches have a responsibility to work with players to assess their readiness and place them in level-appropriate training situations.

THIS IS ROLLER DERBY CURRICULUM relies on coaches' ability to dynamically assess individual players' abilities to engage in contact scenarios. While there is no set metric for when a player is ready to progress, we advise that coaches look out for the following behaviors when making decisions about next steps.

- Is the player capable of recovering from a stumble or trip?
 - Do they grab others when impacted/ falling?
- Do they sprawl or tuck in when falling/ fallen?
- Can the player identify legal target and blocking zones?
 - Are they intentional in working to use legal target and blocking zones?
- Is the player aware of their body and their positioning?
 - Are they leading with their head?
 - Do they have the body control to manage follow through after a hit?

Recovery

What is recovery?

Recovery is a skater's ability to manage their response to instability or physical removal from game play (i.e. by falling or placing part of their body on the floor).

All skaters will eventually fall. It's important for skaters to be comfortable with falls and to understand how to manage their falls.

Consider this!

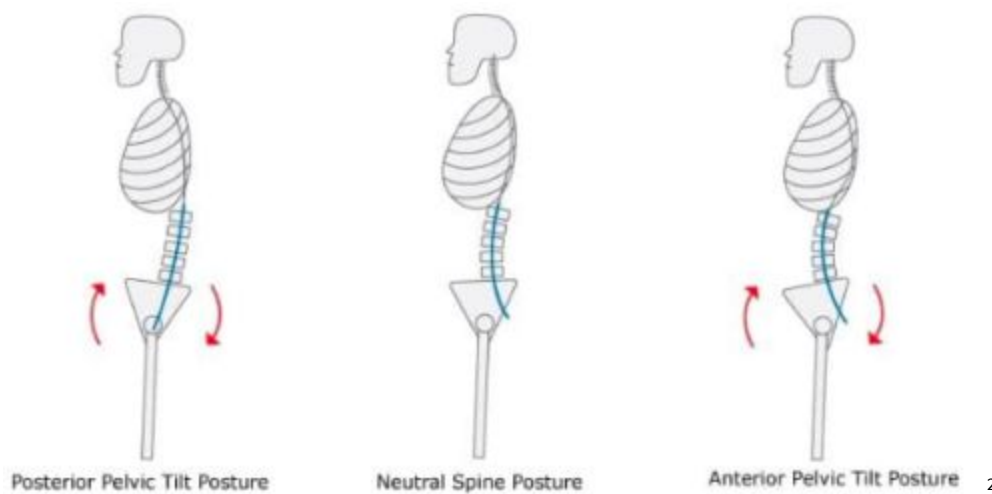
Teaching skaters how to keep themselves from falling can be just as important as learning how to fall properly.

Coaching recovery


There are 4 key building blocks to coaching recovery.

1. Stance

With skaters that are new to roller skating, coaches should encourage them to keep their joints soft (not locked or stiff) and, when skaters feel unstable, cue the response of dropping their sit bones into a squat over their skates and tilt pelvis (posterior pelvic tilt).



² Image source : <http://doctorkickass.com/biomechanics-positional/proper-jiu-jitsu-posture/>



This action:

- lowers their center of gravity, which increases stability;
- keeps the major lower joints (hips, knees, ankles) pliable and springy, which allows the skater to adjust and maintain balance while rolling;
- brings their shoulders in front of their hips which means they will pitch forward (where their padding is) rather than onto their backs;
- places their spine in a neutral position to release pressure on the lower back.

Encourage skaters to get comfortable with this as a rolling safety stance and return to it whenever they feel unstable. By building muscle memory with good habits, skaters have a better foundation upon which to build from.

2. Balance and Proprioception

Balance and proprioception are an integral part of skating and the foundation of basic recovery skills. These senses work together to allow the body to stay upright without injury by providing the brain with input from our muscles and joints. The brain then monitors the body position and makes corrections when necessary.

Proprioception refers to the body's ability to perceive its own position in space. It enables us to judge where our limbs are and how they move. It also works with other senses to locate external objects relative to the body.

Aim to train both elements, focusing on single leg balance and varying positions to improve recovery skills and prevent some stumbles and falls. Encourage skaters to experiment with weight shift and intentionally lowering their centre of gravity to improve balance.

3. Stumbling

Stumbling is getting your feet back underneath you from a loss of balance and staying upright. This can include individual stumbles, like overcompensating in weight shifts or catching a wheel on a piece of debris, as well as things like wheel bumps when skating in proximity to others.

Stumbling may involve stepping, running, and/or shifting between wheels/edges and toe stops. The ability to recover from stumbles can help a skater be more active during gameplay and minimize the number of repeated impacts on players' bodies.

