



THE Game PLAN

A Resource Guide

Building effective
sports programs
for girls

WOMEN'S
SPORTS
FOUNDATION





The secret is out.

The values and skills learned through sports are a huge asset to the development of a healthy child. As leaders of programs for youth, you live this. For girls in particular, sports offer critical opportunities to build self-esteem, positive body image, and a sense of belonging.

I have coached hundreds of girls and young women during my career. The game of basketball has had a positive impact on each and every one of them. For some, it is a ticket out of poverty. For others, the game is a reason to pursue their education and to avoid unwanted pregnancy. For all, it is an opportunity to learn the important life skills of goal setting, hard work, cooperation, and responsibility.

Designing sports programs that meet the unique needs of developing girls is not just a matter of putting pink ribbons on existing programs for boys. Recruiting girls to participate and operating daily in a way that makes them want to keep coming back requires a unique approach. Especially in their formative years, girls respond and relate differently than boys. They are subjected to completely different social pressures and barriers to participation.

In this guide, you will find the tools you and your coaches need to develop effective and lasting sports programs for girls. It covers everything from practical aspects, such as coaching tips for different age groups, to complicated matters like confronting gender stereotypes and using sports to talk to girls about sensitive issues. I hope that you will gain valuable insights and methods for improving the quality of your program.

As leaders of programs that serve our youth, we have the duty and privilege to empower the generation that will lead this nation when we are gone. Girls will turn into women who will be part of that leadership. Let's make sure they have the tools they need to thrive.

Truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Coach Boyle".

Joanne Boyle

Head Coach

Women's Basketball

University of California, Berkeley





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Girls need sports desperately

One in six girls in the United States is obese or overweight. We have the highest rate of teen pregnancy in the industrialized world. One in four teenage girls has considered suicide. Research shows that sports can help reduce a girl's chances of confronting these and a myriad of other physical and emotional health risks. However, girls participate in sports and physical activity at much lower rates than boys, and girls from low-income communities are at even greater risk for low levels of physical activity and engagement in team sports.¹ To say that our nation's girls' lives depend on physical activity is not an understatement.

We must put effort into reaching and retaining girls in sports. This requires a different vision than the one we've used to build boys sports programs in this country. Have you tried to start a sports program that serves girls or perhaps invited girls to participate in an existing team, camp or program for boys? If you have, you know that working with girls is a unique game. Successful program leaders understand what keeps girls out of sports in the first place and design strategies and tactics accordingly.

The Game Plan: Building Effective Sports Programs for Girls is a resource guide for anyone interested in developing or improving a program that uses sports and physical activity to serve girls. Within these pages, we use the word "sports" to refer to any and all types of structured athletics or physical activity – from basketball to yoga. The guide is written for program directors, coaches, teachers, parents, students, and everyone else with a stake in girls' development.

The broadest goal of this guide is to create more opportunities for girls to play sports in supportive environments where they can experience the positive physical, emotional, and mental benefits of sports. We are especially dedicated to expanding opportunities for girls from low-income communities because they face greater risks with fewer resources than other girls.

Team-Up for Youth and the Women's Sports Foundation believe that empowering you is the best way to empower girls. We have compiled this comprehensive resource to equip you with the tools and knowledge you need to create an effective sports program for girls.

This guide can be read front to back, walking you through building, running and evaluating a successful program, or it can be used as a reference. It is full of practical tips, research and examples, and will help you answer questions such as how to find qualified female coaches, how to coach girls effectively on the field and off, and how to gain parental support in tradition-bound cultural settings. We are thrilled to partner with you in utilizing the power of sports to improve the lives of girls.

The Girls' Sports Effect

Why should we care about girls' sports? Sports have the power to change a girl's life. A girl who plays sports has higher self-confidence, feels greater ownership of her body, and is more likely to make healthy decisions about drugs and alcohol, and even sex. But for some girls, sports are not an option. Girls in low-income neighborhoods have the least access to sports opportunities.

A 12 year-old girl is right on the edge. Not only is her body changing but so are all the expectations imposed upon her. She is no longer encouraged to play and get dirty, she is supposed to wear makeup, care about boys, and find her way into the popular crowd. The pressure is on to grow up and "act like a girl."

It is during this volatile time that a girl needs sports the most. This is the time to help a girl find her champion within.

Here are twelve tips on how and why to make the investment in a girls' sports program:

Find Her. It's the most vulnerable girl whose life will improve the most from sports participation. She is often the one on the edge of the playground, seeming disinterested in sports. This girl has not been encouraged to try a sport or has been deterred by cultural messages about what is expected of her. Find this girl. Those who are the least involved are the individuals who stand to gain the most from sports.

Meet Her Gatekeepers. Parents and caregivers are a crucial ingredient to a girl's sports participation -- they can be the reason she plays or the reason she doesn't. Meet these people. Get to know them. Caregivers will be more likely to sign her up in sports if they trust the coach. Talk to them about the role sports can play in her social, emotional, physical, and academic development.

Recruit Her. A girl sometimes needs a little extra encouragement to participate in a sports program. Talk to her about what she will learn and what activities she will experience. Use existing players to demonstrate the program. Empower a girl to recruit other girls. Be persistent, sometimes a girl won't say yes to joining your team the first time you ask.

Give Her Space. A girl must feel safe in order to take the social risks and physical challenges associated with playing sports. Without a coach who knows her or teammates with whom she feels comfortable, a girl might be afraid to even try out. Supportive adults and peers, freedom from observation by boys, and a space that feels safe are important ingredients to making a girl feel comfortable and encouraged.

¹Pedersen, S., & Seidman, E. (2004). Team sports achievement and self-esteem Development among urban adolescent girls. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 28, 412-422.

2 Why Invest in Girls' Sports?

Help Her Create Her Identity. A girl derives strength, poise and purpose from identifying as an athlete. A girl who believes that sports are a part of her core identity is more likely to stick with it. An organized sports program and a skilled coach can help a girl develop this identity.

She Understands Her Body. Sports give a girl permission to feel strong in her body. Developing muscles, coordination and sport-specific skills can boost self-esteem during the time when a girl is negotiating the challenging world of adolescence. A girl who plays sports starts sexual activity later than girls who don't participate, is less likely to smoke and drink, and generally feels greater ownership of her body than a girl who is sedentary.

She Has a Team. Teammates are powerful. When a girl joins a team she instantly gains the benefit of meeting a group of girls who can be her friends, her allies, her confidantes. When girls work and play together like this they feel stronger and more empowered.

She Has a Coach. A coach is an influential role model. A girl will look up to a coach who has been through similar life circumstances and has succeeded – a coach who has faced her own barriers to sports and yet stays involved. A coach who relates to girls on a regular basis can inspire a girl to keep believing and working towards her dreams in sports and beyond.

Her Hero Is a Girl. An older girl can be a powerful influence. She can have the skill and confidence to teach another girl how to lead. Use these role models. Recruit them, train them, form a youth leadership group, honor them as the experts on girls' sports.

She Stays in School. Staying in school increases the chances of a girl's success. A girl who participates in sports is more likely to experience academic success, have fewer discipline problems, and graduate from high school than a girl who does not play sports.

She Stands up for Herself. When a girl reaches adolescence, her self-confidence can plummet. Sports are the ideal environment in which to teach her to be strong, to use her voice, and to stand up for herself when challenged. Qualified coaches can teach a girl important leadership and communication skills that are critical to her success outside of a team.

The Power of Sports. Investing in girls' sports programming is investing in our economy and community. Sports have been shown to help girls stay in school, avoid teen pregnancy, and develop physical and psychological health. Sports can be thought of as a preventative strategy that can save girls, their families and our communities millions of dollars.

“Girls playing sports is not about winning gold medals. It's about self-esteem, learning to compete and learning how hard you have to work in order to achieve your goals.”

— Jackie Joyner-Kersey
Six-time Olympic gold medalist
in track and field

At an early age, many girls are programmed to shy away from sports and physical activity because they are afraid of being perceived as unfeminine or are afraid of failure or being teased. They are bombarded with a million messages about what it means to be a girl. They also see glamorized versions of what girls and women should be that contradict the strong, robust spirit and body of an athletic lifestyle. They are told to look and act a certain way, be interested in certain things, disinterested in others. Girls simply need to look at magazine covers at the local store to see what type of woman they are expected to grow into. The messages they receive are loud, clear and constant.

Girls from low-income communities can face gender barriers that prevent participation, as well as racial discrimination and a scarcity of resources. The result is that a smaller proportion of girls participate in sports in these communities, compared to more affluent neighborhoods, where girls and boys join sports in roughly equal numbers. What keeps girls on the sidelines? Lack of accessible and affordable programming, lack of transportation, lack of family support, cultural pressures, work, household chores, taking care of younger siblings, and lack of confidence to try a new sport all serve as deterrents.



3 Designing a Quality Girls' Sports Program

There is a multitude of research that demonstrates the power of sports in girls' lives. Current research shows that for school-age girls, playing sports is directly related to decreased rates of unintended pregnancy, delinquency, obesity, truancy and use of drugs and alcohol. Additional benefits include increased sense of self and the development of leadership, teamwork, coping and goal setting skills. We know that physical activity also improves long-term health and reduces stress and depression. We need to get all girls in the game so they can enjoy these life-changing benefits.

“The power of the human will to compete and the drive to excel beyond the body's normal capabilities is most beautifully demonstrated in the arena of sport.” — Aimee Mullins
Paralympic Gold Medalist, Track and Field

Commitment to Girls' Sports

Quality sports programming can have an incredible impact on girls' development, but it takes a true champion at an organization to make girls' sports a priority. Starting and running a quality girls' sport program takes dedication and hard work. With passion and commitment you can get girls in your community in the game if you:

- **Believe that serving girls well is not negotiable.**
- **Recognize there are challenges, but excuses are not accepted.**
- **Make a strong commitment to finding experienced female coaches.**
- **Dedicate one experienced staff person to oversee girls' sports.**

Whether you identify with just one or all of the above characteristics, the most important factor in serving girls in sports is being committed to making it happen. If you have the passion we have the tools to help you.

What Does a Successful Girls' Sports Program Look Like?

The following are indicators of a program that can successfully serve the whole girl – including the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual aspects of her being:

Get Girls Involved Early

The earlier you get girls in the game, the more likely it is that they will stick with it through adolescence and into adulthood.

Expose Girls to a Range of Sports

Offer girls a wide range of non-traditional and traditional sports such as martial arts, capoeira, flag football, and soccer. When girls are supported to try a wide range of sports, girls get the chance to discover that physical activity and sports are fun. We can all play a role in helping girls break out of limiting gender

- ▶ Adolescent girls who participate in higher levels of physical activity are less likely to smoke.²
- ▶ Female athletes are less likely to be sexually active, in part because they tend to be more concerned about getting pregnant than female non-athletes.³
- ▶ Female high school athletes, especially those participating on three or more teams, have lower odds of considering suicide.⁴



²Rodriguez, D. & Audrain-McGovern, J. (2004). Team sport participation and smoking: Analysis with general growth mixture modeling. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* 29(4), 299-308.

³Dodge, T., & Jaccard, J. (2002). Participation in athletics and female sexual risk behavior: The evaluation of four causal structures. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 17: 42-67.

