

CONTACT READY







Welcome to Contact Ready	4
Programme objectives	7
Teenage girls – What do we know?	8
Creating positive experiences for teenage girls: Programme principles	9
Coaching guidelines	13
5a. Session structure	13
5b. Coaching approach	13
5c. Coaching tips	14
Six-session overview	16
Teaching the basics of Ball into Contact, Tackle and Safe Landing	18
Player safety, warm-up and primers	26
Programme promotion	28
References	29

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 national introductory programme made especially for teenage girls who are new, in their first year of rugby, or who are playing non-contact versions of the game. The programme seeks to enhance player safety and confidence when transitioning into contact versions of rugby. It's all about providing a safe space to learn and practice with girls of similar abilities, make friends and grow their love of rugby.

“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”.

The programme has been developed with the unique needs and motivations of teenage girls at the centre of the design, utilising current research, experts, and best practice.

The programme has been co-designed with Provincial Unions across the country with the idea to build a nationally recognised and trusted programme through a collaborative delivery network, all working together to create quality experiences for girls.

Background

In 2023, NZR published the 10-year Women and Girls' Strategy (New Zealand Rugby, 2023). While the strategy called out many areas of opportunity, the focus areas related to transition and participation, specifically called out:

- The creation of “skill-build and injury prevention programmes for safe and confident entry or transition into tackle rugby” and,
- The development of “training on skill coaching to support safe and confident W&G transitions into tackle rugby”.

The prioritisation of such a programme was in response to some identified challenges for girls in rugby.



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."

CONTACT
READY

WEROA
HYDRATE

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.



Evidence-based Programme

Programme monitoring and evolution through participant feedback and data-led research in partnership with Auckland University of Technology. The 2025 pilot will be evaluated to assess the programme's impact and effectiveness.

Programme Objectives

Contact Ready has been designed to enhance the confidence, competence and safety of girls transitioning into contact versions of the game.

Girls who participate in the programme, will learn:

- The basics of landing safely.
- The basics of taking the ball into contact (BIC) safely.
- The basics of how to tackle safely.
- The fundamentals of preparing their body for contact.
- How to apply what they have learned through modified games.

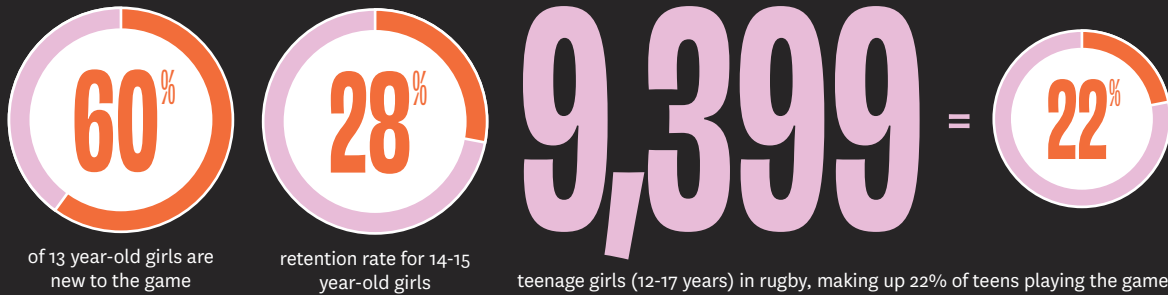
While the focus of the programme is to build the basics of safe technique, the design prioritises connection and enjoyment by learning these skills through games as a preferred learning method.

The intention of this initiative is to act as an 'on ramping programme' into contact rugby, essentially preparing them for their next step. The programme does not completely remove the risk of injury or develop 'competent' rugby players in just six sessions, but has the opportunity to enhance their safety through learning the basics of safe technique with girls of similar abilities, and build their love of rugby through games, friendships and 'feel good moments'.

