



# Advice On Co-Ed Sports

*This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.*

**“In our U-8 league, we are considering co-ed play so that we can include the girls who want to play. Is that age-appropriate? And should there be rules about how many girls are on the field at once for each team?”**

## PCA Response by Jim Thompson, PCA Founder and CEO

As kids get older, size, strength and ability differences become more pronounced. However, at 6 and 7 years of age, there is often little difference in these areas between girls and boys, so a co-ed program makes sense, especially if it means that more girls will be able to play. I see no need to limit the number of girls on the field at the same time but there should be minimum playing time regulations so coaches will not be tempted to keep their weaker players (boys or girls) on the bench.

Even at somewhat older age levels a co-ed program can work. There is always going to be a range on a particular team from strongest to weakest player. Coaches always will have to wrestle with playing-time philosophy and their “fear-of-losing profile.”

There will also always be mismatches even in same-gender sports. So coaches will always have to make mature, thoughtful decisions on how to handle match-ups between “uneven” teams. Teaching players how to support each other, how to respect differences in ability, and how to fill each others’ Emotional Tanks are universal requirements of a Double-Goal Coach®.

For co-ed programs, it can be especially important to get parents on board with PCA values such as Honoring The Game, athletes focusing on the ELM Tree of Mastery (E for Effort, L for Learning, M for bouncing back from Mistakes), and filling Emotional Tanks of teammates. Although the focus of co-ed sports is often to benefit girls, the positive lessons for boys can also be huge. Learning to treat females with respect can flow from boys being on the same team with girls, especially when coached by a Double-Goal Coach.

Powerful and lasting life lessons can be learned from playing in this situation for both genders as men working effectively with and for women is a reality in the workplace. Boys who learn to do this early on will have a leg up in their careers after their playing days are over.

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