4. Falling

Falling is more than just hitting the ground. Coaching falling should include the following considerations:

Anticipating a fall

Skaters should learn to anticipate a fall to improve their chance of recovering safely and quickly. Coach them to be mindful of their body weight and indicators of instability.

Consider this!

First rule of falling:

When you go down, do not take anybody with you. When someone else goes down, do not try to “help” them as they fall.

By maintaining a stable and ready stance (knees bent, chest up, core engaged) they will be able to react to instability or hits more readily.

Protecting your body when you fall

When a skater does fall, dropping their centre of gravity and having their body soft and closer to the ground will allow the skater to fall in a way that will allow their safety equipment to protect them.

Coach skaters to avoid standing and stiffening when they feel like they are losing their balance. The more upright a skater, the more likely that they will have an uncontrolled fall backwards which can cause injury to the tail bone or head.

Coach controlled falls to minimize heavy impacts. Anticipating the fall and dropping into the safety stance will allow the skater to manage their fall and its trajectory. They should aim to fall where they have padding (protective kit or the more robust body parts, like hips and rear ends). If they are going to fall over backwards, train them to try to pick a side and lean so that they fall more on one side of their bum than flat on their tailbone.

Coach them to use their core to control the speed of the fall and avoid slamming down into the ground.

Protecting others when you fall

The best way to protect other skaters when a skater falls is to train skaters to be self-contained. This means that they fall in a way that their body does not become a hazard to other skaters and they do not grab and pull at other skaters as they go down. Staying self-contained also protects the falling skater from collisions and tangling with others.

After a fall, skaters should check the situation before standing up. Have them look to see what or who is around them, making sure fingers are tucked in and off the floor, and that they are not going to

make contact with another skater as they are getting up.

Once it is safe, a skater should get up as quickly as possible so they do not become a hazard during gameplay.

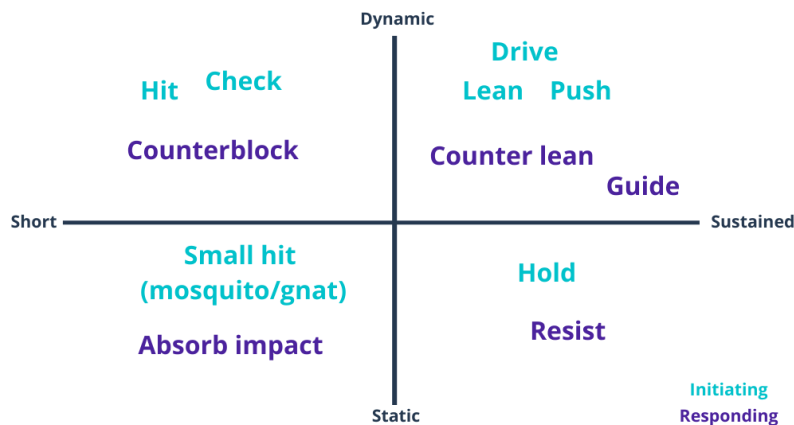
Contact

What is contact?


Contact is any situation in which one player intentionally physically engages with another player.

Types of contact are varied and can be categorized according to:

- Intention - whether assisting a teammate or blocking an opponent
- Initiation - whether initiating or responding to the contact
- Duration - whether the contact is sustained
- Trajectory - whether the intent of contact is to maintain a static position or dynamically move the other player



All contact has a Start, Middle, and End, separate from whether the contact achieves the objective that was set by the player.



To Start contact, players should set the intention of their contact and ensure they are in legal position (in bounds, in play, and moving in a counterclockwise direction) and using a legal blocking zone to engage with a legal target zone.

Initiation of contact is the act of beginning contact, either with an opponent (block) or with a teammate (assist). The initiation of contact plays a role in several of *the Rules of Flat Track Roller Derby* and the initiator is always responsible for the legality of the contact³.

The speed of the contact is determined at the Start of Contact.

In the Middle of contact, players are enacting the direction and duration of contact.

After the End of Contact, the initiator is still responsible for their momentum and follow through; body control, position within the track and Engagement Zone, and direction and speed of movement are still important.

Foundations of contact

Responsible behavior surrounding contact is foundational to the game of roller derby.

Elements to aim for when training contact

upholding
the values
and
behaviors
of contact

using legal
blocking
zones

engaging
against
legal target
zones

moving in a
counter-clo
ckwise
direction

maintaining
an in-play,
upright,
and
in-bounds
position
during the
jam

Players may not always achieve all of these when initiating contact, especially in the early stages of contact skill development, but the intention should always be to initiate contact responsibly, legally, and safely within the rules of gameplay.