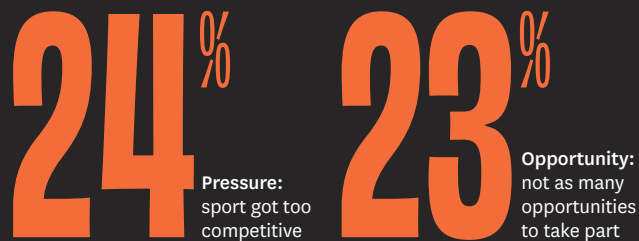
It is important to note, while being 'contact ready' can encompass a wide range of skills, there has been intentional prioritisation of focus based on safety over performance outcomes. Over time the programme has scope to extend focus through additional modules but given the majority of injuries, including concussion, occur in the tackle contest, a focus on ball carrier and tackling skills has taken priority.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT WOMEN AND GIRLS?

TEENAGE GIRLS IN RUGBY, NEW ZEALAND¹



TOP FIVE REASONS GIRLS DISENGAGE FROM SPORT²



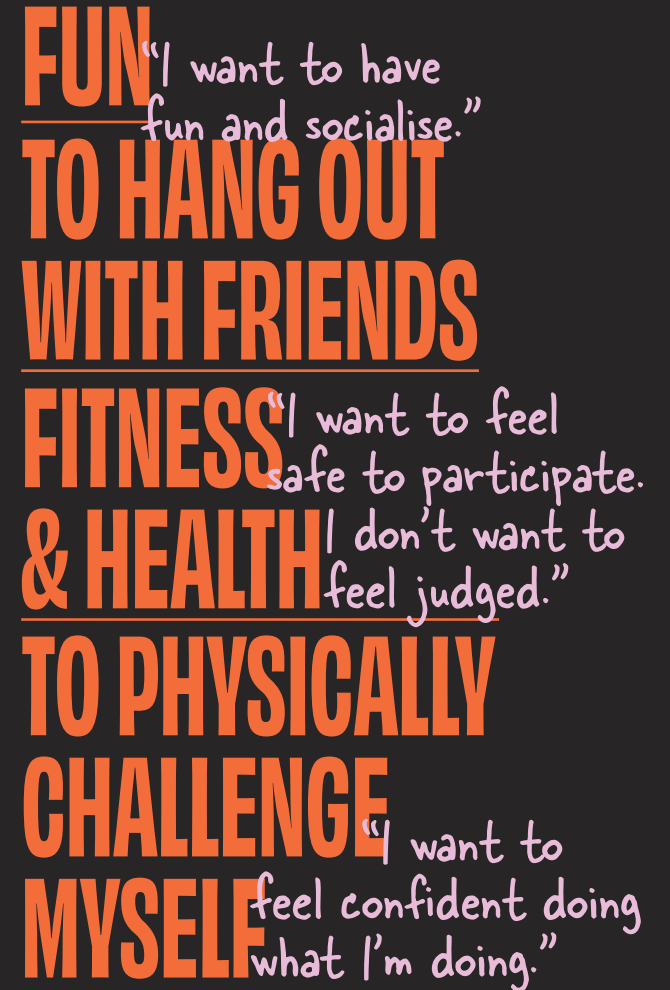
TOP FOUR BARRIERS FOR WOMEN & GIRLS ENGAGEMENT IN RUGBY⁴



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.”

78%

don't feel confident

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

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!



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.

- The intro/recap includes what the session includes and what the girls can expect. It also includes a recap of what was covered in the previous session to remind the girls of key coaching cues and safety messaging.
- Each session has a connection activity aimed to bring the connection principle to life and assist the girls in forming strong bonds.
- Warm-up and primers are included to ensure the girls are physically ready to confidently learn the key skills of the day.
- The body of the session focusses on skill development. The session content is delivered via games and activities, so the girls can learn and apply the skills in a fun environment and achieve feel good moments and increase confidence.
- Each session has a modified game close to the end of the session to bring the group together to apply what they have learnt.
- All sessions finish off with a cool down, and an opportunity to capture learning. This gives the coaches the ability to check if/how learning outcomes success measures have been achieved and check in on how the girls are feeling. Capturing learning from one lesson to the next is particularly important for confidence which can only be measured by the players.

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.”