⁴Sabo, D., Miller, K.E., Melnick, M.J., Farrell, M.P., & Barnes, G.M. (2005). High school athletic participation and adolescent suicide: A nationwide study. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 40(1): 5-23.



norms, and expose them to the idea that girls can play any sport they choose. They don't have to be limited by "girls don't play football" statements. Girls need the opportunity to learn that they can run fast, scrape their knees, sweat, be assertive, get muddy, and be athletes. When choosing what sports to offer, program designers might consider introducing a new unfamiliar sport. This tends to level the playing field for all participants, as everyone is learning from scratch.

Help Her Find the Right Sport

Find out what type of sports interest a girl. Does she want to play a team sport or an individual sport? Does she prefer soccer or rock climbing? What goals does she have for her sports experience? Finding out what girls are really looking for can help you design appropriate programming. Sedentary girls need opportunities for quick success. Weight bearing physical activity and sports that allow a girl to compete with herself or reach benchmarks are ideal.

Tip: Be mindful that girls with limited experience in sports might appear to be disinterested. But they may just be unsure, so take the time to talk to girls individually to get a better sense of where they are coming from.

Give it Time

Because many girls are new to sports, after-school providers often will offer a different sport or activity each week. The advantage to this approach is exposure to a variety of new sports and for sedentary girls it can lead to quick successes. When programs switch up sports every week or two, however, girls are often unable to develop their skills and become competent at any one activity. If we want to do more than just get girls to try something new – if we want them to develop a lifelong love of physical activity – we need to provide them with opportunities for consistent engagement in a specific sport over time and with increasing challenge. If you decide that you want to expose girls to a variety of sports (a good idea when girls are younger) then plan to stick with each sport for a five-week period so girls get enough time to develop skills and figure out if they like the sport.

Get the Right Numbers

We suggest that sports programs meet three times a week for at least an hour. Strive for an adult-to-youth ratio of 1:10. This will help girls develop skills, remain motivated, and develop meaningful relationships with their coaches and teammates.

Hire Female Coaches

Girls find positive and empowering role models in their coaches. Having a female coach helps girls realize that women can overcome various barriers to participation and be successful in sports. Additionally, girls are often more comfortable talking to women about sensitive issues that arise around sexuality, health issues and family pressures.



Offer Girls Only Teams

Have you run a co-ed sports program that by the end of the season had 18 boys and 2 girls? You're not alone. At a fairly young age boys start to get territorial about their sports spaces and girls start getting pushed to the sidelines. Single-sex teams offer girls an emotionally safe environment and a level playing field in which to push themselves physically and mentally and to develop their skills and self-confidence. We recommend that single sex programming begins no later than 6th grade.

Remember Fun

There are many reasons girls play sports, but research has shown the number one reason is because it's fun. Not having fun is the number one reason girls drop out of sports. *Tip – To make your programs more fun, turn your drills into games (e.g. instead of working on dribbling by having players run back and forth between cones, incorporate a game in which players must keep possession of their ball while trying to knock their teammates' basketballs out of the grid). Keep girls engaged and having fun by making sure everyone gets plenty of playing time.*

Showtime Opportunities

For any sports experience to be meaningful, girls need to have the opportunity to test their skills in games against other teams or in an end-of-season performance. Regardless of whether you are coaching a soccer team, teaching martial arts or hip-hop dance, you can create tournaments, leagues, or public performances to showcase learning and skill. This gives the girls something to work towards. It also gives them an opportunity to learn to manage the stress and anxiety that having to perform in a competition can bring up. This will give them valuable experience they can draw on later in life when they are called upon to perform.

Recruiting Girls into Your Sports Program

Recruiting girls is the biggest challenge for many after-school girls' sports programs. We have found that a variety of strategies are necessary to get girls in the game.

Don't rely on only one or two recruitment strategies. Use a wide range of techniques to increase your chances of reaching the right audience. Girls tend to respond to more active recruitment, so run a sports demo at recess, follow up with phone calls to each girl and actively engage current team members in recruiting new girls. These strategies can all catch girls' interest. This will take more time and effort on your part, but will likely prove much more successful.



Girls Sports Recruiting Tips

Flyers Alone are not Enough

We hear many stories of coaches who post flyers for a girls' sports program but no one shows up. Many girls need extra encouragement, especially if they haven't played the sport before. Go around and talk to the girls, throw or kick a ball with them, share with them what the program will be like, what fun they will have, and what skills they will learn. You can also use older girls to promote the program – have them talk about their experiences and distribute flyers.

Use Girl Networks

One of the best ways to get more girls involved is to have players ask their friends. Girls often feel more comfortable trying something new if they have the support of their friends. This will take time, but it's one of the most effective ways to build a team.

Conduct a Demonstration or Clinic

Connect with local schools to get permission to set up a volleyball net at recess and invite the girls to play. Once you have a captive audience, hand out flyers about your volleyball program, provide a signup sheet, and follow up with phone calls.

Get to Know the Parents

Find the parents and get to know them. Sharing all the potential benefits their daughters can experience through sports participation sometimes gives parents

the extra incentive they need to sign their daughters up. Make sure you leave them a flyer with your contact information. Parents want to know who is running the team. Once they meet the coaches and get to know them, they may be more willing to let their daughter participate.

Be Persistent

It usually takes patience and perseverance to create a successful girls' sports program. Don't assume three girls at your first practice means your team will be a failure. It does, however, mean you will have to continue actively recruiting players after the season has begun.

Engaging Girls in Program Development

If the goal of your sports program is truly to empower girls, why not let them help in the design of the program? Girls are more likely to be engaged when they have participated in the creation of the program. Give girls opportunities to shape the activities that will ultimately shape them. The experience can be incredible for building trust and bonding within the group.

Invite girls to help:

- **Pick the sport or activity**
- **Weigh in on practice times, length of practice and frequency of games**
- **Decide on team names and colors**
- **Design, paint or care for physical space that is being used**
- **Create code of conduct, expectations or team rules**
- **Choose the captains or leaders**

Recruiting Coaches

Role of the Coach

Sports can be a powerful vehicle to help girls reach their potential. But without skilled and caring coaches, sports can only do so much to help girls grow and develop. Coaches have the power to change lives. A great coach not only develops a young person's athletic skills, but also teaches perseverance, selflessness, loyalty, cooperation, and tolerance. A challenging yet supportive coach can help girls take risks, develop self-confidence, teach them to speak up and stand up for themselves, and support them through the rocky road of adolescence. These are qualities that foster success well beyond the playing field – in school, work and family life. We believe that a skilled and committed coach can be a child's most powerful teacher.

The Jamestown Community Center in San Francisco uses a wide variety of recruitment techniques to enroll girls in their sports programs. Jamestown uses flyers but is very intentional about what information the flyers contain and how they are distributed. The flyers contain not only logistical information about the program but also list some important benefits girls can gain from sports participation. Also, the flyers are not simply posted around their community. Jamestown builds relationships with schools in order to place flyers in students' homework packets, which go straight to parents. Jamestown has enjoyed great success engaging girls in sports by using a variety of recruitment strategies and by educating parents on how their daughters can benefit from sports.





Finding Qualified Coaches

A quality girls' sports program is only as strong as its coaching staff. Finding coaches can be the most challenging aspect of youth sports programming. Your ideal candidates should have playing experience and, hopefully, some coaching experience in the sport. They should have a command of the activity that enables them to teach skills and strategy to their players and they must be passionate about working with girls and have high expectations for what can be achieved by all the girls in the program.

Part of what defines a great coach is that they compliment the program. Do you need them to bring their own coaching curriculum and design their own practices? If so, do the people you are considering have the skill set? They also need to be great with people. Your coaches have to make connections with parents, families and other coaches. They have to be sensitive to team chemistry and promote positive interaction between teammates. The relationships coaches develop with their players are often the most lasting and beneficial results of any sports program.

Like recruiting players, there are two main kinds of coach recruitment strategies – passive and active. Passive recruitment, such as posting flyers, allows you to get the word out about your coaching needs to a large number of people. Passive recruitment success, however, depends upon eager and qualified adults seeing your flyers and following up with you to coach one of your teams. Active recruitment strategies consist of you going out into the community and finding these individuals and inviting them to join your coaching staff. Active recruiting is time and labor intensive, but because of its face-to-face nature, it tends to draw in coaches who are a great fit for your program. A thoughtful combination of both passive and active strategies will be the most effective.

Pay Specific Attention to Recruiting Female Coaches

There are thousands of youth sports coaches but the reality is that only 6 to 13 percent are women.⁵ As you strategize about where and how you will recruit, keep in mind that qualified female coaches can be pivotal in a girl's development.

Tips for Getting Female Coaches in the Game

- Recruit from local women's sports leagues.
- Connect with local women's college teams to see if any players are interested in coaching.
- Often fathers are the ones who are asked to coach the team, invite mothers too.
- Encourage former players to assistant coach with you and support their development by training them and giving them tasks that are appropriate for their abilities.

Supporting Coaches

Once you have female coaches on your sidelines it is essential to support them and offer training opportunities so they can continue to grow and develop. Michael Messner, Professor of Sociology and Gender Studies at the University of Southern California gives tips for female coaches in his book, "It's all for the kids: Gender, families and youth sports." We hope these tips are helpful in understanding the unique barriers female coaches face and how best to support their success.

Strategies of Successful Female Coaches: How to Support Female Coaches and Keep Them in Your Program

Volunteer (assertively).

The pipeline to becoming a head coach runs through assistant coaching. Nearly every head coach I interviewed started as an assistant coach, a much lower-key and lower-pressure position. But women who wanted to assistant coach often had to be extra-assertive about it – going beyond simply signing up on the volunteer sheet, making a follow-up phone call, or advocating for herself at an initial team meeting. A year or two as an assistant helps to build experience and confidence. Next year: Head Coach!

Take coaching classes.

Even if you have playing experience, coaching classes can be very helpful in learning how to run a good practice. Women coaches were sometimes critical of the "Old Boys" tone of these classes, but did not allow themselves to be put off by it. Knowledge is important, especially for those who know they are going to be subjected to an additional layer of scrutiny from other adults.

Find a mentor.

Several women coaches told me that they were recruited into coaching and then mentored by a more experienced coach. Often (though not always) this mentor was a man. Though the general culture of youth sports coaching is still not fully supportive of women coaches, there are individual men who see women's involvement as a good thing, and are actively mentoring newer women coaches. Many successful women coaches have benefited from these guys.



Look the part.

When people hear “coach,” they often implicitly think “man.” So a woman coach is often not even recognized as the coach by kids, other adults, umpires or referees. Therefore, like women in professional fields of employment, women coaches are often very conscious of the importance of looking the part of a coach. One soccer coach, for instance, told me that she wears a whistle around her neck. Not that she ever used it, however, she just wore it: “It makes me look like the coach.”

Speak your mind.

Women coaches tell me that they sometimes feel drowned out or intimidated by the “yellers” – loud men coaches and fathers on the sidelines. One coach said, “I don’t put up with that. I just don’t. There’s no reason why I should, so I don’t. I’m sure that when it comes to your business or whatever career you are in, you’re not like that. You know, it’s the same type of thing [in coaching]. I mean, why should you feel inferior to a man? There’s no reason for it. And I [am] well known... I speak my mind.”

Help build a network.

A woman soccer coach told me (with an ironic chuckle) that she was helping to build an “old girls’ network” that aimed to recruit and support more women coaches. Newer coaches told me that having this network in place had made a huge difference. Numbers do matter: In AYSO, women coaches were up to 19 percent in the final year of my study, creating the possibility of such a network. Little League is still dominated by men, leaving the handful of women coaches as isolated tokens. Build a network —It’s lonely being the only female coach. Suggest other female coaches your director can hire, bring in collegiate players to assist you and put them on the coaching track, form a female coaches group that meets every month.

