

# Women in Sport: Reframing Sport for Teenage Girls

Women in Sport research released yesterday has found that too many girls are dropping out of sport and physical activity during teenage years and developing deep-rooted negative attitudes towards it, which act as barriers throughout life.



**14%** of girls age 5-16 achieve recommended levels of physical activity dropping to **10%** of girls age 13-16.

- By the age of **14-16** **78%** of girls understand the importance of an active lifestyle whereas only **28%** really enjoy taking part in physical activity.
- **60%** of girls aged **11-16** know a girl or young woman who has experienced a mental health problem.
- **1/3** girls aged **14-16** are unhappy with their body image
- Only **18%** of girls aged **11-16** say they are very happy compared to 38% in 2011
- **62%** of girls report having the lowest wellbeing compared to 38% of boys aged 14.
- **7/10** girls who don't feel good about the way they look will stop themselves from eating or otherwise put their health at risk.
- **44%** of girls aged **13-15** are overweight/obese compared to 36% of boys.



## WHY AREN'T GIRLS ENGAGING WITH SPORT?

- **Perception of sport:** Only **4 in 10** girls define themselves as sporty compared to more than 6 out of 10 boys. This is often judged by limited experience of school PE.
- **A Spectrum of engagement;** Some girls loved sport at Primary school and have fallen out of love with it due to their perceived image or it becoming too competitive, some have always been disengaged and haven't had the wide experience of sport, with **28%** of girls only having done PE at school and no sport anywhere else.
- The impact of **Puberty** on girls: Great change and upheaval, lack of support and advice. **6/10** girls said that failing during puberty made them want to quit. **7/10** girls avoid trying new things during puberty because they are too afraid to fail. **64%** of girls will have quit sports by the age of finishing puberty (**16-17**).

## BARRIERS

### Personal Barriers:

- Feeling like she's not good enough to take part and only the talented are valuable – **29%** of girls aged **14-16** say not being good at sport stops them from taking part in school sport.
- Low self-worth and a predetermined sense of failure – **50%** of girls feel paralysed by their fear of failure at puberty which stops them trying new things.
- Lack of confidence over body image and appearance – **8 out of 10** girls with low body esteem avoid seeing friends and family or trying out for a team or club.
- Pressure to prioritise future goals from school, family and themselves – Only **29%** of girls **14-16** say the skills they learn in PE are relevant to their day to day life.
- Feeling physically and emotionally vulnerable during puberty – 42% of 14-16 year olds say their period stops them taking part in physical activity inside school.

### Social Barriers:

- Fear of missing out on any time with friends – **63%** of young women would shun sport or physical activity if their friends were not involved.
- Perception that it's for boys, not for girls – **80%** of girls feel they do not belong in sport.
- Lack of active female role models – **72%** of girls **11-21** years old say a lack of media coverage of women's sport leads them to being treated unfairly.
- Fear of having to go along and meet new people – **42%** of girls aged **11-21** prefer to communicate on social media than face to face.

### Contextual Barriers:

- School sport is their only frame of reference – only **49%** of girls aged **11-16** say they enjoy PE
- Perceived lack of time means sport is deprioritised – **37%** of girls **14-16** say they don't have time to do sport outside of school due to school work
- Lack of support and guidance on managing puberty and sport – **1 in 4** girls and young women feel unprepared for the start of their period, with 1 in 7 saying they didn't know what was happening.
- Disengaged attitude of parents – **67%** of girls **14-16** say their parents encourage them to take part in sport.