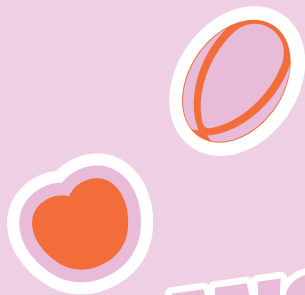
By using this method, we allow the girls to learn the skill in a ‘fixed’ environment, allowing for repetition and learning in a safe, ‘predictable’ and controlled setting. E.g. learning to tackle on a crash mat. Once confident, they can then practise this in a ‘varied’ setting, where they can apply the skill in more ‘unpredictable’ scenarios through fun games.

The skill development approach for players, is to initially observe the whole skill demonstrated by coaches so the girls can appreciate the complete movement and execution. However, due to nature of some skills being complex, we then break the skill down into parts for learning. Once the players have had time to practice the broken-down skill, we practice the skill as a whole through a variety of fixed and varied settings.

Coaching tips

While the content is provided for Contact Ready, to deliver a great session, the following should be considered:

- Pre-session preparation.
- Group and equipment management.
- Demonstrating and giving instructions.
- Observations and giving feedback.
- Questioning.
- Post-session debriefs.



**WOMEN
& GIRLS**

Pre-session preparation includes:

- Coaches meet prior to the session and establish roles based on the number of coaches available, the number of girls and the coach's experience and skills. They get clear on who is doing what, when and where (i.e. timekeeping, setting and packing up, introducing the activities, demonstrating etc.). Each coach prepares and become an expert for their allocated sections.
- All equipment is sourced and transferred to the venue.
- Music playlists have been prepped and are ready for use.
- Programme assets are set up to be visible.

Group management:

- Improves the learning environment and helps deliver the best possible session.
- The Contact Ready programme's ratio is 1 coach to every 10 girls (max) to ensure the girls needs are met and the programme remains safe. This ratio also maximises engagement (time on task) and provides the opportunity for individual feedback.
- The minimum number of players is 10 and the maximum is 30 to effectively run Contact Ready.

When the session is run with 15 players and under:

- Run the games and activities consecutively without stations and complete as one or two groups depending on the task. When a mat is in use, where possible ensure minimal lines and maximum time on task through smaller groups or additional mats/hit shields.
- Or/when three stations are in the programme, split into two groups with one station empty rotating around within the same time frames.

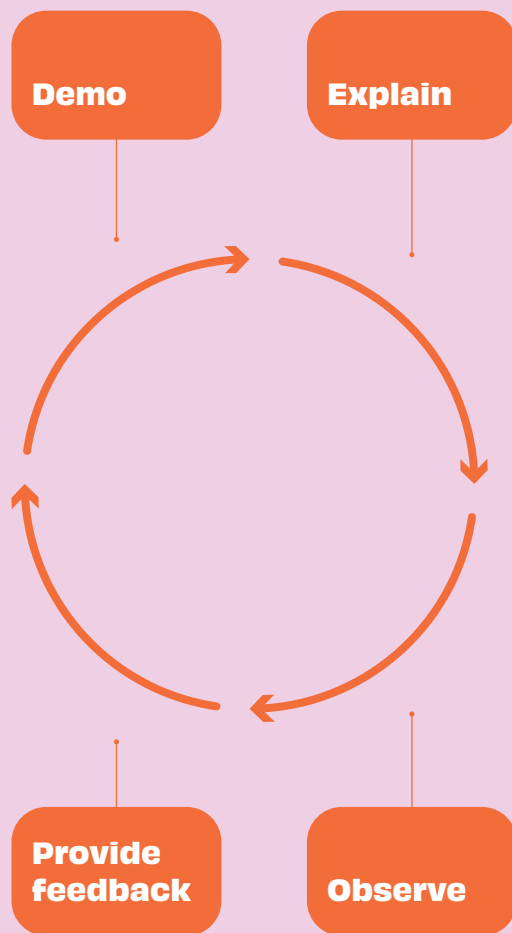
When the session is run with 15 to 30 players:

- Run as is.

When partnering girls up, doing this in confidence levels allows for girls to have more autonomy in their rate of progression or intensity during an activity. This can be directed by the players using a thumbs up, thumbs sideways approach, *"Thumbs up who is feeling confident? Thumbs sideways if you would like more practice?"*.

Learning new skills

Coaches facilitate learning of new skills. They explain, demonstrate, observe, and provide feedback to ensure the girls can learn to apply skills safely.