Strategies of Successful Female Coaches contributed by Michael Messner, Professor of Sociology and Gender Studies at the University of Southern California

Coaching Corps® is a Team-Up for Youth program that engages college students and community members in volunteering in after-school youth sports programs. For more information visit www.joincoachingcorps.org

Positive Coaching Alliance and Team-Up for Youth both offer coach trainings that focus on teaching sports skills and life skills. For more information, visit www.positivecoach.org and www.teamupforyouth.org

Tips to Support Male Coaches

Girls deserve high quality trained coaches. Men can play a key role in girls’ development and can be powerful allies in promoting girls’ sports. Coaching a sex different from your own can present challenges. Here are some tips to help you be a great coach for girls and to contribute to their overall development.

Don’t be afraid to push girls

Sometimes male coaches think girls can’t be pushed as hard as boys. Girls can and do want you to challenge them physically and mentally with age and skill-appropriate activities. For example, include some fitness exercises in your practices to build girls’ endurance.

The Jamestown Community Center prioritizes having women involved with all their girls’ teams. If a girls’ team has male coaches, Jamestown will enlist the support of a team mother who believes in the importance of sports for girls. For example a team mom for their Under 15 team provides key support to the girls and coaches. She is physically active during practice - she doesn’t practice with them but jogs around the field for her own workout during their practice time, supports the girls on a variety of topics such as working together as a team, and mediates behavior issues. Having a female role model really strengthens Jamestown’s girls’ sports teams.



Appropriate Feedback Delivery

Don't be afraid that giving specific skills-based feedback will hurt girls' feelings. In actuality it's the delivery not the feedback, which affects a girls' self-esteem. Give them skills-based feedback with a positive delivery. For example encourage girls with "great try, keep taking on the defender" but also include "next time, once the defender has committed to you, pass to your open teammate." Also, when giving a girl constructive feedback, pull her to the side so she doesn't feel singled out in front of the group.

Include a Female Role Model

Co-coach with a woman, hire a female assistant coach, or have a mother participate in the program. As great as it is that you're out there coaching, girls benefit greatly from female role models. *Tip: Make sure you give a female coach a specific role that values her skills, so your players see a coaching relationship that values both genders as coaches.*

Support Girls off the Field

Girls may need to talk about off-the-field issues. Make sure they know you are willing to talk with them, or be prepared to recommend someone else they can talk to. Depending on what the issues are you can recommend a school counselor, athletic director, or a school health center.

Be Professional and Responsible

All male coaches, especially young men whose players are close to their age, need to be highly aware of maintaining clear and professional boundaries at all times. Dress appropriately (shorts, sweats), use gender inclusive language (try not to say "guys come over here"), have one-on-one meetings with players off to the side but visible to others. Don't use inappropriate language or host dinners at your house without other adults/parents present.

Be Self-Aware

Look at and challenge your own assumptions about female athletes, the more you can see the girls as capable and strong, the more they will benefit from your coaching. For example, outline your expectations at the beginning of the program and encourage the girls to work hard to reach them. Motivate your players to give 100 percent against their teammates at practices.



I coach middle school girls and I pride myself on teaching them skills and developing their fitness. I had a blind spot around aggressiveness. Some of my players were failing to challenge hard on defense and fight for the ball. I think I subconsciously associated that with boys' behavior and let it slide. I never realized this until my mom came to watch one of the games, and asked me, "Why are you letting them be passive on defense? Are you being soft because they're girls?" I started encouraging and teaching more aggressive play and the girls soon rose to the challenge. Not only did it improve our play, but they loved when we worked on fighting for the ball! All players – boys and girls – will meet your expectations, whether they are low or high.



– Coach Ed Center (San Francisco, CA)



4 Coaching Girls



“If you’ve given the greatest effort that you can expect of yourself, you always get what you deserve.”

— C. Vivian Stringer, Head Basketball Coach, Rutgers University *First coach in women’s or men’s college basketball to lead three different programs to the Final Four*

What is Athlete Identity?

We know that sports can be a powerful vehicle to help girls reach their full potential. So why do so many girls who play sports in their younger years drop out in adolescence? Research shows that girls may face overt or subtle pressure from their peers and families to ‘feminize,’ or to take on responsibilities that prohibit their continued participation such as studying and taking care of younger siblings. Adolescence can be a tumultuous time for girls, when they can lose self-confidence and assertiveness and become more deferential and self-critical. Keeping them in the game during this period is essential.

The good news is that many girls continue to play sports in spite of the challenges adolescence presents. These girls who continue to play through adolescence and beyond are usually those who have developed a love for the sport and a belief that they are competent in it. In other words they have developed an athlete identity. The sport has become a part of who they are. These are the girls who say, “I am a soccer player!” rather than, “I play soccer.” These are the girls who see sports participation as non-negotiable. Girls who develop their athlete identity are more likely to stay involved in sports and experience all the benefits sports and coaches can provide.

One of the most important ways a coach can help girls is to support them in developing their athlete identity. A committed coach develops a girl’s athletic skills, encourages her to take risks, motivates her to never give up, and builds her up on the field so she can overcome anything off the field.

In helping girls develop an identity as an athlete it is also important for coaches to consider the developmental stages and coinciding needs of girls. The following tips can help coaches to support girls in becoming life-long athletes.

Age-Appropriate Tips for Developing Girls’ Athlete Identity

Building the Foundation K – 2nd Grade (5 – 7 years old)

In Kindergarten to 2nd grade, most girls love physical activity and games. They aren’t worried about notions of femininity, and they love to run, move and get dirty. Good programs harness this energy and make physical activity a fun experience for all. Coaches should help girls build motor skills through group games; sport specific skills are not as important.

Coaching Tips:

- At this age girls and boys play well together, so co-ed or single sex programs can be successful. Before adolescence, gender dynamics may not interfere with their social, emotional and physical development.
- Focus on motor skills like balance and coordination. These need to be developed before girls can master specific sports skills.
- Sessions should feel light, fun, positive, and playful at all times – at this age we want to help girls fall in love with physical activity and sports. We want them to leave excited for the next practice.
- Build in lots of water breaks because girls can have low endurance at this age.
- Use a lot of fun games to introduce physical skills – young girls often don’t have the attention span for lots of drills.
- Modify the size of fields and equipment – younger girls usually have more success with smaller fields and equipment. For example, tennis rackets should be sized for smaller hands.
- Give lots of encouragement and positive reinforcement.



The Emerging Athlete 3rd – 5th Grade (8 – 10 years old)

In grades 3 to 5, girls still love to run and play hard. Yet many are internalizing strong notions of what is expected of their gender expression. This is fine, as long as they aren't restricting themselves and can still express themselves physically. Good programs will respect girls' individuality and create a broad sense of what it can mean to be a girl. Diverse female role models are important at this time. Emerging athletes become more excited about mastery, performance and competition, but play and fun are still important.

Coaching Tips:

- ▶ Encourage girls to try a wide variety of sports, but make sure you give each sport at least a five-week period so girls have time to gain competence in the fundamental skills.
- ▶ Encourage girls to try playing different positions. This will enable girls to learn the game more fully and it will help them develop a wide range of skills.
- ▶ Co-ed programs are still okay but make sure that girls are included equally. Sometimes boys can start to get territorial about sports spaces so make sure your coaches understand the importance of girls getting an equal opportunity to develop their skills.
- ▶ Offer encouragement and give skill improvement feedback. For example, "I love your hustle, Marisol. Now make sure you get your feet into position before you bump the volleyball."
- ▶ Girls are starting to enjoy competition. Include some low-stakes competitive games but avoid an emphasis on winning and losing – e.g. relay races are a great way to get girls competing, but you don't need to focus on who won each race.
- ▶ Continue to modify size of fields and equipment.



The Critical Period 6th – 8th Grade (11 – 13 years old)

This is perhaps the turning point for whether or not girls will stick with a sport and identify as an athlete or decide to walk away from sports. This is a time to encourage girls to see that sports can be a part of her identity. A supportive sports program can be instrumental in helping girls to navigate adolescence. Keep girls playing!

Coaching Tips:

- ▶ New girls may hesitate to get involved, existing players may consider dropping out. Stick with it, and continue the conversation with each girl and encourage her to play. If a girl does drop out, try to find out why. You might be able to help her overcome what is keeping her from continuing with your team.
- ▶ Focus on skills development. Don't assume girls just want to play around. Everyone wants to be challenged to improve their game. Yes, you should keep a focus on fun, but girls are also motivated by working hard and seeing their skills progress over time.
- ▶ Help girls develop as athletes. Teach girls how to take care of their bodies (warm up, nutrition, strengthening). Encourage them to stretch outside their comfort zone (have them try a new skill each practice, if a girl fails when trying something new, praise her for taking the risk and remind the group that no one can improve if they don't try new things). Push girls to play hard against their teammates at practice, just like they are playing in a game against an opponent.
- ▶ When girls are younger, parents and programs often want them to try a lot of different sports. But when girls reach middle school they may want to spend more time focusing on a specific sport, so they can develop their skills and improve their game.
- ▶ Single sex teams become very important starting in 6th grade. This gives a team the opportunity to focus on girls' specific issues, and can give girls a network of peers for support and shared experiences. Girls will often stay away from co-ed sports when they reach middle school because boys may dominate the game, or they may not feel welcome by the boys or the coach. Girls deserve their own sports team so they can truly grow in a supportive environment.



- ▶ Girls want some competition. Don't emphasize winning or losing, but it's okay to take the sport seriously by keeping score. Keeping score lets the girls work towards a goal of winning a game, but the coaches should always bring them back to improving as individual players and as a team.
- ▶ Treat the girls like athletes. Set high expectations and support the girls to reach those standards. Set goals like being on time, always giving 100 percent, demanding the best from teammates, setting goals and working towards them.
- ▶ Encourage and organize off-field activities. Belonging to a team is highly important to girls. Making friends, sharing a common experience, supporting one another on and off the field are all important. Camaraderie is one of the true joys and benefits of team sports for girls. Create time for team dinners or movie nights. Set up teambuilding events like a ropes course.
Tip: Mix it up. Have your softball team go for a run, take your basketball team swimming. Have the captains run practice so the team can work together while you take a back seat.

The Athlete 9th – 12th Grade (14 -18 years old)

High school girls who play sports are likely to see themselves as athletes. They have been playing for some years now and have developed their skills. Athleticism is integrated into their identities (especially for older high school girls) and they take their sport or physical activity seriously. By this age if girls have been playing for some time, they have discovered that they love the sport and want it to be a part of their lives. Give them opportunities to compete, advance and perform. Girls will continue to learn from winning or losing, seek to showcase their ability during games or events, and may fully identify as athletes.

Coaching Tips

- ▶ High school girls want guidance from you, but on more of a peer level. Girls often need support but may not turn to their parents. They are looking for a trusted adult who they can talk to. A coach should remind her players that she is available if they need to talk about anything. Be prepared to refer players to another resource if it is a topic you are not able to handle. Interact with the girls on an adult-to-adult level – they want to be respected now as young women and will listen to your guidance and advice much more if you treat them as the young women they are growing into.

