

ACTIVELY ENGAGING WOMEN AND GIRLS

Recommendations for Community Program Leaders and Coaches

Community program leaders and coaches can increase the participation of women and girls across the lifespan through the delivery of quality sport and physical activity programs, and the implementation of gender equitable policies and practice, from the playing field to the boardroom. Gender equitable organizations increase their pool of athletes and leaders, improve organizational performance and decision-making, and contribute to enhancing the Canadian sport and physical activity system.

1. EDUCATE YOURSELF – Invest time to learn about the psycho-social factors affecting women’s and girls’ participation and leadership, and how to reduce the barriers to their full involvement. A number of resources and workshops are available from Canadian Women & Sport – visit www.womenandsport.ca.

2. TALK TO WOMEN AND GIRLS – Consult with women and girls in your community to develop programs that meet their needs, interests and experiences. What works in one community may not work in another. Be prepared to provide ideas and suggestions, as women and girls may not be familiar with the opportunities available. Consult on preferred program models, including day of the week, time of day, and session frequency.

3. CREATE FEMALE-ONLY OPPORTUNITIES – Create female-only programs or events that provide an opportunity for women and girls to try new sports and physical activities, and build their skills and confidence, in a safe and supportive environment.

4. PROVIDE QUALITY PROGRAMS – Use effective instructional methods to teach, evaluate and motivate participants. Emphasize the fun, pleasure and challenge of participation. Consider the age and stage of participants, being aware of the variation in women’s and girls’ experiences across the lifespan. Individualize learning and provide encouragement and recognition for improvement and effort (in addition to ability). Provide skill development opportunities – women and girls tend to enjoy and participate more often in activities they are competent at; don’t assume prior experience, skills or knowledge.

5. SUPPORT POSITIVE BODY IMAGE – Teach women and girls to value what their bodies can “do” rather than “how they look”. While weight loss can be an initial motivator for some women and girls to become involved, encourage them to reflect on the other outcomes of their participation, including new skills and increased self-esteem, increased social support, decreased stress, better sleep, etc.

6. PRACTICE INCLUSION – Create an inclusive environment that is respectful of diversity in gender, race, ethnicity, culture, ability, body size, and sexual and gender identity – in your program and within your facility. Use inclusive language; ensure diverse images of women and girls are used in promotional materials and within the facility; be sensitive to unique needs based on cultural and religious beliefs and practices.

7. CREATE A POSITIVE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT – Support positive social dynamics within the program. For many women and girls, social acceptance enhances group performance (in contrast to men and boys, for whom performance enhances social acceptance).

- Include ice breakers and fun games to build relationships amongst girls.
- Provide social time for women before, during or after programs or practices.
- Incorporate discussions so participants can connect and share their experiences (e.g. bullying, media awareness, goal-setting, healthy eating).
- Proactively address negative dynamics to avoid a toxic environment that will discourage participation.

8. PROVIDE ROLE MODELS – Provide positive role models for women and girls. Profile female athletes and healthy living champions, focusing on their skills, achievements and contributions. Recruit staff who reflect the diversity of your community.

9. RESEARCH AND EVALUATE – Examine current statistics relating to women’s and girls’ participation in your community. Evaluate programs and services to identify success factors and possible barriers to participation. Inactive women and girls are a marginalized group that will require additional time, human and financial resources to effectively engage. Don’t rely on registration numbers as the sole indicator of program success; alternative measures include skill development, participant and parent satisfaction, registration in other programs, and benefits to participants and the community.

10. JOIN THE MOVEMENT – Become part of the Canadian Sport for Life movement to benefit from and contribute to the ongoing evolution of program ideas and lessons related to LTAD, especially ideas related to improving the environment for women and girls.

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