

ACTIVELY ENGAGING WOMEN AND GIRLS

Learn to Train and Train to Train Stage Considerations

Females ages 8-11 and Females ages 11-15*

Canadian Sport For Life (CS4L) is a movement to improve the quality of sport and physical activity. The Learn to Train and Train to Train stages are the third and fourth of seven stages in **Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD)** – a training, competition and recovery pathway guiding an individual's experience in sport and physical activity from infancy through all phases of adulthood.

During the **Learn to Train** stage, athletes convert fundamental movement skills into fundamental sport skills, supporting participation and mastery across a variety of activities. A key outcome of the Learn to Train stage is physical literacy. During the **Train to Train** stage, athletes start to focus on the sport of their choice, consolidating sport specific skills and building their strength and conditioning. The ages typically associated with the Train to Train stage are based on the approximate onset and end of the adolescent growth spurt.

Considerations for Female Athletes

Developmental age – Girls of the same chronological age can differ by several years in their biological maturation. Sports with age cut-off dates advantage athletes born in the first third of the year who may be physically bigger or more developed (the relative age effect). Widening hips and breast development with the onset of puberty can be a competitive disadvantage. Ongoing developmental gaps can make chronological age a poor guide to grouping adolescents for training and competitions, and can contribute to concerns about competence, impacting retention and drop-out rates. Compounding these issues, early or late maturation can result in self-esteem issues, bullying and harassment, and unwanted sexual attention for athletes.

Increasing independence – In earlier stages, parents are often directly involved in their child's athletic development, e.g. helping her learn movement skills, selecting early sport experiences, or coaching her team. By the Train to Train stage, athletes become more independent, and parents typically become less involved. However, ongoing engagement is critical to maintaining a focus on fun (as defined by their child), debriefing on successes and failures, and providing encouragement, transportation, and financial assistance.

Peers and social dynamics – During these stages, peers become a priority for many girls and young women. Within teams, social

acceptance will lead to enhanced effort and better performance. Coaches must intentionally create an inclusive environment where athletes feel welcome, connected, and safe. Negative dynamics must be proactively addressed to avoid toxic environments that can have damaging consequences for athletes. Coaches and parents can support athletes by taking the time to listen and observe what's happening before, during and after competition and practice – on the field and through social media. Be prepared to ask questions and follow up if needed.

A time of transition – During these stages athletes are exploring their interests and preferences. Some athletes will commit to a single sport, while others will continue exploring across environments, seasonal activities, and team and individual pursuits. Athletes will also develop a sense of the level of competition they prefer, with some opting to transition to or stay in recreational sport or less-structured physical activity – moving into the Active for Life stage. Athletes will also be exploring and developing interests outside of sport, navigating their developing sexuality and gender identity, and trying to manage demands from friends, family, and school. The Train to Train stage is when many athletes drop-out due to burnout or excessive pressure from coaches and parents. Coaches and parents have an important role to play in easing these transitions, providing time and support to explore interests in and outside of sport, and helping athletes build skills and resilience to maintain their physical and mental health, manage their time, and balance athletic pursuits with other demands.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

LTAD Stage Considerations for Female Athletes series – www.caaws.ca/CS4L

Actively Engaging Women and Girls: Addressing the Psycho-Social Factors – www.caaws.ca/CS4L

About CS4L and LTAD – www.canadiansportforlife.ca

Recommendations for Coaches – www.caaws.ca/CS4L

CS4L – A Sport Parent's Guide – www.canadiansportforlife.ca

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*Stage-related ages are guidelines only, and should consider developmental appropriateness and variations in readiness due to psycho-social factors.



Canadian Association for the
Advancement of Women
and Sport and Physical Activity

Association canadienne pour
l'avancement des femmes
du sport et de l'activité physique



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