- ▶ Continue to hold high expectations. As their coach you can help them develop many skills which will translate to their lives off the field or court. For example, hand out a list of team expectations on the first day of the season which outlines everything the girls will need to live up to, including being on time, being responsible for their gear, having a positive attitude, giving 100 percent, and maintaining good grades. After going over these expectations give time for the girls to comment or add to the list. The result is a group of committed girls who feel ownership of their team.
- ▶ Girls may be trying out risky behaviors. The high school years are a critical time for girls as they try to figure out who they are. This can include experimenting with different social groups, and possibly experimenting with drugs, smoking and sex. Support them by giving gentle advice and educating them on various topics such as body image, health, nutrition, and self-defense. If you aren't able to give advice on certain topics, refer your players to someone who can.
- ▶ Continue single sex teams. As with the middle school ages, it's important to still offer girls their own sports' teams.
- ▶ Girls at this age take the sport seriously. Give them the opportunity to compete. Set up leagues, scrimmages, and tournaments that give girls a chance to test their skills against other teams.
- ▶ Girls enjoy being with their teammates off the field. Include activities such as dinners, teambuilding, and community service opportunities.
- ▶ Offer alternative sports activities. For girls who aren't participating and/or who don't have an athlete identity – it's not too late! Most of the time, athleticism is defined by one's enthusiasm for and ability in traditional sports. But there is a whole world of different athletic options out there, and many of these reward different types of athleticism such as endurance (cross-country running), flexibility (yoga), strength (rowing, rock climbing), or coordination and rhythm (capoeira). It may be hard for a high school girl to try basketball if she has never played before – she is many years behind some of her peers. But lots of other sports are great for novice teenagers and even adults. Encourage older girls to find their inner athlete in these alternate sports.

“Sports teaches you character, it teaches you to play by the rules, it teaches you to know what it feels like to win and lose—it teaches you about life.”

— Billie Jean King, Tennis legend,
Founder of the Women's Sports Foundation

Developing Leaders

Girls in general are good communicators, sensitive and understanding of others, and they value friendships. These skills are among the building blocks of leadership. But when girls reach the beginning of adolescence, some may lose their natural inclinations towards leadership. This is due in part to a loss of self-confidence and self-esteem that starts around age 11 or 12, and to enduring stereotypes that girls should be more deferential. Leadership skills can be learned, and it is important that coaches foster the development of these skills in girls. Remember, there may be some who are born good leaders – but great leaders can be made!

Leadership styles vary from one individual to the other. While some girls will lead by example, others are vocal. It's important for coaches to recognize and support various types of leadership. Some common threads are characteristic of all leaders:

- A good leader is respectful of others' feelings. She's a good listener and likes to hear what others have to say.
- A good leader is fair. You can't favor some people over others, and you have to give everyone a chance.
- A good leader is honest. You need to earn the trust of your followers, and being honest and truthful is an important way to do it.

- A good leader is convincing. She is confident in what she says and can influence others. This is a very big responsibility. When you inspire others, they will follow what you say.
- A good leader leads by example. She won't ask her teammates to do anything she isn't willing to try herself.

Tips for Coaches

- Give the girls support and praise plus something to work on, like, “You're doing great leading by example, can you work on vocally leading the team also?” One way you can help girls be more vocal is to assign them the responsibility for encouraging and mentoring new players. Then they can work up to leading the whole team in something like warm ups.
- Develop leadership amongst your whole team (not just the captains). Try this, for example, at fundraising dinners – where the whole team has a job to do. Have your team organize all the details. Selling tickets, collecting money, buying food, cooking, hosting, and cleaning up. With your support everyone on the team will have a chance to lead part of the event.
- Recognize that some people may have influence on the team but lead in a negative way. Coaches can work with these players to use their influence in a positive manner. Assign these players specific tasks and support them. For example you can ask them to coordinate a team movie night, creating team unity.

Communication Skills - Help Girls Find Their Voice



Coaches play a key role in helping girls learn to be effective communicators. Making athletes aware of the ways they communicate both verbally and non-verbally can be helpful to team culture. But the real benefit of developing girls' communication skills will be realized away from the sports arena. The more coaches can work with girls to encourage them to speak up and use their voices on the field the more likely it is that girls will speak up in class, express themselves, and be confident in their opinions and values.



Meet Dre.

Her family moved to Berkeley, California when she was in 10th grade. As the newest member of her school's varsity soccer team she was shy and rarely spoke up. Her coach noticed this and worked with Dre on using her voice. The first step was helping Dre gain confidence in speaking loudly. For example when Dre would sub into the game her coach wouldn't yell "sub" to the referee, Dre had to do it. If she didn't yell loud enough for the referee to hear, Dre wouldn't get in the game. In Dre's junior year her coach encouraged her to speak up in team meetings and help problem-solve ways that the team could play better. With constant reminders from her coach about the importance of speaking up, over time Dre developed communication skills and confidence and became a captain of the team in her senior year.

Goal Setting

Whether girls have their eyes set on making their high school team, nailing a new tumbling routine, or sinking a three-pointer, they need a plan for achieving their goal. Coaches can support girls in goal setting, and can also help them see that win or lose, you can achieve your goals!

Goals should be S.M.A.R.T:

Specific – A specific goal is clear and helps you focus on what you are trying to achieve.

Measurable – You must be able to track your progress towards achieving the goal. For example, "I want to score ten points in a basketball game" is something you can measure. Improving your total points each game demonstrates progress towards the goal. Saying "I want to be a good basketball player" is not as easy to quantify.

Aggressive – Working towards a goal should make you stretch and grow.

Realistic – Goals should be something you can realistically achieve.

Timely – A timeline can motivate you towards achieving your goal.

Tips for Coaches

- Have the girls set three individual goals, and monitor and support their progress towards achieving their goals throughout the season.
- Have your team set three group goals before each game or performance. It will help the girls focus and show them that even if they lose, they can still achieve some of their goals.

Meet Zulma.

Zulma's mother wanted her to stay off the streets to keep safe. The only time she was allowed outside after school was to participate on an Oakland Parks and Recreation soccer team. However, she was not allowed to go to practice or games until her homework and chores were complete. These strict requirements didn't stop Zulma from playing, but motivated her to manage her time so she could play soccer with her friends. She kept up with her responsibilities, making a priority of school and chores, not hanging out and watching TV, so she could enjoy the sport she loves. These time management skills helped Zulma in the classroom and helped her get into UC Berkeley.

Time Management

Whether girls are playing on a school basketball team or participating in an after-school hip-hop dance program, extra-curricular activities can be a significant time commitment. These activities can take time away from other important things like family, chores and academics. Coaches know that sports are often the first thing to be pulled away from girls who are having trouble juggling multiple activities. Girls have a better chance of fulfilling their responsibilities if they have effective time management skills.

Tips for Coaches

- Make Prioritized To-Do Lists – have girls write and prioritize their various commitments and obligations.
- Study Hall – support girls in their academics by creating time in your program for tutoring and study hall.
- Communicate with Players – girls may need your support in figuring out how to prioritize. Talk it through with them.

Teamwork

Learning to work with teammates can impart lessons that will translate into many areas of life. Together girls can learn to share ideas effectively, make compromises, problem solve, and work together to reach a common goal. Girls can learn a sense of dedication and accountability to themselves and their teammates.

Tips for Coaches

- Incorporate teambuilding activities into practice.
- Create time for girls to get to know each other away from practice so they feel more connected.
- Create time for girls to give feedback to each other (e.g. at the end of practice ask your team, “Who saw a teammate giving 100 percent today?” Then give the players time to share.)
- Instead of giving your team all the answers, have them problem solve and strategize together during practices to improve their performance.

“When you come watch me play, I try my best to prove to you that I am good. I get really happy and excited when you are there, standing on the sideline. Can you please make time to come watch me play more often?” —Zulma

“Come to my game to show me that you care. And when you're there, don't answer the phone or make phone calls. Don't read a book or magazine or newspaper. Show me that you're engaged in what I'm doing.” —Nina



Parents can play a key role in engaging and supporting their daughters' sports experiences.

Young female athletes, when surveyed, resoundingly agreed that seeing their parent(s) on the sideline had a positive impact on them. For these young athletes the support, encouragement and recognition from their parents made a tremendous difference in their own self-esteem and self-confidence.



Children's involvement with sports is associated with higher levels of family satisfaction.

Youth sports can help build communication and trust between parents and children.

Sports help parents and children spend more time together.⁶

What a Coach Can Do to Involve Parents

Good coaches are able to engage parents and communicate with them about their daughters' sports activities. Talk to parents about their daughters' progress on the field and share the accomplishments and character growth you've noticed. This will give parents a better understanding of the positive effects playing sports has on their daughters. Parents may be unaware of how their daughters can benefit from playing sports if they themselves did not play. Let parents know that youth sports are about more than just winning and losing but also about developing life skills. A good coach also serves as the eyes and ears of the parents. A girl may come to the coach for guidance, or the coach may observe something about her that should be brought to her parents' attention. An open line of communication between coaches and parents can strengthen the impact of their positive influence.

Ask Questions

Many parents have questions or hesitations when it comes to their daughters' participation in sports. Asking them about their concerns will give you an opportunity to address them. Safety is a common concern. In many communities, children do not have a safe place to play and parents believe that the only safe place for them is at school or in their home. Explain to parents that their daughters will be supervised and that the structure and location of practices and games are planned with safety in mind.

Find a Champion

Talk to the parents and find one or two who can serve as your champions to other parents. An enthusiastic parent can help you educate the other parents about the benefits of girls playing sports. They can speak first hand to the

importance of parent involvement. They can also help you organize parent socials and team gatherings and recruit other parent volunteers. These activities will help you build a strong parent network.

Coach Tips to Involve Parents

- Socials are a great way for coaches to get to know all the parents and for the parents to get to know each other. A potluck offers opportunities for each family to bring a dish, often a great way for families from immigrant communities to share across cultural lines.

When **Kids In Sports** in Los Angeles wanted to get more girls in the game, they realized that many Latino families kept their daughters from playing because of conflicting family priorities or a belief that sports challenge traditional notions of proper girls' behavior. The staff at Kids In Sports identified certain fathers who were willing to champion the cause of girls' participation, and to discuss, advocate, and educate other parents about the benefits of play for girls. Kids In Sports now has a vibrant girls' sports program with over 50% Latina participants.



⁶Sabo, D., and Veliz, P. (2008). "Go out and play: Youth sports in America." A Women's Sports Foundation Research Report.



- Have the girls host a clinic where they teach their parents about the sport.
- Host a parent-daughter game day.

Respecting Cultural Differences

As a coach or director of a program, you will be on stronger grounds with parents when you understand their cultural traditions and are able to work within the bounds of varying cultural expectations, not against them. Immigrant families may come from cultural traditions where girls are expected to stick close to home, care for their younger siblings, and help with the household chores. Many cultures value an education above all else. You can make the case to parents that although they may not have grown up seeing girls play sports, their daughters' participation need not be in conflict with their values. When parents learn that sports help kids grow physically, socially and academically, they may be more open to letting their daughters join in. This is an approach that program directors should encourage their coaches to take.

