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WHY DO GIRLS PARTICIPATE AND WHAT STOPS THEM?

Understanding why girls and women participate is a key factor in learning how to increase and encourage participation. The main reasons for all girls & women to participate in organised sport are:

- Fun, enjoyment and socialising with friends
- Health benefits

KEY FACTORS FOR GIRL'S PARTICIPATION

Activity buddy

For girls of all ages, a key factor in whether they engage in and sustain physical activities is whether they have a same-sex friend with whom to participate. For girls, the support structure of such shared experiences is very important. Young girls might lack the confidence to try new things on their own, so being able to do an activity with a friend helps to encourage participation.

Different ages – different motivations

Cultural and age differences mean different motivations for participating and it is important to recognise these factors:

Young girls participate because...

- ...it's fun
- ...they get to play with their friends
- ...they want to experiment
- ...they enjoy learning new skills
- ...of parental support

Teenagers and young women participate because...

- ...it's fun
- ...they get to socialise with friends
- ...they are concerned about weight management and body shape
- ...of peer support



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WHY DO GIRLS STOP PARTICIPATING?

There is a clear trend of decreasing levels of activity as girls get older. Levels of activity steadily decline from about 6yrs of age until adolescence, when activity levels drop more steeply.

From child to adult

The transition from childhood to adulthood is a key risk time for drop-out. The time of optimal training and peak performances in competitive sport often coincides with the phases of school and/or higher education and starting a professional career. Therefore, the most frequent reason for attrition is the time problem which occurs when trying to coordinate school/study/job and competitive sport.

Other commitments

Simply having other things to do is a big reason for attrition. Work, study and family commitments are often stronger motives for sport disassociation than dissatisfaction with elements within the sport itself.

Peer pressure

During adolescence, many girls consider reducing their commitment to physical activity, especially if they are anxious about being rejected or excluded from same-sex friendships. They might experience pressure from their peer group to seek other activities associated with their preferred perceptions of femininity.

Coaches & Parents

Coaches and parents are the most important figures and supporters of young athletes and the role played by these two groups can have a tremendous effect on whether or not a child chooses to continue with a sport or dropout. The coach can not only be responsible for a successful career in competitive sport but may also be responsible for the termination of a career. The dislike of the coach is often a big reason for withdrawal.

The authoritarian behaviour of coaches and officials, as well as their lack of openness and readiness to discuss things have been identified by girls as important reasons for dropout.

Other reasons

- Perceived ability - those who perceive themselves as athletes are more likely to maintain participation
- An inadequate team atmosphere, lack of fun and enjoyment, too competitive
- Transport problems – families don't have a car and girls can't take part in activities because it means having to walk home late which is considered unsafe