

BARRIERS & CHALLENGES TO GIRLS' PARTICIPATION IN SPORT

APPROPRIATE SPORT CLOTHING

It can be dangerous for a girl to shame their family by behaving in a manner perceived as inappropriate: they risk being punished (physically or psychologically), threatened, or having their freedom of movement restricted. Many communities impose constraints on what is considered appropriate attire for girls. These requirements can make sports participation challenging for girls.

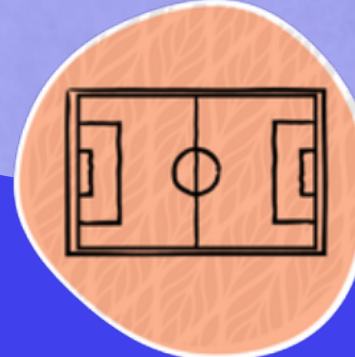


STRATEGIES:

- Respect cultural dress codes, and be flexible within the boundaries of physical safety.
- Use a private venue if girls' attire restricts their ability to perform athletically.
- Select activities that girls can play in modest clothing.
- Provide girls and female coaches with proper sport attire if they can't provide it for themselves.

FIELDS AND FACILITIES

In some cultures and conflict regions, it may be inappropriate or too dangerous for girls to play outside. Girls' teams are often at the bottom of the hierarchy for access to sport spaces.



STRATEGIES:

- Seek alternative fields or courts or find times when these spaces are not being used (e.g. partner with local schools).
- Include field/court space in the programme budget to ensure girls' safety.
- Build partnerships with community decision-makers.
- Create or build mobile equipment that you can take with you when finished playing.

ECONOMIC CONSTRAINTS

The economic burden and costs associated with equipment, transportation and competition may be unrealistic for some girls' families. The economic opportunity cost of playing sports over income-generating work can make parents resistant to letting their daughters play.



STRATEGIES:

- Consider the financial impact on families and where possible, provide income-earning opportunities for girls.
- Match the sport to the economic capacity of your participants or cut costs by sharing equipment.
- Find creative low-cost solutions for your programme.
- Build partnerships within the community to reduce costs.

SCHEDULING

Girls are often responsible for assisting with domestic responsibilities or paid jobs and may find it difficult to fit in a sport.



STRATEGIES:

- Schedule around the majority of a girl's home and religious responsibilities.
- Ask teachers to set aside an hour before school ends to run your sport programme.
- Be flexible and understanding (e.g. offer make up sessions or allow younger siblings to join sessions).

PERSONAL SAFETY

There are few girls who have never feared for their own safety. When participating in a sport programme, girls and their caregivers have to feel safe when travelling to and from training and events, and throughout the entire practice and competition.



STRATEGIES:

- Engage female coaches and trainers who can create safe spaces.
- Organise groups to travel home together.
- Include girls in the creation and implementation of safeguarding policies.
- Invite a qualified instructor, preferably a woman, to teach basic self-defence skills.
- Schedule activities at appropriate times of the day.
- Inform caregivers about scheduling and transport.
- Teach girls to recognise potentially dangerous situations or areas.
- Develop a strategy for communicating with caregivers in case an external emergency arises.

FEMALE ROLE MODELS

If girls have never seen women playing sport, it's almost impossible for them to imagine playing themselves. Too often, girls only see certain types of role models, limiting their visions for their own potential. Girls need role models who show them how they can achieve success in all aspects of sport and life.



STRATEGIES:

- Invite successful women to be guest speakers or do training sessions with your group.
- Create a policy to promote women coaches and leaders.
- Encourage girls to be positive role models for one another.
- Use powerful images of strong female role models (in and outside of sport) that can help girls visualise who a role model might be.

GOVERNMENT SUPPORT

In countries where governments don't support sport opportunities for girls, independently run sport programmes fill an important void. Sport is a government-sponsored and regulated institution in many countries. These governments, often run by a male majority, prioritise sporting opportunities for boys rather than girls.



STRATEGIES:

- Solicit the help of like-minded individuals and organisations to help gain government support.
- Identify and apply for government funding that is relevant to your programme objectives.
- Build a network of citizens, politicians, and business people who'll lobby on your behalf.

MEDIA COVERAGE

The media can play a pivotal role in showing the images of strong, healthy female athletes who can serve as role models for younger girls. Most mainstream media show women's sport only occasionally or not at all, while providing a daily dose of men's sport.



STRATEGIES:

- Share media related to girls' and women's sport.
- Encourage local media outlets to cover women's sport.
- If possible, invite local media to cover your programme, events and participants.
- Take your team to watch local women's sport events if they exist, even if they aren't part of a formal league.

RELIGION

Some conservative societies and institutions use religion to prevent girls from playing sport. While many religions dictate what appropriate sport clothing may look like, few bar girls from participating in sport at the same level as their male counterparts.



STRATEGIES:

- Ensure that religious leaders are fully aware of the intention and benefits of the sport programme — reducing fears, anxieties and misunderstandings that might exist.
- Ask religious leaders to help educate parents that religion doesn't forbid sport.

PREJUDICES AND MISCONCEPTIONS

Prejudices and misconceptions around sport and gender can pose a barrier to girls participation in sport. Societal prejudices often associate athleticism, strength, and competitiveness as 'masculine' traits. Social expectations of 'femininity' can make girls reluctant to practice sport for fear of building muscle mass or being seen as promiscuous.



STRATEGIES:

- Teach the community about the benefits of physical activity for girls to help change perceptions.
- Invite the community to visit the programme in action and to talk about their concerns.
- Create and implement a child protection policy and code of conduct. Train coaches around these policies.
- Talk openly with girls about perceptions of women athletes.
- Enlist the support of health professionals and community leaders to defuse myths.
- Use local pride as a motivator.
- Encourage girls to make decisions about their bodies on their own well-being as opposed to social or cultural stigmas.
- Teach girls how to manage menstruation while participating in sport.

BODY IMAGE

A girl's perception of their own body and their relationship with their body image can influence if they feel confident or comfortable enough to play sport. Many girls are afraid to play sport out of fear of their bodies becoming less 'feminine'.



STRATEGIES:

- Discuss with participants alternative ideas of beauty.
- Invite women athletes to come share about their experience navigating their relationship with their bodies.
- Be patient.