“ I have found that meeting with my girls' parents and explaining to them what the program is about, why it could be beneficial to their daughters, and listening to their concerns about their daughters' participation on a soccer team goes a long way to making it possible for girls to play. If you are willing to be flexible and come up with compromises, such as letting a player miss a practice so she can work, there is almost always a way for the girl to participate in the program. ”

-- Ben Gucciardi,
Founder of Soccer Without Borders

Parent Tips for Getting Girls in the Game: Handout for Parents

Supporting Your Daughter's Involvement in Sports

- Contact your local after-school program or league to see what opportunities exist for girls in your community.
- Set an example by being active yourself.
- Discuss specific options for sports and let your daughter choose activities she enjoys most.
- Go to her games.
- Practice with her at home.
- Make participation fun. Make the activity feel effortless. If it feels like a chore or a scheduled nuisance, she won't be excited to participate.
- Encourage her to be active. Tell her that she doesn't have to be a hard-core athlete to enjoy physical activity (and follow this advice yourself!), and that not all sports involve competition. Also, reinforce the fact that no one is a born athlete. Even champions had to start at the beginning and learn how to play their sports.
- Help her set goals that are reasonable and achievable. For example if your daughter hasn't played sports before it is a lot to ask her to start playing four or five days a week. Instead, increase the frequency over time.
- Be aware of how she is feeling physically and emotionally. She may be apprehensive because she doesn't know anything about sports, she may be afraid of being teased, or of looking like she doesn't know how to play. Understand and identify with her fears and talk to her about them. Watch a game together, go visit a local women's sports event, practice at the park to help build her skills. Your support can make a big difference.
- Emphasize enjoyment and personal improvement rather than focusing only on winning. There is a sport or physical activity for every girl. Some girls are drawn to traditional team sports, some to individual sports and some girls prefer capoeira or hip-hop dance. Help girls find and succeed in the activity they enjoy.

Share this tool with parents

Empowering Conversations between Parents and Daughters, from Positive Coaching Alliance

Conversations are the glue between people, the essential element in strong relationships. Many parents think that it is their job to talk and their daughter's to listen. That's only half right. It is also your job to listen, and your daughter's job to talk. It's a wonderful thing when a parent and child can really talk to and hear each other.

In our busy lives it is sometimes hard to attend all our daughter's sports events. Even without attending a game you can ask questions that will show your daughter you support her, even though you couldn't make it to the game.

Ask questions that don't focus on winning and losing but more about what she learned and if she had fun.

Here are some suggestions:

- "What was the most fun part about today's game?"
- "What worked well? What didn't turn out so well?"
- "What did you learn that can help you in the future?"



The sports environment provides girls with a ready-made social support system. Coaches and players have the opportunity to explore together important issues that girls face today. Sports and physical activity leaders can have a powerful impact on girls. The relationship between a girl and her coach is a special one. With your guidance, the girls can learn how to cope with tough circumstances and to change behaviors that threaten their well-being. The following sections briefly address some of the challenges that are likely to surface for adolescent and teen girls. It is important that coaches are aware of these issues and prepared to address them.

A few basic guidelines for coaches about approaching sensitive issues in a team setting:

- Be supportive.
- Create a safe environment for the girls to share their feelings and ideas.
- You may find yourself in the challenging position of providing a safe place where girls may say things they want kept confidential. A common code for confidentiality, and one that is mandated, is that if girls disclose anything that poses a threat to the safety of themselves or others, tell them you will have to report it.
- Make a plan for addressing confidentiality issues and share that plan with the girls.
- Avoid being judgmental, instead be curious.
- Give positive feedback.
- Maintain an upbeat attitude.
- Be patient. Some girls take longer than others to feel comfortable.
- Ask, never tell. For example, instead of saying, "You look sad," ask, "Are you sad?"
- Be creative.
- Be a healthy role model – if you are making healthy changes, share your experiences; eat well, rest, don't smoke, don't swear, don't display a quick temper. Know that the girls are very attuned to you and will notice how you behave and act.



Obesity

Childhood obesity has reached epidemic proportions, particularly among low-income, minority, and urban children. Over the past 25 years, the percentage of overweight girls has more than doubled.⁷ Higher body mass index (a measure of body weight adjusted for height) is associated with a decline in activity among both black and white girls.⁸ Since girls often have fewer opportunities than boys to access sports and physical activity, they are more at risk. Prioritizing quality sports and physical activity programs for girls is more important than ever. Regular physical activity and sports can help girls develop strength and endurance, manage their weight more effectively, and can significantly improve long-term health, including reduced risk of diabetes, certain cancers and heart disease.⁹

Coach Tip

Girls who are overweight may be ashamed of their bodies. Creating a welcoming and safe environment are keys to getting them comfortable and eager to participate.

Nutrition

Physical activity and good nutrition are key factors in addressing childhood obesity. Low-income communities are filled with stores that offer cheap and quick snacks, but have few sources for fresh produce. Working with girls to educate them on making healthy choices, learning to read nutrition labels, and showing them that healthy food can also taste great are all keys to helping girls stay healthy.

Coach Tip

Incorporate nutrition lessons into your program. One soccer coach at Community Bridges Beacon in San Francisco collaborated with an after-school cooking program to teach lessons about healthy foods for athletes. They spent time preparing the foods together and enjoyed a team meal afterwards. Activities can include having girls measure out how many teaspoons of sugar are in a soda, or calculating how many calories are in some of their favorite foods. Then teach the girls alternative ways of eating foods they enjoy, for example adding vegetables to plain pasta sauce. (See CANFIT for resources on healthy foods and nutrition activities: www.canfit.org)

Mind and Body

Most coaches are well aware that physical activity is good for mental health. Endorphins, which produce the “runners’ high,” get a lot of attention. Less is known about the other side of the equation – the impact an athlete’s mental health has on physical health and athletic performance. Stress is different for everyone, so it is difficult to quantify, however the body’s physiological response to a stress overload is universal:

- Cortisol is a stress-related hormone that weakens the immune system. If an athlete is under a lot of stress, increased cortisol levels will impede her body’s ability to repair muscle tissue, leading to and exacerbating injuries.
- Stress increases muscle tension, making muscles more likely to strain and tear. In addition, tense muscles affect coordination and balance.

Did You Know?: Moderate (3-6 hours/week) levels of sports activity are associated with lower levels of adolescent depression than low (0-2 hours/week) levels of involvement.¹⁰

Meet Claudia.

She participates in a **BAWSI (Bay Area Women’s Sports Initiative)** after-school program in San Jose, CA. If it weren’t for BAWSI, Claudia wouldn’t have the opportunity to be physically active. Her father said, “There are so many programs offered for children – soccer leagues and other sport leagues – but we can’t enroll her in these programs because we don’t have enough money. Extra activities are not an option.” BAWSI gives Claudia a chance to be active and her father knows how important this is. “We want Claudia to be active so she can be healthy and continue to be healthy because it affects other aspects of her life. There is a saying, *cuerpo sano, mente sana* (healthy body, healthy mind), so we want her to live by that saying.”

⁷ Ogden, C. et al., (2004). Prevalence of overweight among children and adolescents: United States, 1999–2002. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics.

⁸ Kimm, S., Glynn, N., Kriska, A., Barton, B., Kronsberg, S., Daniels, S., Crawford, P., Sabry, Z., & Liu, K. (2002). Decline in physical activity in black girls and white girls during adolescence. *The New England Journal of Medicine*. 347:709-715.

⁹ The President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Report. (1997). Physical activity and sport in the lives of girls. Getting girls active, sweating, and enjoying physical activity can go a long way in promoting long-term health.

¹⁰ Sanders, C.E., Field, T.M., Diego, M., & Kaplan, M. (2000). “Moderate involvement in sports is related to lower depression levels in adolescents.” *Adolescence*, 35(140):793-797.



Ways to treat and prevent stressful situations:

- Increase communication on and off the field.
- Allow players a day off or a shortened practice so they can keep up with school work or sleep.
- Incorporate relevant relaxation techniques, such as yoga and meditation, into training regimens. This will not only decrease stress, but will also encourage focus and can improve performance.
- Train coaches to be aware of signs that an athlete might be experiencing high levels of stress then adjust expectations accordingly.

Three Key Principles of Sports Nutrition

1 Hydration – Players should drink fluids (e.g. water, sports drink) throughout the day to stay hydrated. A good sign of hydration is clear urine.

2 Fuel – Providing fuel to the muscles is important for athletes. This fuel comes from food. If players eat a high carbohydrates meal (e.g. pasta, turkey sandwich) two to three hours before games and practice, they will have more energy.

3 Recovery – Good nutrition is important after working out. Eating a mixture of proteins and carbohydrates (e.g. peanut butter and jelly sandwich, cheese and crackers, fruit) after a practice or game will help the body recover more quickly, leading to fewer aching muscles and more energy for the next practice or game.

www.powerbar.com

Disordered Eating

Determination – the ability to train hard, to push oneself to the max – is an admirable quality that helps propel competitive athletes to the top of their game. The pursuit of athletic perfection in combination with a relentless drive for thinness may open the door to the development of an eating disorder. Given all the societal pressures to be thin, many female athletes focus their efforts on shaping their bodies towards an ideal. If not treated, the most common eating disorders, anorexia nervosa or bulimia nervosa, can cause serious problems such as abnormal heart rhythms, infertility, bone loss or depression. The longer an eating disorder continues, the more dangerous it is. This makes it especially important for coaches to intervene if they are concerned about an athlete.

Types of Eating Disorders

Anorexia Nervosa: self-starvation and excessive weight loss

Symptoms include:

- Refusal to maintain body weight at or above a minimally normal weight for height, body type, age, and activity level
- Intense fear of weight gain or being “fat”
- Feeling “fat” or overweight despite dramatic weight loss
- Loss of menstrual periods
- Lack of energy
- Feeling cold
- Obsessive with calories, reading nutrition labels

Bulimia Nervosa: a secretive cycle of binge eating followed by purging. Bulimia includes eating large amounts of food – more than most people would eat in one meal – in short periods of time, then getting rid of the food and calories through vomiting, laxative abuse, or over-exercising.

Symptoms include:

- Eating large quantities of food in one sitting
- Going to the bathroom after meals
- Discolored teeth
- Puffy cheeks caused by repeated vomiting



- Frequent dieting
- Extreme concern with body weight and shape

Binge Eating Disorder (a.k.a. Compulsive Overeating) is characterized primarily by periods of uncontrolled, impulsive or continuous eating beyond the point of feeling comfortably full. While there is no purging, there may be sporadic fasts or repetitive diets. Feelings of shame or self-hatred frequently follow a binge. People who overeat compulsively may struggle with anxiety, depression and loneliness, which can set off more episodes of binge eating. Body weight may vary from normal to mild, moderate, or severe obesity.

Other Eating Disorders can include some combination of the signs and symptoms of anorexia, bulimia, and/or binge eating disorder. Sometimes these behaviors are not extreme enough to be clinically classified as an eating disorder, but they still can be physically dangerous and emotionally draining. All eating disorders require professional help.

Tips for Coaches: Preventing Eating Disorders in Athletes:

(Compiled for the National Eating Disorders Association by Karin Kratina, MA, RD)

Take warning signs and eating disordered behaviors seriously! Extreme eating disorders can lead to cardiac arrest and suicide. If an athlete is chronically dieting or exhibits mildly abnormal eating, refer her to a health professional with experience in eating disorders. Early detection increases the likelihood of successful treatment. Left untreated the problem may progress to an eating disorder.

- De-emphasize weight by not weighing athletes, and eliminate comments about weight. Instead, focus on areas athletes can control to improve performance. For example, focus on strength and physical conditioning as well as on the mental and emotional components of performance.
- Don't assume that reducing body fat or weight will enhance performance. Sometimes it does, but studies show this does not apply to all athletes. It is not uncommon for individuals attempting to lose weight to develop eating disorder symptoms. Performance should not be at the expense of the athlete's health.