Demonstrating and giving instructions

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.

Multiple learning methods should be included:

- Verbal prompts.
- Visual demonstrations.
- Written instructions and ques.
- Learning questions to check understanding.

Feedback

With multiple coaches working together to run the session, there are opportunities for coaches to observe the girls and provide feedback.

- Coaches use positive specific feedback to boost players' confidence. i.e. *“Yes, that’s it! Way to get your foot in close, that will ensure you can get your head in the right spot.”*
- 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.

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?”

Applying effective questioning techniques, including clarification questions, enhances player understanding. In the coach’s toolkit, pre-written questions are provided that help check the sessions’ objectives and success measures.

A great questioning strategy for recapping content covered in the previous training session is *“hand up, pair up, share up”*. This activity lets the coach ask the players a recap question. If a player knows the answer, they raise their hand. Players then find another player who also has their hand up, high five them and then they share their answers with each other.

SESSION PLAN OVERVIEW: THEMES, LEARNING OUTCOMES AND SUCCESS INDICATORS

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

IN THIS SESSION THE PLAYERS WILL:

Form strong bonds

- Get to know each other through connection games.

Learn a range of warm-ups and primers

- Become familiar with getting in close contact with each other and the ground through primers.
- Complete an introduction to warm-up.

Learn correct falling techniques

- Learn how to fall sideways and backwards safely.

SUCCESS INDICATORS

- Players learn the names of at least three other participants.
- Players can explain the importance of warming up.
- Players demonstrate the correct technique for safely falling sideways and backward.

SESSION 2

Ball Carrier

IN THIS SESSION THE PLAYERS WILL:

Form strong bonds

- Continue to get to know each other and make friends.

Become familiar with warming up the body and primers

- Participate in new primers that prepare them for contact.

Introduction to safely taking the Ball into Contact (BIC)

- Learn how to keep themselves safe through the basics of correct technique.
- Learn the 'Rugby Strong' position.

SUCCESS INDICATORS

- Players can demonstrate the 'Rugby Strong' position and explain why it is important.
- Players can give one example of how to keep themselves safe when taking the ball into contact.
- Players can demonstrate landing safely.
- Players can demonstrate 'step to space' to evade and prepare for safe contact and explain why it's important.

SESSION 3

Introduction to Tackle

IN THIS SESSION THE PLAYERS WILL:

Form strong bonds

- Continue to build connections with each other through games.

Become familiar with warming up and primers

- Lead their own warm-up using warm-up cards.
- Learn two new primers.

Learn the basics of a safe tackle

- Learn how to keep themselves and others safe through the basics of correct tackle technique.
- Understand the importance of correct tackle height and head positioning.

SUCCESS INDICATORS

- Players can lead their own warm-up supported by coaches, using warm cards.
- Players can explain why it is important to activate their neck before rugby.
- Players can identify and demonstrate correct tackle height and head position on a stationary ball carrier.
- Players can give one example of how to keep themselves safe as a ball carrier and a tackle.



SESSION 4

Contact Confidence

IN THIS SESSION THE PLAYERS WILL:

Form strong bonds

- Work as a team in a problem-solving activity.

Build independence warming up and participating in their own primers

- Lead their own warm-up using warm-up cards.

Build confidence in the basics of a safe tackle

- Practice applying a safe tackle on crash mats at a walking or jogging pace.
- Understand that tracking and locating our opponent is important to make a safe tackle.

Build confidence applying the basics of Ball into Contact (BIC)

- Practice (BIC) through a range of activities.

SUCCESS INDICATORS

- Players can explain the purpose of the 'rams' primer.
- Players can lead their own warm-up in small groups using warm-up cards.
- Players demonstrate safe tackle technique on a walking or jogging ball carrier (on a crash mat).
- Players can explain why tracking is important for preparation.

SESSION 5

Contact Confidence +

IN THIS SESSION THE PLAYERS WILL:

Form strong bonds

- Use observation and feedback to support their team.

Build independence warming up and participating in primers

- Lead their own warm-up using warm-up cards.