## WHAT REALLY MATTERS IN GIRL'S LIVES?

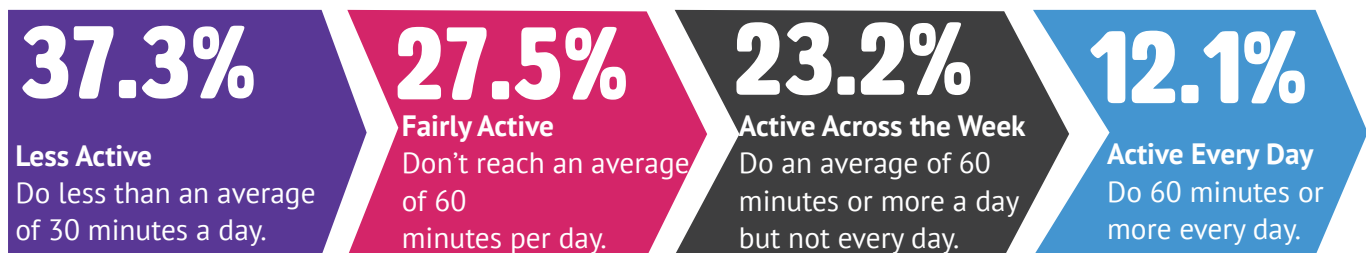
- **Support Network** – we should not underestimate the importance of a mum's role at this life stage. Mum and Friends most valued. Over 1 in 4 young women would be more likely to join a sport if their mum played. 63% of young women wouldn't play sport or exercises without a friend by their side but 54% of girls aged 11-16 say relationships with friends are a main cause of stress in their life.
- **Socially Connected** – The amount of time **12-15** year olds spend online has more than doubled in the last 10 years, from 8 hours a week in 2005 to 18.9 hours a week in 2015, putting massive pressure on time available to do other things. Snapchat and Instagram, most popular apps among teenage girls and also perceived as the most harmful to their mental health and wellbeing due to it being largely appearance based. **How can we make sport and physical activity shareable and positive in an online environment?**
- **Independence and New Experiences** – During adolescence girls are more likely to seek out novel experiences and take risks as they figure out who they are and what they enjoy. Many girls don't view sport as something that can give them independence or offer adventures that could compete with the other exciting opportunities on offer. Girls had largely negative memories of PE as something they were no longer interested in. **We need to consider how sport and organised activities can become part of these formative memories and become adventures that they carry with them for life.**
- **Moments of pride** – Moments of pride help to build girls confidence and realise their best. We need to consider how sport and activity contribute to moments of pride, particularly for those girls who are not sporty. Social media gives them an avenue to share these moments with others. Competitiveness is important to a significant number of girls, with half of those aged 11-16 saying **We should consider how sport can be more inclusive to cater for all girls, so that each and every one has the opportunity to feel good about themselves and experience moments of pride.**
- **Keeping on top of it all** – Girls deprioritise sport with age as the pressures of school and social norms intensify because it is not considered as time well spent in their busy lives and does not compete in the enjoyment stakes with other things girls want to do. Yet sport could be the key to greater attainment at school, greater success in the future and crucially to helping girls better manage and cope with their lives today.

# HOW CAN SPORT BETTER MEET GIRLS' NEEDS?

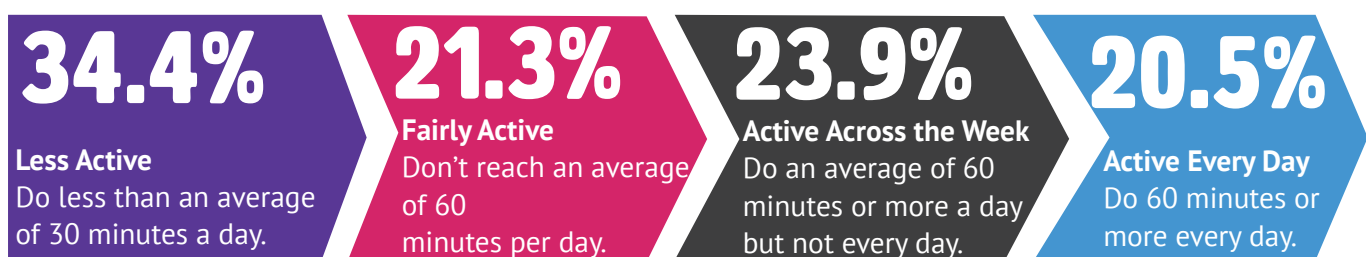
8 Principles of success to **REFRAME** sport in the mind of these girls, **REDEFINE** their experience to be broader and better than what they've ever experienced at school and **REINFORCE** the enjoyment of physical activity and sport, and how it adds real value to their lives.

1. **No judgement** – take pressure off performance and give freedom to simply play (silly and spontaneous is ok)
2. **Invoke excitement** – Bring a sense of adventure and discovery (more unusual activities give them something to share)
3. **Clear emotional reward** – Reframe achievement as moments of pride not winning (celebrate behaviours girls can be proud of)
4. **Open eyes to what's there** – Redefine sport as more than school sport (language is powerful)
5. **Build into existing habits** – Tap into existing behaviours in other spheres (learn from the digital world)
6. **Give girls a voice and a choice** – allow girls choice and control to feel empowered (change authority dynamic)
7. **Champion what's in it for them** – make it much more than just about health (use power of incentives and rewards)
8. **Expand image of what sporty looks like** – create truly relatable role models which inspire (people they can relate to).

## GIRL'S ACTIVITY LEVELS IN GM



## BOY'S ACTIVITY LEVELS IN GM



Based on the Active Lives Children and Young People Survey in Greater Manchester the gap between boys and girls who are doing 60 minutes or more of activity every day is **8.4%**. The gap increases by 0.7% when adding to those who are Active across the week.

The gap between inactive boys and girls is **2.9%**.