- Instruct coaches and trainers to recognize signs and symptoms of eating disorders and understand their role in prevention. Those with eating problems often hide their symptoms to avoid calling attention to them. They are often aware that the behavior is abnormal and are ashamed.
- Provide athletes with accurate information regarding weight, weight loss, body composition, nutrition, and sports performance to reduce misinformation and to challenge unhealthy practices. Be aware of local professionals who can help educate the athletes.
- Emphasize the health risks of low weight, especially for female athletes with menstrual irregularities or amenorrhea. The athlete should be referred to a doctor in these cases.
- Emphasize that you want your athletes at their best – talk about the importance of sleep and proper nutrition. Many people struggle with food cravings due to lack of sleep. Emphasize eating foods that cultivate balanced blood sugar vs. high sugar foods which lead to spikes and dips in energy. Teach them how to properly fuel their bodies and keep the focus on positive behaviors.
- Understand why weight is such a sensitive and personal issue for many girls. Eliminate derogatory comments or behaviors about weight – no matter how slight.
- Do not automatically curtail athletic participation if an athlete is found to have eating problems unless warranted by a medical condition. Consider the athlete's health, physical and emotional safety, and self-image when making decisions regarding an athlete's level of participation in her sport.
- Coaches and trainers should explore their own values and attitudes regarding weight, dieting and body image, and understand how they may inadvertently affect their athletes. Coaches should understand how much they can influence an athlete's self esteem and self image.
- Understand that many athletes may be dieting and controlling their weight in an unhealthy way even though they appear to be within a normal weight range. Coaches should key into behaviors and moods as well as weight changes.



“ The worst part of having an eating disorder was the stress I felt about being so secretive – nobody knew about it. I had to hide it from my family, friends, coaches, and teammates. It wasn’t easy. I would worry all the time. What a relief when I was honest. ”

— Dara Torres,
12-time Olympic Medalist in swimming

Alcohol and Drugs

About four out of five high school students have tried alcohol. Although female athletes are less likely to experiment with illicit drugs than non-athletes, overall adolescent substance use is on the rise and substance abuse by girls is approaching that of boys.

Coaches should be aware of the pressures girls face to try alcohol and illicit drugs like marijuana and cocaine. Frequent substance abuse or even the pressure to experiment with drugs and alcohol can distract a young athlete from training and derail her aspirations. The perception that drug use is a social asset can be a powerful force.

Tips for Coaches

- Don’t preach about drugs and alcohol. Effective mentoring on this issue is a lot more complex than telling them to “Just Say No.”
- Educate girls about the potential repercussions of using drugs and alcohol, including team penalties, and legal, health, and safety consequences.
- Refer girls struggling with drug and/or alcohol use to resource centers and health professionals.

Reproductive Health and Sexuality

Research shows that high school female athletes are more likely to be virgins and less likely to have unwanted pregnancies than non-athletes. However, once girls begin to menstruate, their bodies are preparing them to be sexual beings and it’s unrealistic to assume they are not experimenting with their sexuality.

Adolescent teammates often raise questions about sexuality or bring up personal experiences. This is an incredibly sensitive issue and one that coaches need to handle very cautiously. However coaches can use these openings as opportunities to have a positive impact on decision making for girls grappling with this issue.

Tips for Coaches

- Empower girls to make smart decisions for themselves.
- Bring in a positive female role model to talk honestly about her experiences during adolescence.
- Be a good listener when girls have questions or concerns.
- Encourage girls to support each other in navigating social pressure and making healthy decisions.
- Encourage girls to talk to school nurses and counselors.

Compared to non-athletes, high school female athletes:^{11,12}

Are less likely to have sex
Are more likely to use contraception
Are less likely to have an unwanted pregnancy
Have fewer sexual partners

¹¹Dodge T, Jaccard J. (2002). Participation in athletics and female sexual risk behavior: the evaluation of four causal structures. *Journal of Adolescent Research*, 17, 42-67.

¹²Pate RR, Trost SG, Levin S, Dowda M. (2000). Sports participation and health-related behaviors among US youth. *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*, 154, 904-911.



Common Injuries

Injuries are often part of physical activity and sports for girls and boys alike. The best rule of thumb for coaches is to encourage girls to be aware of their bodies and to take aches and pains seriously. Refer girls to a health care professional or call their parents or caregiver if you are ever in doubt of the severity of an injury. Below are the most common injuries seen in female athletes, as well as some tips for treatment and prevention.

Ankle Sprain

An ankle sprain occurs when the foot is twisted, rolls to the outside and sprains the support ligaments on the outside of the ankle. The ankle will swell up and may turn black and blue around the injury.

Treatment

The early treatment of an ankle sprain is the “RICE” method of treatment.

• Rest:

The first 24-48 hours after the injury is considered a critical treatment period and activities need to be reduced. Gradually put as much weight on the injured ankle as tolerated.

• Ice:

For the first 48 hours post-injury, ice and elevate the ankle sprain 20 minutes at a time every 3-4 hours. The ice pack can be a bag of frozen peas or corn which you can refreeze for future injuries. Do NOT ice an ankle sprain for longer than 20 minutes. This won't speed up the healing process and you can cause damage to the tissues.

• Compression:

Use compression when elevating the ankle sprain in early treatment. Using an Ace bandage, wrap the ankle from the toes all the way up to the calf muscle, overlapping the elastic wrap by one-half its width. The wrap should be snug, but not cutting off circulation to the foot and ankle. If your foot becomes cold, blue, or falls asleep, loosen the bandage.

• Elevate:

Keep your ankle higher than your heart as often as possible. Elevate at night by placing pillows under your ankle.

Muscle Pull

A muscle pull occurs when a sudden, severe force is applied to the muscle and the fibers are stretched beyond their capacity. To prevent a muscle pull, stretch prior to any activity and work your muscles on a regular routine. Often people go too hard and too fast in their exercise or sports activities. Have coaches start slow and work their athletes up to more strenuous activity.

Treatment

Rest and apply ice, the ice relaxes the muscle and helps relieve any spasm. Ice should be applied for about 20 minutes on, then 20 minutes off, as often as possible for the first few days.

As soon as tolerable, begin gently stretching the muscle. Stretching and strengthening are useful in treatment and prevention of muscle strain injuries. Muscles that are stronger and more flexible are less likely to be injured.

Concussion

Concussions range in significance from minor to major, but they all share one common factor – they temporarily interfere with the way your brain works. Concussions can affect memory, judgment, reflexes, speech, balance, and coordination.

Usually caused by a blow to the head, concussions don't always involve a loss of consciousness. In fact, most people who have concussions never black out. Some people have had concussions and not even realized it.

Concussions are common, particularly if you play a contact sport such as football. But every concussion, no matter how mild, injures the brain. This injury needs time and rest to heal properly. Luckily, most concussions are mild and people usually recover fully. www.mayoclinic.com

Symptoms

- Confusion
- Amnesia
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Ringing in the ears
- Nausea or vomiting
- Slurred speech
- Fatigue
- Irritability



Treatment

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that a doctor is consulted if a child receives anything more than a light bump on the head.

Stress Fracture

Usually a broken bone occurs when there is an acute event such as a fall. A stress fracture occurs when the force of impact is much lower, but happens repeatedly for a long period of time. These injuries are also known as “fatigue fractures.” Stress fractures are commonly seen in athletes who run and jump on hard surfaces, such as distance runners, basketball players, and dancers. Other factors that can contribute to the development of a stress fracture are dietary abnormalities and menstrual irregularities. Because both factors contribute to bone health, any problems with diet (e.g. poor nutrition, anorexia, and bulimia) or menstruation (amenorrhea) may place an individual at higher risk for these injuries. This is one reason that adolescent female athletes are at particularly high risk for stress fractures. www.orthopedics.about.com/cs/otherfractures/a/stressfracture.htm

Treatment

The best treatment is almost always resting the injured leg. Training may be maintained by replacing the high-impact activity with lower impact exercises, such as cycling and swimming.

Coaches can help athletes avoid stress fractures by encouraging them to use proper shoes, to train on softer surfaces such as grass or dirt instead of concrete, and to follow higher-calcium diets that maintain stable bone density.

Knee Injury

Female athletes can be more vulnerable than male athletes to knee injuries for several reasons. Women and girls put more stress on their knees because of their wider hips. Also, unlike men whose larger muscle mass helps restrain excessive joint movement, women and girls typically have lower muscle quantity and increased hamstring flexibility, which results in joint laxity and hyperextension.

Anterior Cruciate Ligament

The anterior cruciate ligament, or ACL, is one of four major knee ligaments. The ACL is critical to knee stability. A torn ACL is much more prominent in female athletes than in their male counterparts. In fact records show that female athletes have four times as many ACL tears as male athletes. Athletes who participate in sports that involve jumping, twisting, and sudden movements, such as soccer, basketball, and lacrosse, are at higher risk because the knee is subject to more impact and torque.

Treatment

Repairing the ACL requires surgery and many months of physical therapy.

Prevention

Sports medicine researchers have developed exercises to strengthen knees through improved jumping, landing and cutting techniques. Coaches should prioritize these programs to build up muscles around the knee to minimize the possibility of injury. See PEP (Prevent Injury, Enhance Performance) Program: www.aclprevent.com/pepprogram.htm

Always refer players to a health care professional if any injury is sustained.

Female Athlete Triad

Comprised of three interrelated conditions, Energy Deficit/Disordered Eating, Menstrual Disturbances/Amenorrhea, and Bone Loss/Osteoporosis, the Female Athlete Triad is one of the most common health problems for female athletes.

Energy Deficit/Disordered Eating

An energy deficit is the caloric imbalance that occurs when more energy is spent during exercise than is consumed. Disordered eating is one of the primary reasons that many female athletes are energy deficient.

Menstrual Disturbances/Amenorrhea

Menstrual disturbances result from the aforementioned energy deficit. Lower estrogen levels which accompany extreme weight loss can disrupt any part of the natural menstrual cycle, and may result in Amenorrhea, in which the period is essentially absent. Amenorrhea can be subdivided into Primary Amenorrhea and Secondary Amenorrhea. If an athletic girl has not had her first period or developed any secondary sex characteristics by age 14, she is said to have Primary Amenorrhea; Secondary Amenorrhea is the absence of a period for three months or more. In both cases, the period will most likely appear or return if the athlete changes her diet and exercise habits.



Bone Loss/Osteoporosis

Osteoporosis is the loss of bone mineral density and inadequate formation of bone due to low estrogen levels and poor nutrition, particularly a low calcium intake. Osteoporosis increases the chances of stress fractures, which are particularly problematic for female athletes.

The Female Athlete Triad is a psychosocial condition that is closely linked to the athlete's level of commitment to her sport. In sports where aesthetics are important, such as gymnastics and dance, girls will often feel pressured by coaches who suggest that losing a few pounds will help to increase their performance. However, even athletes who do not aim to aesthetically please will often start to diet if their coach gives them the impression that losing weight will benefit their athletic performance.

Female Athlete Triad Risk Factors:

- Playing sports that require weight checks
- Exercising more than necessary for a sport
- Pressure to win at all costs
- Punitive consequences for weight gain
- Controlling parents and/or coaches
- Being a gymnast, dancer, distance runner, swimmer or diver where undue emphasis is placed on having a low body weight and a lean physique

Symptoms:

- Irregular or absent menstrual cycles
- Always feeling tired, yet having problems sleeping
- Stress fractures and frequent or recurrent injuries
- Often restricting food intake
- Constantly striving to be thin
- Eating less than needed in an effort to improve performance or physical appearance
- Cold hands and feet

Prevention and Recognition Tips for Coaches

- Pay attention to the physical appearances of athletes, notice when weight fluctuates.
- Encourage athletes to keep a log of their periods. Missing three or more is reason to see a doctor.
- Be knowledgeable about nutritional needs, such as iron, calcium, and protein requirements.
- Separate body image from sport if possible.
- Know that athletes may compare their weight to that of the general population, but their muscle mass makes their weights different from non-athletes.

