

Barriers to physical activity and strategies to encourage female participation

Barriers for junior girls (8-12)

At this age, girls (and boys) are greatly influenced by their families and schools. Therefore, barriers to their participation in sport and active recreation may be due to their home and school environment.

Barriers at home

- time constraints (work and family commitments);
- lack of knowledge of available opportunities; and
- cost – membership fees, travel and equipment can be expensive, especially for single income families.

Barriers at school

- peer pressure;
- the diversity of activities offered (for example offered traditional sports which can be thought of as more relevant for males); and
- overcrowding of the curriculum, physical activity can often be viewed as the lowest priority.

Other barriers junior girls (and boys) may face include:

- lack of opportunity for girls who may not want to become elite athletes;
- poor promotion of social or informal activities;
- shy about wearing sporting uniforms or swimming costumes;
- lack of confidence due to perceived as poor or slow learning of skills;
- low numbers of accredited coaches or unwillingness of experienced coaches to coach juniors;
- unaware of participation opportunities outside school;
- perception of physical activity as sport that is highly competitive and/or inappropriately anti-social or violent; and
- lack of alternative organised and supervised opportunities for social interaction through physical activity.

Strategies to overcome barriers at the junior level

Strategies for home

- get active together. Try family activities like bushwalking or backyard ball games;
- explore your local area for parks, bikeways, walking trails and swimming pools; and
- make a family project to find affordable physical activity opportunities near you such as clubs, community events or walking groups. Information on your local Heart Foundation Walking Group can be found at www.heartfoundation.org.au.

Strategies for schools

- encourage stay-at-home parents to participate in active programs such as walk to school groups. Information on the 'Walking School Buses' program can be found at www.travelsmart.gov.au;
- encourage active transport, such as cycling or walking to school;
- enhance the skills and confidence of those who deliver sport and active recreation within your school. The Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing runs the [Get Active Queensland Accreditation Program](#) where teachers and school-based volunteers can obtain coaching and/or officiating qualifications.

Strategies for sport and active recreation organisations

- ensure you communicate the importance for the entire family to support their children's participation;
- try to conduct some physical activities at times convenient for families, such as after school, twilight or well-lit locations at night;
- investigate if club members or volunteers will organise a car pool for families in the same area;
- use your newsletter or website to showcase some role models. Acknowledge females within the club who have made a significant contribution by their sporting achievements or on a volunteer basis;

- offer short clinic sessions (girls only and mixed) to develop skills and confidence. Follow these up with social competition linked to mainstream junior competition structures;
- provide feedback to parents to highlight achievements and suggest how parents can encourage their daughters or practice with them at home;
- have a high profile female in your club adopt a junior team. They could assist with some training sessions, attend some junior games or events and invite the team to one of their games or events;
- incorporate some of the ideas in the [female friendly facility checklist](#) into your organisation; and
- look at increasing your organisation's contact with local primary schools, identify effective means for promoting activities such as participation in the school assembly, small articles in school newsletter or flyers distributed with the school newsletter;

Barriers for teenage girls (12-17)

- increased demands on available time due to things like study and part-time employment;
- self-conscious about body image, wearing uniforms and participating in physical activity in front of males;
- peer-pressure;
- emphasis on achieving or winning over participating for enjoyment;
- lack of knowledge on opportunities outside of school;
- cost – membership fees, travel and equipment can be expensive, especially for single income families; and
- competing interests for spare time (social media, computer games, television, hanging out with friends).

Strategies to overcome barriers for teenage girls

Strategies for home

- be a role model. Look at the benefits of physical activity as a family;
- discuss with your daughter what activities she would enjoy. If joining the local sporting club is not what she's interested in, suggest alternative options that may appeal to the age group, such as hip-hop classes; and
- provide DVDs or online videos that teach activities such as dance, aerobics or kickboxing. These can be enjoyed with friends, other family members or alone.

Strategies for sport and active recreation organisations

- involve teenagers in designing uniforms, marketing and merchandising your organisation;
- incorporate teenagers interests in the activity, such as playing music;
- promote your organisations in ways teenagers respond to, such as social media, websites, emails or SMS;
- provide incentives for high school students to take on coaching, umpiring or administration duties. Incentives could include reducing their membership fees or providing payment;
- provide vocationally based leadership programs such as Challenge, Achievement and Pathways in Sport (CAPS) or accreditation opportunities by getting involved in the Get Active Queensland Accreditation Program. Information on both of these programs can be found at www.nprsr.qld.gov.au;
- establish a youth committee to run a one-off event or program for the community. Teens could also do some casual 'market research' for your organisation amongst their friends to help with future program and marketing development; and
- acknowledge the contribution women and girls have made to the organisation via social media, your website, newsletter and in person.

Barriers for women (18+)

- time constraints (work and family commitments);
- lack of available or affordable childcare;
- lack of female coaches, instructors and leaders;
- few activity options specifically for women and girls;
- limited social or non-competitive activity options;
- limited flexible activity options, such as pay as you play, no uniforms, casual membership;
- perception that physical activity is male dominated or stereotyping that some activities as exclusive to males; and
- perception that in mixed activities, males can be overly physical against female participants.

Strategies to overcome barriers for women

Strategies at home

- get active together. Try family activities such as bushwalking, joining a club, playing backyard cricket or softball or doing a class with family members or friends;
- explore your local area for parks, bikeways, walking trails and swimming pools; and
- purchase DVDs or online videos that teach activities such as dance, aerobics or pilates. These can be undertaken in the privacy of your own home with friends, family members or alone.

Strategies for sport and active recreation organisations

- encourage current female members to invite friends or family members to the organisation;
- offer family and social opportunities at convenient times;
- offer 'come and try' days so women can experiment with a range of activity options to find one they enjoy and will continue participating in;
- offer female only activities;
- create programs in which mothers can participate with their children, avoiding the need for childcare requirements. These programs could be promoted through local childcare centres and mothers groups;
- encourage women within your organisation to mentor other women;
- acknowledge the contribution women and girls have made to the organisation via your website, newsletter and in person;
- incorporate some of the ideas in the [female friendly facility checklist](#) into your organisation; and
- look to get the mothers of junior members involved in the administration side of your organisation. Encourage them to take on a coach or official role, and offer to arrange accredited training so they have the skills and confidence to undertake these roles. National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing can help you with this through the [Get Active Queensland Accreditation Program](#).