³ Glossary of *The WFTDA Rules of Flat Track Roller Derby*

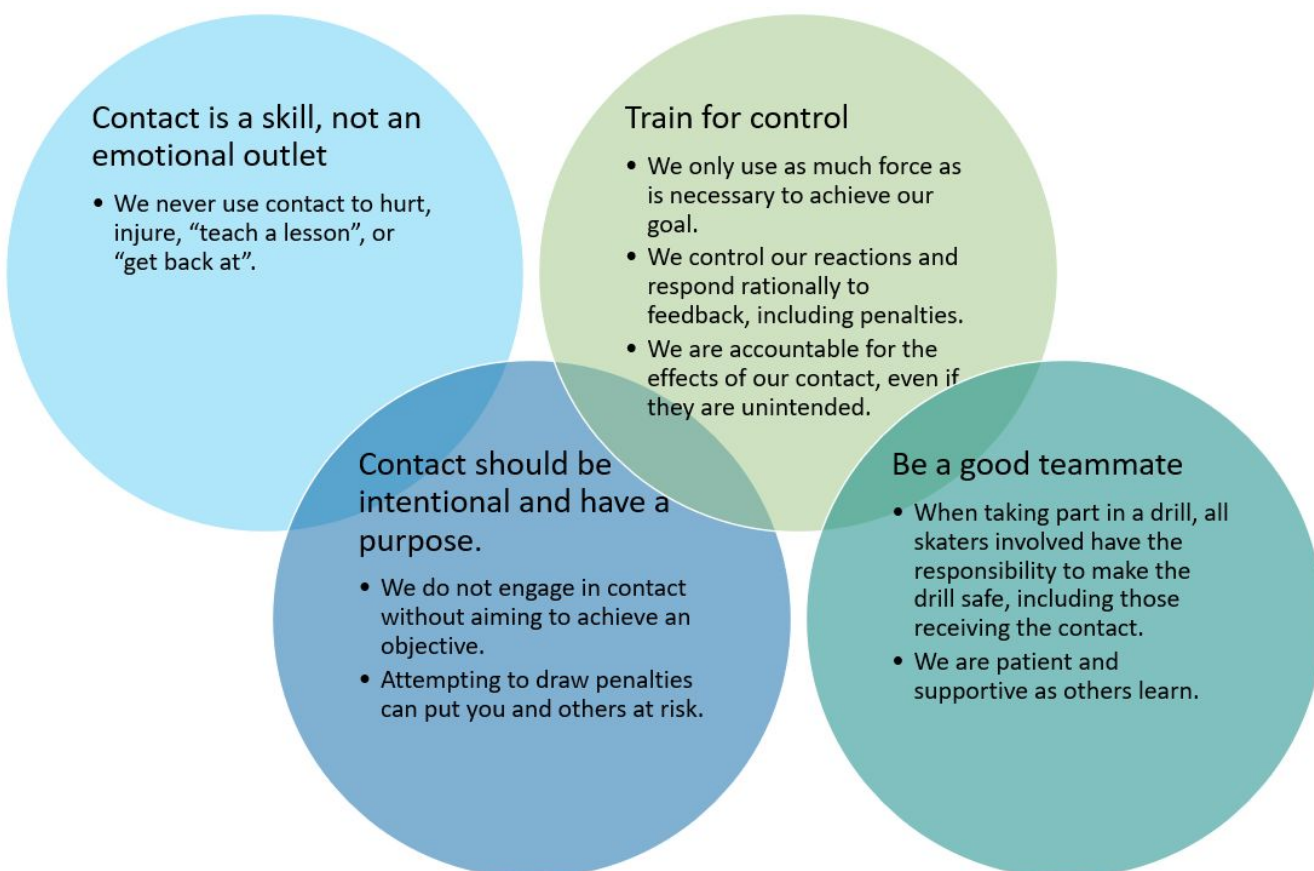
Since the Initiator is always responsible for the legality of contact, players initiating contact must understand the rules and uphold the values and behaviors of engaging in contact. We all share the responsibility of protecting ourselves and others.

To effectively achieve the foundational elements of contact, a player must have:

- the ability to control their body (to use legal blocking and target zones and to maintain an upright position);
- the ability to change their speed and direction while skating (to move in a counterclockwise direction and maintain an in play and inbounds position);
- the ability to mitigate their force of contact (to understand and use only as much force as is necessary to achieve their objective).

Introducing movement and skills for contact off-skates can support the development of fundamental movement and muscle memory needed to maintain control of body, speed, and force.