Meet Angelica.

Angelica was one of the best soccer players on her New Jersey high school team. She had "the best leg" and could go right into the upper corners of the net. She was valued for her commitment to the other players and her supportive nature. Her coach told her she could make first team all region if she would only lose 30 lbs and build more muscle in her legs (which to this day are incredibly prominent and strong). Being a dutiful athlete, she adopted a diet of cottage cheese, celery and pretzels – three times a day. She lost 20 lbs in one month and subsequently lost her period. She had no energy so she would take "energy beans," basically caffeine, to stay in the game. This created challenges at home as her mother saw what was happening, so Angelica started lying to her mother and getting in frequent arguments. Her father praised her for her weight loss, and her coach asked her if she was feeling OK – saying he could tell that there was a great deal of weight loss. She felt weak and she was making herself particularly vulnerable because she has a heart murmur. She spent the next two years fighting her body to keep the weight off – a miserable endeavor. Looking back, she sees how crazy this was, and understands that there was nothing wrong with her body's natural set point. She says she wishes she had information on the Female Athlete Triad as a student-athlete.

“Homophobia is a problem in girls' and women's' sports at all levels and it limits the ability of all girls to enjoy a positive and respectful sports experience in which they can explore and develop their athleticism. Coaches play an influential role and set powerful examples for the girls on their teams about respect, inclusion and working as a team regardless of the differences each one brings to the playing field.”

—Pat Griffin, Director of the Women's Sports Foundation Initiative, It Takes A Team! Education Campaign for LGBT Issues in Sport

Female Role Models

They come in all shapes and sizes. Some stand tall on pedestals while others call shots from the sidelines. Some go down in history while others rise up as legends. They're heroes and mentors, leaders and role models. They walk the earth disguised as parents, teachers, coaches and athletes. They are the ones who can make a difference in a girl's life at a time when making a difference matters.

Incorporating strong female role models into your programming can have a lasting impact on girls. It's a chance for a female athlete to stand up before them and say, "It's great to be strong, confident, athletic, and female." Often, accomplished women are willing to come speak to girls in an altruistic act of giving back. Beyond the power of their words, their sheer example can show girls what is possible for them.

Meet Laila.

– Growing up in Berkeley, CA, Laila loved playing soccer. Making new friends, pushing her limits, and developing new skills are some of the ways Laila benefitted from the game. "My high school coach pushed me all the time. She would always encourage me to give just a little bit more. Sometimes I thought she was asking too much, but somehow I always lived up to my coach's expectations. She believed in me and helped me believe in myself. My coach was also there for me away from soccer. I talked to her about my family life, my problems, and school. She was always there no matter what I needed. My coach really had an impact on me. Now I'm a soccer coach. I want to help the girls in my community, and coach and mentor them in soccer and in life."

Challenging Media Messages

"People in the States used to think that if girls were good at sports their sexuality would be affected. Being feminine meant being a cheerleader, not being an athlete. The image of women is changing now. You don't have to be pretty for people to come and see you play. At the same time, if you're a good athlete, it doesn't mean you're not a woman."

– Martina Navratilova, Nine-time Wimbledon Champion (tennis)

The media perpetuate gender stereotypes when they portray female athletes as sex objects. Many images of female athletes are those of women posing in bathing suits or other midriff-baring outfits, and almost none of these women are shown in action shots playing their sport. Girls see these images on the Internet and in magazines, and they are conditioned to believe that all successful female athletes have to look this way. As a result, many girls will take drastic measures to achieve a feminine ideal, which can impede their progress in sports.



Layne Beachley, regarded as the best professional female surfer in history, complained about the pressure she felt from her sponsors that influenced her to get liposuction when she was only 24. In her biography, *Beneath the Waves*, Beachley explains, “If you don’t fit that image then you’re not worthy of support... It’s a really unreasonable ethic to have.” The support to which Beachley is referring is that of the sponsors and fans.

Coach Tips

- At introductory and recreation levels of sport, emphasize effort and dedication. At higher levels, emphasize fitness rather than body type or shape.
- Find media specific to your sport that portray real, non-celebrity athletes, and share them with your team.
- Emphasize that female athletes come in different shapes and sizes.
- Explain why certain muscle groups are important and how they contribute to playing abilities.
- Invite accomplished athletes with varying body types to come talk to girls about body image.
- Help athletes to focus on physical attributes that make them good at their sport. For example, if you are a basketball player it helps that you are tall, if you are a soccer player it is great to have strong legs.

Respecting Diversity

Girls come in all shapes and sizes, talents and abilities, colors and religions, interests and family backgrounds. When a girl is taught to accept and respect these differences, she will gain acceptance and respect from others. And by embracing both uniqueness and similarity, she can feel better about who she is in this world. Unfortunately, prejudice is learned. That’s why appreciation of difference needs to be taught.

Coaches have incredible power in creating an open and accepting climate in which all girls can grow. By contrast, when a coach demonstrates judgment or disdain for difference, the effects can be deep and corrosive.

Homophobia

Many girls don’t play sports because they are afraid someone will call them a lesbian or they are afraid one of their teammates or a coach might be a lesbian. Many gay athletes struggle with coming out to their coaches and teammates. Regardless of a girl’s sexuality, homophobia can impact her sports experience.

Olympic softball player Lauren Lappin was concerned about how her sexuality would affect her chances of making the Olympic team. In an interview with Pat Griffin of *It Takes A Team*, she said, “I was worried about how coaches at the top of the program would react. I was worried about how being gay might affect my standing on the team. I didn’t want anything to affect my dream of making the Olympic team. But I also wanted to achieve my dream as *me*.”

How to Confront Homophobia

Coaches are responsible for making their teams a safe space. They must put their own biases aside and treat homophobia as any other form of discrimination. Coaches must avoid using words like “gay” and “faggot” as negative words. If coaches hear their players using these expressions in a harmful manner, they should take them aside and explain to them why the words are offensive.

In some cases, words speak louder than actions. The best way for a coach to acknowledge people’s differences is to use inclusive language. Inviting players’ “boyfriends and girlfriends” or “significant others” to watch a game sends the message that you know that players may have any sexual orientation. If coaches use inclusive language, they will set the example for their team and the players will start to use similar language as well.



Since homophobia is such a difficult subject for many to approach, coaches can talk about it generally as a type of bullying. A list of rules for Boston's Metro-Lacrosse summer camp states that bullying of any kind will not be tolerated. If you simply include homophobia as a type of discrimination, young players will know that it is not appropriate.

Avoiding homophobia and other similar discrimination will ultimately make your team more cohesive. In the same interview, Lappin told Pat Griffin: "I felt like I could finally be myself in every aspect of my life, I started to train better and play better. I didn't have to hide anything anymore; I could just put it all out there in every aspect of my life. I felt empowered."

Contributions from Tracey Britton, Program Director, MetroLacrosse and from www.womenssportsfoundation.org/Issues-And-Research/Homophobia.aspx

Racism

Sports can provide great possibilities for social inclusion and can bring diverse youth together to work towards a common goal. Oftentimes coaches wait for issues to arise and then address them, instead have coaches create a culture of respect and appreciation of diversity from the beginning with their team.

Coach Tips

- Leadership positions on your teams (i.e. coaches, captains) should reflect the community's diversity in terms of race. This may be difficult and take a lot more time, effort, and intentional recruiting strategies but it can have powerful results.
- Provide trainings for your coaches. Find facilitators who are experienced leading trainings on diversity and who can provide specific tools to help coaches handle racism within their program.
- Racism and issues of racial discrimination ultimately can play out in the form of bullying, especially with young people. Create a zero tolerance policy on bullying.

- Recruit players or compete against teams and athletes that are different from your team and players.
- Sports competition can bring about racial conflict. Talking about respecting diversity from the beginning of the program can help coaches manage potentially challenging situations.

Contributions from Tracey Britton, Program Director, MetroLacrosse



9 Getting it Right: Evaluation and Adjusting



After you have developed a sports program for girls and watched it operate for a couple months, it's crucial to take the time to assess its strengths and weaknesses. As with any growing enterprise, the ability to adjust is the key to growth. Ideally, all primary stakeholders should contribute to the evaluation of the program – including girls, coaches, program directors, and parents.

Quality Self-Assessment Tool for Girls' Sports Programs

Many after-school programs recognize the excellent potential of sports to help girls have fun, be healthy and learn life lessons.

These programs commit to more than free play with sports equipment, or a few weeks of trying a sport.

This Quality Self-Assessment Tool, designed by Team-Up for Youth, can be used by any adult-supervised sports program taking place outside of school time.



Quality sports programs share four characteristics:

- 1 A strong program design that creates a team of girls who are practicing and working towards a common goal
- 2 Skilled, caring coaches who teach, connect and mentor
- 3 A commitment to equity and inclusion for all youth
- 4 A connection between sports participation and youth development, educational and/or health outcomes for girls.

How to Use This Tool

This tool can be used as a stand-alone piece, or in conjunction with the more comprehensive Program Quality Self-Assessment (QSA) Tool developed by the California Afterschool Network. www.afterschoolnetwork.org

The QSA tool is meant to support a reflective practice process in which program staff and stakeholders explore their own programs and work collaboratively to develop strategies to enhance policies, procedures and practices. It will help program staff and stakeholders assess their program and identify their challenges. The QSA tool should not be used as an external evaluation measure.

Performance Levels

The QSA Tool uses the following rating system to assess the degree to which each quality indicator is evident in the program.

Level 1: Our program is just beginning to work in this area and has an urgent need to address this practice. Our program can be much better at this than we are currently.

Level 2: Our program has done some work in this area but will need targeted support to move to the next level. Our program is making progress, but can improve further.

Level 3: Our program has achieved a high level of proficiency in this area and needs only a little additional work to be exceptionally proficient. Our program is very good at this practice.

Level 4: Our program is exceptionally proficient in this practice and can demonstrate this in observable ways. This is an area of quality practice where our program can serve as an example for others.



Don't Know: I am not familiar enough with this aspect of the program to rate performance on this indicator or am just not sure how to rate it at this time.

After-school programs should strive to meet Level 3 or 4 for each indicator to demonstrate overall program quality. Assistance and support should be sought for areas scoring as Level 1 or Level 2.

There is space next to each indicator for respondents to note what the practice looks like at their site or in their organization. This can help to inform the team's discussion of the results.



	Level 1-4 D-K	Examples of this indicator in our program
Strong Program Design		
1		Staff to youth ratio is 1:20 or better (the best programs have ratios of 1:10).
2		Community volunteers help to coach and reduce ratios.
3		A consistent group of girls participates as a team or cohort.
4		Sports program meets a minimum of 3 times a week.
5		Sports program 'season' lasts at least 10 weeks (at least 5 weeks for elementary school aged girls).
6		Each session lasts a minimum of 1 hour, including 30-60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity.
7		There is access to enough of the right equipment, supplies and space to run sports programs.
8		Demonstration opportunities exist for girls to showcase learning and skill – games, tournaments, public performances etc.
9		A supervisor staff provides vision, leadership and support for the sports program.
Skilled, Caring Coaches		
10		The program has a functioning strategy to recruit quality coaches.
11		The program ensures that coaches have experience in the sport, cultural competency, and group management skills.