Continue to build contact confidence

- Practice applying a safe tackle and BIC at jogging pace in a 1v1 activity.
- Participate in a controlled modified game.

SUCCESS INDICATORS

- Players can observe others and give at least one piece of constructive feedback to their peers.
- Players can lead a group warm-up using warm-up cards.
- Players can demonstrate a safe tackle in a 1v1 activity and a modified game, at a walking or jogging pace.
- Players can demonstrate correct landing when tackled in an 'unpredictable' activity.

SESSION 6

Contact Ready Mini-Festival

IN THIS SESSION THE PLAYERS WILL:

Form strong bonds

- Work as a team to play in the Contact Ready festival.

Independently lead warm-up and participate in primers.

- Use warm-up cards to lead their own warm-up.
- Participate in two new primers.

Apply safe tackle & Ball into Contact (BIC) technique within small-sided modified games

- Participate in small-sided contact games applying their learnings from the five sessions.
- Celebrate individual and collective 'feel good' moments.

SUCCESS INDICATORS

- Players lead their own warm-up correctly as a team.
- Players will identify/share three things they are most proud of achieving as a team.
- Players will identify something they feel more confident in now compared to session one.
- Players have participated in a small-sided game demonstrating safe tackle technique and safe BIC.



TEACHING THE BASICS

The Contact Ready programme focuses on three key skills:

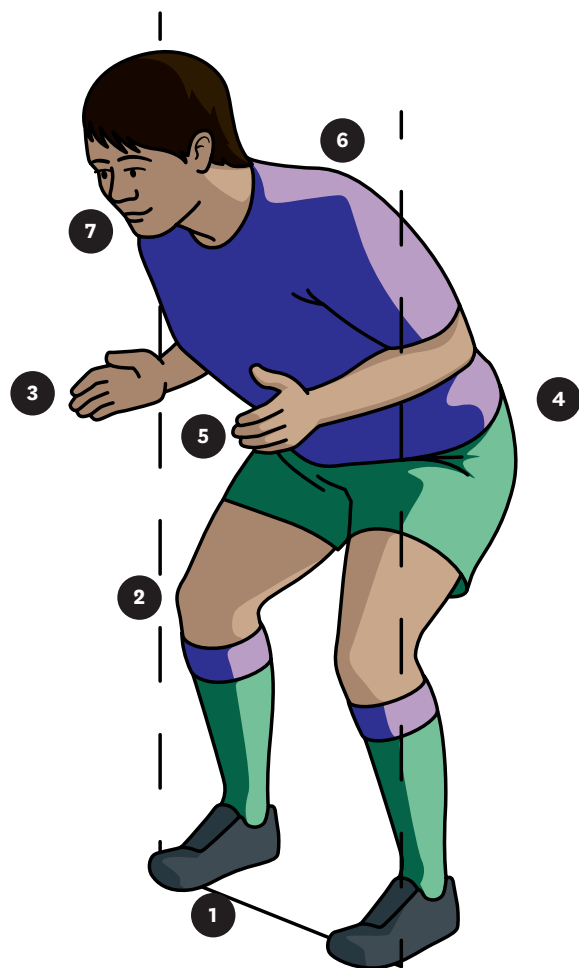
1. Landing safely
2. Ball into contact
3. Tackling

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

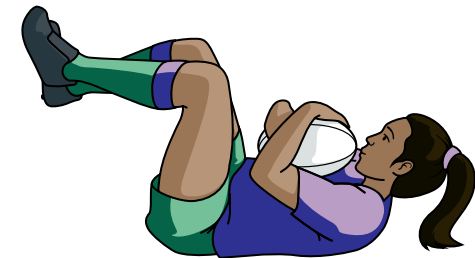


'Rugby Strong' is a strong body position that forms the foundation of many movements in rugby, and is utilised throughout the programme.