Values and behaviors for players engaging in contact



Building contact confidence (How to)

PROXIMITY (NO CONTACT OR ENGAGEMENT)

Start proximity as soon as your players are on-skates - this can be as simple as standing arms width apart in penguin stance.

As soon as a coach can see that a player has the stability to resist flailing or grabbing at other skaters, move to pack standing, pack skating, skating in pairs, and close proximity (>1 foot) shadow drills.



PLACEMENT (DELIBERATE ENGAGEMENT WITH MINIMAL PRESSURE)

When introducing new blocks, start with setting players up to feel where engagement will legally happen.

Use limited movement or pressure as players focus on technique and body positioning.

Take the time to discuss:

- How the player initiating contact can identify they are in a legal position.
- The impact the placement of the block will have on stability - where will the pressure come from and what changes to body position with both players need to adapt to the block?
- Variations for different body needs (range of motion, size, anatomical structure, strength, etc.).



PRESSURE (CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT AFTER INITIAL CONTACT)

Upskill by adding pressure. Make sure to focus both on giving and in receiving contact.

Initiating contact:

Players should work on applying the weight shift and body position changes discussed during placement. What does it feel like? What works? What do you have control over and how can you find the control?

Assessing and regulating force:

- What does it feel like to use more force than necessary?
- What is the difference between a player who is resisting (prepared for the contact) and one who is not?
- How to adjust force mid block to respond to the level of resistance?

Receiving contact:

Stance

Skaters should learn to be aware of their stance and their state of readiness. A ready stance means they will be in a better position to receive unexpected hits, react to incidental contact, and protect themselves and others by maintaining stability.

Stance check: knees bent, chest up and weight back, shoulders in front of hips.

Counter-blocking or “meeting a hit”

Counter-blocking is used to absorb the force of a hit. This technique should be introduced at the same time as giving a hit.

Take the time discuss

- weight transfer
- timing (intercept the block before it completes its trajectory)
- how much force is needed to absorb the hit
- recovery - what happens after you take the hit



IMPACT (RECEIVING CONTACT)

Impact can be introduced incrementally.

Coaches should set parameters for the skill set of their group.

Avoid using parameters such as “go at 50% of strength”. Frame training as an opportunity to improve player ability to assess and regulate force under changing circumstances.

Build up to higher levels of impact by adjusting distance from target and speed on approach.



Appendices

Appendix 1 : Example drills for coaching recovery skills

Balance

Everything you do while learning to skate will be a balance exercise! Balance can be developed both on and off-skates.

- Practice one foot balance on and off skates, both stationary and while moving.
- Varied movement is helpful - practice single leg hops and jumps from one foot to the other, sideways, etc.
- Get skaters used to standing on skates and skating in groups. Things to look for: are they unsteady, do they reach out when they lose their balance?


Stumbling

To practice stumbling, introduce instability or loss of balance by:

- Pushing or bumping a skater.
Example: have skaters glide on one foot, gently push them, and have them practice stepping to regain balance. With more experienced skaters, you can increase the difficulty by increasing force, varying the direction, or pushing them towards the track boundary and challenging them to stay in bounds.
- Skating over obstacles.
Example: Skate over track rope or low cones.
- Intentionally bumping wheels.
Example: Start by having skaters skate very slowly next to each other in pairs and get closer until wheels touch. This will cause the wheels to stop; encourage the skaters to step forward to recover.

Teach the movement patterns:

- Walking/skating lunges
- Lateral steps on and off skates: Start on one foot in skating position, step laterally on to the other foot. Emphasize not leading or reaching with feet. Hips initiate the movement, feet will get there in time to catch yourself.

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- Toe stop and duck feet runs, practicing acceleration starting with a forward “almost fall”. Skater starts stationary, with weight forward. They start the run by picking up their *front* foot and leaning further forwards. The foot comes down angled out to push, or with a toe stop down, still behind their center of gravity. As they run the skater’s feet will catch up and push them into a balanced position, similar to a sprinter’s start from blocks.

Falling

Falling practice should be designed to limit repeated hard impact to skaters’ bodies, even if they are wearing pads. Keep in mind that a new skater will already be falling a lot in practice, and they will likely be less able to control their fall and experience more force of impact than an experienced skater doing the same drill.

- Practice going from standing to kneeling or sitting on the floor, with and without skates. Work towards lowering to and getting up from a kneeling position without using hands on the floor.
- Practice the tucked “fall small” position on the floor. A skater is said to have “fallen small” if they fall with the arms and legs controlled, tucked into the body, and not flailing or sprawled⁴. Feet brought in together and fingers off the floor.
- Practice getting into and out of a half kneeling, full kneeling, and tucked on knees and elbows positions while skating. Emphasize “crumpling” rather than dropping to the floor. To assess readiness for this, look for ability to do a walking lunge off skates, and to get down to the floor in a controlled way on skates.