	Level 1-4 D-K	Examples of this indicator in our program
12		The program has strong training, mentorship and feedback systems in place for coach development.
13		Coaches give feedback, support and equal attention to all team members (regardless of ability or behavior challenges).
14		Coaches stay for multiple seasons or years; <20% of coaches leave between seasons.
15		Staff & coaches model healthy eating and physical activity.
16		Girls are not punished by barring sports participation.
Equity and Inclusion		
17		In 6th grade and above, girls have their own sports teams.
18		The program actively recruits women coaches.
19		In comprehensive programs, 50% of sports participants are girls.
20		The program selects and adapts sports to meet the needs of all students including those with special physical or learning needs.
21		Parents and caregivers are encouraged to play active roles such as volunteering as coaches, organizing special events or attending games.

	Level 1-4 D-K	Examples of this indicator in our program
Youth Development, Educational and Health Outcomes		
22		Retention: The majority of available girls return each season.
23		The emotional climate of the program is positive, characterized by mutually respectful, supportive, and relaxed interactions.
24		Girls demonstrate improved skill and fitness levels over time.
25		Program uses a research-based curriculum to teach life lessons.
26		Coaches talk to girls about school and school success.
27		Staff monitors girls' academic progress.

Funding

In an ideal world, all programs seeking to advance girls' lives through sports would have unlimited resources with which to do that good work. However, in real life, most programs have to work diligently to raise money for space, equipment, travel, and other expenses. Below are some ideas for how to get the resources you need to run your program.

- Seek equipment donations. Connect with local universities, clubs, schools, and community centers and ask for “gently-used” equipment.
- Host a night at a local restaurant or bar where a portion of the proceeds goes to your team.
- Encourage and organize the girls to do fundraising, such as a car wash, candy sales, walkathon, or to work the concession stand at a local event.
- Seek business sponsorships to offset league fees, uniform costs, etc.
- Negotiate free use of practice/game space in exchange for a service girls can help with, like cleaning up a park.



Parents should reflect on the goals they have for their daughter's sports participation. You can hand this out at a parents' meeting and encourage them to fill it out. You can also pass out the 100 Points Exercise for Girls and have parents compare their answers with their daughter's to see if they have similar goals. If they are not similar, it could be a great discussion starter between a parent and a girl.

What are YOUR goals for your daughter in youth sports?

(Assign points to the goals that are important to you so they add up to a total of 100 points.)

Become a good athlete

Learn to play the sport

Learn teamwork

Win

Gain increased self-confidence

Learn to deal with defeat

Physical fitness

Learn “life” lessons

Have Fun

Make friends

Earn a college scholarship

Other (specify _____)

Other (specify _____)

Other (specify _____)

100 TOTAL

100 Points Exercise for Girls by Positive Coaching Alliance



What are YOUR goals for playing sports?

(Assign points to the goals that are important to you so they add up to a total of 100 points)

_____	Become a good athlete	_____
_____	Learn to play the sport	_____
_____	Learn teamwork	_____
_____	Win	_____
_____	Gain increased self-confidence	_____
_____	Learn to deal with defeat	_____
_____	Physical fitness	_____
_____	Learn "life" lessons	_____
_____	Have Fun	_____
_____	Make friends	_____
_____	Earn a college scholarship	_____
_____	Other (specify _____)	_____
_____	Other (specify _____)	_____
_____	Other (specify _____)	_____

100 **TOTAL**

Ten Tips for Coaching All Girls

- 1** Encourage girls to get dirty: Girls can push themselves – they can tackle, slide into home plate, snag rebounds, and be as tough as any boy – if they are coached to. Give the girls you coach room to be as strong as they can be within the parameters set by the rules of the game.
- 2** Set clear goals: Individually and as a team, kids need focus for their energies. To facilitate progress, set clear, concise goals for every practice and game. Make sure goals are attainable and relevant to the skills and tactics your team needs to work on.
- 3** Evaluate progress regularly: Setting goals is only the first step. Evaluating strides each player makes in a given direction is equally important to improvement. Girls need to know when they have made progress – so they remain engaged and enthusiastic. On the other hand, girls need to know when they have fallen short of their goals – so they can alter their effort or approach next time.
- 4** Be mindful of social dynamics: Sports don't exist in a social vacuum at any level. Like it or not, crushes, cliques and power dynamics come to practice every day. Observe your group and try to understand what social forces are affecting their progress. Exploit positive behaviors (leadership, support, honesty) and intervene to diffuse negative behaviors (bullying, isolation).
- 5** Take a process-oriented approach: Athletic development is slow to come when wins and losses are the only measure of a season's success. Concentrate on how to shoot the ball rather than on whether or not a goal is scored. Focus on fundamental skills, tactics and strategies more than obsessing about victory.
- 6** Respect each player's contribution: Every player on your team has something to offer the group – whether it's a positive attitude, a fast 100-yard dash, or a smart play. It's your job to find each girl's strength and encourage it to shine. Learn to highlight all contributions – physical, emotional and mental.



- 7 Create expectations: Before your season begins, let players know what expectations you have of them (timeliness, effort, care for equipment) and let them know what they can expect of you (feedback, support, communication). Create a predictable environment to support their learning.
- 8 Set an example of sportsmanship: Your treatment of officials, opponents and fans will undoubtedly be noted and mimicked – by both players and parents. Recognize your role and make a commitment to respecting the spirit of the game and all those involved.
- 9 Help parents understand their supporting role: Parental support is a key to a successful season. However, parental meddling in coaching details is a sure sign of trouble. Have a pre-season parents' meeting (or send an e-mail, make phone calls) where you communicate your goals and expectations with parents – and respectfully ask that they allow you to have autonomy in coaching practices and decisions.
- 10 Focus on fun: After all, that's what playing is all about, right?

25 Benefits of Girls Playing Sports

- 1 Sports are FUN.
- 2 Girls and women who play sports have a more positive body image than girls and women who don't participate.
- 3 Girls who participate in sports have higher self-esteem and pride in themselves.
- 4 Physical activity can reduce symptoms of stress and depression among girls.
- 5 Playing sports teaches girls how to take risks and be aggressive.
- 6 Sports are where girls can learn goal-setting, strategic thinking, the pursuit of excellence in performance, and other achievement-oriented behaviors. These are crucial skills for success in the workplace.

- 7 Playing sports teaches math skills.
- 8 Sports help girls develop leadership skills.
- 9 Sports teach girls teamwork.
- 10 Regular physical activity in adolescence can reduce girls' risk for obesity.
- 11 Physical activity appears to decrease the initiation of cigarette smoking in adolescent girls.
- 12 Research suggests that girls who participate in sports are more likely to experience academic success and graduate from high school than those who do not play sports.
- 13 Teenage female athletes are less than half as likely to get pregnant as female non-athletes (5 percent and 11 percent, respectively).
- 14 Teenage female athletes are significantly more likely than non-athletes to report that they have never had sexual intercourse (54 percent and 41 percent).
- 15 Teenage female athletes are more likely than non-athletes to experience their first sexual intercourse later in adolescence.
- 16 High school sports participation may help prevent osteoporosis.

Girls who play sports are more likely to grow up to be women who remain physically active.

- 17 Women who exercise report being happier than those who do not exercise.
- 18 Women who exercise believe they have more energy and more often feel they are in excellent health than women who do not exercise.
- 19 Women who were active in sports and recreational activities as girls feel greater confidence in their physical and social selves than those who were sedentary as kids.



- 2 0** Women who exercise miss fewer days of work.
- 2 1** Research shows that regular physical activity can reduce the risk of becoming overweight or obese.
- 2 2** Recreational physical activity may decrease a woman's chance of developing breast cancer.
- 2 3** Women who exercise weigh less than non-exercising women.
- 2 4** Women who exercise have lower levels of blood sugar, cholesterol, and triglycerides, and have lower blood pressure than women who do not exercise.
- 2 5** Regular exercise improves overall quality of life.



Additional Resources

Team-Up for Youth

310 8th St
Oakland, CA 94607
510-663-9200
www.teamupforyouth.org

Women's Sports Foundation

Eisenhower Park
East Meadow, NY 11554
800-227-3988
www.WomensSportsFoundation.org

CANFIT

2140 Shattuck Avenue, Suite 610
Berkeley, CA 94704
510-644-1533
www.canfit.org

Girls in the Game

Union Park Fieldhouse
1501 W. Randolph St.
Chicago, IL 60607
312-633-4263
www.girlsinthegame.org

National Association for Girls and Women in Sport

1900 Association Dr
Reston, VA 20191
703-476-3453
www.aahperd.org/nagws

Positive Coaching Alliance

1001 N. Rengstorff Ave., Suite 100
Mountain View, CA 94043
866-725-0024
www.positivecoach.org

President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports

Department W
Tower Bldg., Suite 560
1101 Wootton Pkwy.
Rockville, MD 20852
240-276-9567
www.fitness.gov

Sport in Society

Northeastern University
360 Huntington Ave
Boston, MA 02115
617-373-4025
www.northeastern.edu/sportinsociety

Tucker Center for Research on Girls and Women in Sport

University of Minnesota
203 Cooke Hall
1900 University Ave. SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455 USA
612-625-7327
www.cehd.umn.edu/tuckercenter

Up2Us

520 Eighth Avenue
2nd Floor
New York, NY 10018
212-563-3031
www.up2us.org

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I'd like to dedicate this resource guide to the many young women I have coached over the last 20 years. They have taught me all I know about coaching and they inspire me to do all that I can to get more girls in the game. Without them, this guide would not have been possible.

Suzanne Sillett
Author
Team-Up for Youth

In order to truly empower young women and open opportunity up to them, we must dismantle the norms that permit society to devalue girls. A young girl's pride in herself can change her life and a single person can give that girl the ability to see her self-worth and potential. And the power of an individual cannot be underestimated.

We, at Team-Up for Youth, have been inspired by the dedication of both Cicley Gay and Whitney Post at the Women's Sports Foundation to create such opportunities for every girl in low-income communities. Along the way, the three of us have learned from and admired the author of this book, Suzanne Sillett, for her relentless determination to get more girls in the game, for her bottomless well of knowledge to create high quality sports programs, and for her mastery in coaching girls into women. We thank Suzanne for pouring every drop of heart and soul into this publication.

Lynne Lee
Associate Director
Team-Up for Youth

About Team-Up for Youth

Team-Up for Youth uses sports to change the lives of underprivileged girls and boys. What children learn on a playing field from great coaches – self discipline, resolve, cooperation, courage – helps them succeed in school, work and family life. Team-Up for Youth works with organizations to expand and improve after-school sports programs in neighborhoods that need them most. Team-Up for Youth trains coaches, sports programs leaders and staff, and strengthens community based organizations, making a positive impact in the lives of kids in California and beyond. Team-Up for Youth is working hard to level the playing field by recruiting female coaches and supporting community organizations that offer quality programs for girls.



About The Women's Sports Foundation

The Women's Sports Foundation – the leading authority on the participation of women and girls in sports – advocates for equality, educates the public, conducts research and offers grants to promote sports and physical activity for girls and women. Founded by Billie Jean King in 1974, the Women's Sports Foundation builds on her legacy as a champion athlete, advocate of social justice and agent of change. We strive for gender equity and fight discrimination in sports. Our work shapes public attitudes about women's sports and athletes, builds capacities for organizations that get girls active, provides equal opportunities for girls and women, and supports physically and emotionally healthy lifestyles.

**WOMEN'S
SPORTS
FOUNDATION**



Visit us online at
www.teamupforyouth.org