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 Pelvic tilt
5 Belly button to back (engage core)	6 Roll shoulders back and down
7 Neck in 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”

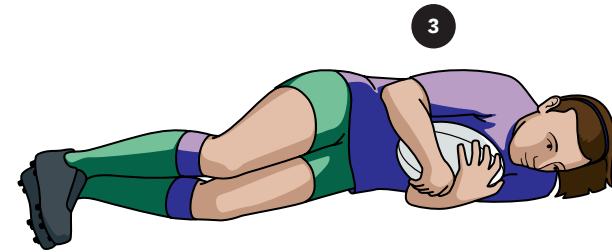
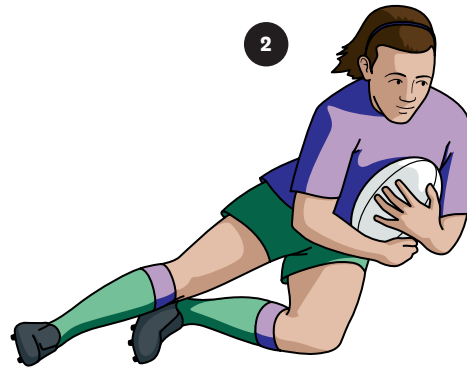
3 Roll

- 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.

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 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 Footwork

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

OPTIONAL SUPPORT CUES:

- "Spaces not faces"
- "Feet alive" or "fast feet"

2 Forward

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

OPTIONAL SUPPORT CUES:

- "Rugby Strong position"

3 Finish

- Land on a large part of the body, then, place the ball in the direction of your team.

OPTIONAL SUPPORT CUES:

- "Sink, tuck, roll"
- "Land and place"
- "Staple"

The top few things to look for:

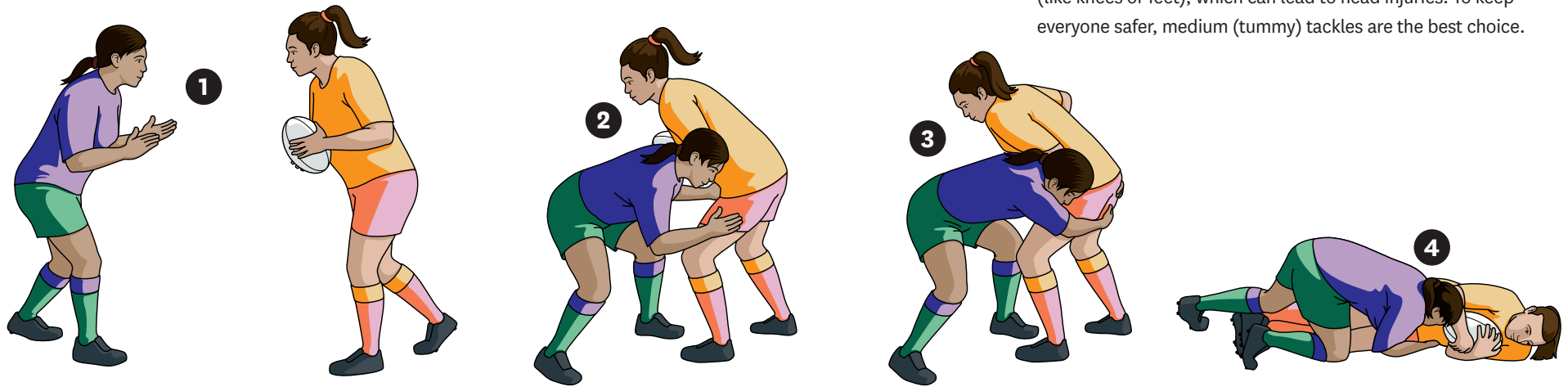
- Protecting the ball in contact.
- A balanced, strong position ready for contact with a tackler.
- Evading direct contact where possible.
- Safe landing.

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”
- “Same leg, same shoulder”
- “Shoulder below the ball”

3 Wrap

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

OPTIONAL SUPPORT CUES:

- “Wrap and squeeze”

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 is below the sternum (tummy tackle).
- ‘Same leg same shoulder’ to get the correct shoulder onto the ball carrier’s tummy.
- A good 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)

4.2^x

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 5 parts:

A **CARDIOVASCULAR WARM-UP**

B **DYNAMIC STRETCHING**

C **STRENGTH/CHANGE OF DIRECTION/
NEUROMUSCULAR CONTROL**

D **SHOULDER AND NECK ACTIVATIONS**

E **RUNNING AT INTENSITY**

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.



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.

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 to 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.



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