⁴ WFTDA Rules of Flat Track Roller Derby



Appendix 2: Coaching skaters to receiving contact (counter-block)

Fundamental steps to coaching counter-blocking.

Before contact is made

- Check stable and ready stance (knees bent, shoulders in front of hips, center of gravity over feet)

As contact is made

- Engage the core
- Drop center of gravity
- Meet the block by stepping or shifting body weight towards the initiator (keeping legal direction in mind!)

After contact is made

- Position body for sustained contact (braking/holding/guiding), or
- Recover/return to stable and ready stance

Example drills to practice responding to contact

On or off skates: A pair of skaters take turns initiating contact and attempting to move each other laterally or from slightly behind. After initial impact is made, return to a stable and ready stance.

Progressions: Initiator approaches from some distance with speed, sustained contact for a few seconds after impact

On or off skates: Groups of 1-3 skaters counter-block a skater who initiates contact from behind attempting to move or push through the wall. Initiators engage for a predetermined amount of time (could be as low as a few seconds - just one initial impact - or longer to practice responding to repeated or sustained contact) before moving on to the next group.

Progressions: Initiators can stop then engage, or initiate with speed, depending on the level of the participants. Add a second initiator, either acting as Jammer + offensive Blocker, or coordinated offense, to increase complexity.

Appendix 3: Functional movements and skills for initiating contact


Contact skills build on foundational skating skills and functional movements. Identifying and assessing the foundations for contact skills, and developing them on and off skates, sets skaters up for success when introducing contact.

Throughout contact, skaters' feet should stay close enough to their center of gravity that they can be responsible for their own balance and recovery-- this will allow them to better maintain control of their body position, force, and the duration of their engagement.

Basic skill/foundation	Leads to
<p>Weight transfer (within own base of balance) and applying lateral force</p> <p>In order to effectively apply force laterally, skaters need to be able to control where they put their weight and to fully transfer weight to one leg.</p> <p><i>Practice:</i> One leg balance, one leg jumps, skater jumps and dryland skating drills</p> <p><i>Key points:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lateral movement starts with the skater’s weight over or close to the foot that they will push off of (“loading”). 	<p>Lateral hits</p> <p>Driving/directing</p>
<p>Weight transfer and applying force to others</p> <p>Learning to be responsible for own balance while applying force to others.</p> <p><i>Practice:</i> (on and off skates) Leaning on a teammate to create a seam, pushing on another skater or skaters, resisting a push</p> <p><i>Key points:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving weight far enough to create pressure, while staying within your own ability to recover. 	<p>Slowing/holding</p>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feet close enough to the center of gravity that the skater is able to step and regain their balance. Have partners vary or completely remove pressure and make sure skaters are able to adjust. • Experiment with body positioning and make sure skaters work with different teammates to adjust for differences in size, stance, etc. 	
<p>Following and predicting movement</p> <p><i>Practice:</i> Mirroring or tracking another skater’s lateral movement Partner and group games off skates (e.g. tag games)</p> <p><i>Key points:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where can you look to predict where someone is going (their feet, hips, eyes)? • Ways of tracking the position of someone who is behind you, both with and without contact (“feeler arms”, back contact, looking over shoulders). 	<p>Positioning for blocking</p>
<p>Forward acceleration</p> <p><i>Practice:</i> Quickly accelerating from slow skating or standstill, using both toe stops and wheels (duck feet), or off skates Pushing on another skater while moving forward</p> <p><i>Key points:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skaters need to discover how far forward they can put their weight while still being able to regain balance. • Hips and feet need to be in line with the point of contact to avoid leaning with upper body and shoulders only. 	<p>Forward pushing</p> <p>Backwards blocking (similar body positions used to resist and slow down opponents)</p> <p>Stumbling/recovery</p>
<p>Stable and ready stance</p> <p>What this looks like will vary, the goal is to activate core muscles and find a stable position that works for each skater’s body.</p>	<p>Absorbing impact</p>



<p><i>Practice:</i> Knee alignment and tracking in lunges, squats and jumps, pelvic tilt (noticing and controlling), strength and coordination of shoulder, back and neck muscles</p> <p>Absorbing increasing impacts, off and then on skates</p> <p>Non-derby specific contact drills and games (e.g attempting to pull/push a partner off balance from different positions)</p>	
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