

POSITIVE MESSAGING FOR GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

Although female participation and success in sport continue to increase, and the benefits associated with sport and physical activity are numerous, the participation of girls and young women remains low. In fact, **only 39% of females between the ages of 5 and 17 are considered active enough for optimal health benefits.** While some girls and women excel at sport and physical activity, others face barriers to their participation including inadequate opportunities to participate and develop their skills, little support and encouragement from parents, teachers and coaches, and a lack of positive role models. Making a difference in the lives of girls and young women can be easy – here's what you can do:

1. **Use inclusive language** so girls and young women know they have a place in sport.

The power of language to disempower and discourage young people's potential should not be underestimated – use your opportunities to build dreams and encourage participation. Use neutral phrases such as player-to-player defense, rather than man-to-man. Be proud to "throw like a girl" – don't use terms like this in a negative sense. Refer to yourself or others as "athletic", instead of as a "tomboy". Avoid using male sport as a yardstick to measure the success or skill of girls and women; value women's sport for its exciting and competitive nature. Encourage girls and young women to try a wide variety of sports, including wrestling, karate, rugby and kayaking.

2. **Emphasize fun and fitness** rather than competition, personal injuries or negative experiences.

Think critically about your experiences and provide lessons or positive twists. Be careful not to normalize or portray as acceptable unsafe practices like excessive exercising or not eating to lose weight. Given that 27% of teenaged girls have eating disorders, encourage healthy eating and emphasize the social benefits of sport and physical activity. One of the reasons girls and women don't participate is because they're afraid to get hurt – a list of grueling injuries may turn a potential Olympic athlete off sport forever. The goal is not to censor your experiences, but to ensure that negative experiences are accompanied by a positive message.

3. **Share personal experiences** about how sport makes you feel.

Share the physical and psychological benefits including strength and physical competence, increased self-esteem and decreased stress, as well as the opportunities to make friends, develop leadership skills, even travel the world. While the participation of girls and young women is low, they are more likely than males to want to increase their involvement in sport and physical activity – give them a reason!

4. **Share your role models** by talking about a woman that influenced your life.

Not only are you a valuable role model that can encourage participation, so can your own role models! Value and celebrate the accomplishments of females in your sport, or talk about your active grandmother or younger sister. The underrepresentation of female athletes in the media limits the role models girls and young women have – challenge them to learn about or follow the accomplishments of female athletes on the internet or at the library.

5. **Make a statement** about the importance of physical activity in the lives of females and males.

Share information - the benefits associated with sport and physical activity: maintaining a good body image, increased self-confidence, improved cardiovascular fitness, decreased incidence of eating disorders and smoking, and healthy bone development. Those benefits should be available to all girls and boys, young women and young men. This is your chance to make a difference!



Canadian Association for the
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