

Designing Welcoming, Equitable, and Positive Girls' Sports Programs—9 Tips

Designing youth sports programs with girls central and in mind is key to making youth sports welcoming, equitable, and positive for all. Check out these nine tips!

*All supporting studies available upon request.

TIP
1 Make It
Girl-Centered

■ **Over 90% of girls ages 7 to 13 who play sports like (or love!) to participate.** Younger and older girls, and young women really enjoy athletics. Presume girls are interested and want to play especially when programs are inclusive and accommodating.

TIP
2 Make It
Intentional to
Get All Girls
in the Game

■ Black and Latinx girls enter sport at a later average age and leave sport earlier than their counterparts, affording girls of color an even narrower window of opportunity. **Girls of color and girls in low-income communities are getting fewer opportunities to play, yet want to play in greater numbers! Let's include everyone.**

TIP
3 Make It
Responsive
to Girls'
Interests

■ Using simple surveys, small focus groups, and/or basic outreach to understand what sports girls want to play, and how, can help set up a lasting, successful program based on girls' interests. For example, volleyball, soccer, and basketball are popular girls' sports nationwide; check what girls want to play in your area.

■ Many girls prefer and thrive in all girls' athletic contexts whereas some girls like co-ed play – check with girls on what they prefer and offer that!

■ Don't assume what girls want to play or base offerings simply on what a coach knows / has coached / what's been historically offered. **Ask and tailor programs.**



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TIP
4 | **Make It Safe
(Physically)**

■ **Safety** - Are the practice / game times, locations, facilities, and items like bathrooms safe and accessible (corresponding to identity)? **Simple steps like working lights, adult supervision, and safe, clear spaces help girls play.**

TIP
5 | **Make It Safe
(Emotionally)**

- **Comfortable** - Create fun, engaging sport routines so girls know what to expect.
- **Belonging** - Prioritize support and training for staff / coaches to use positive, gender-supportive language, names, and preferred pronouns, demonstrate empathy, and build connections with girls.
- **Friends** - Connections with peers is often a driver for participation. Use a buddy registration / team formation system so that girls can know one person, if preferred.
- **Curb the Negative** - Counter gender stereotypes that can limit girls' participation. **Ensure kids and adults near practice and game space use supportive language.**
- **Empathy** - Coaches can listen to understand girls' perspectives without judgment.

TIP
6 | **Make It
Accessible**

- **Scheduling** - **Getting to practice / games is doable if scheduling and facilities are considered** - e.g., have sports on / near campuses at ideal times, at a close-by park, and along public transit lines. Support carpools. Consider calendar conflicts.
- **Cost** - Cost impacts girls in starting and sticking with sport. Make offerings affordable and scholarships available - consider costs (league, equipment, transportation).





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**TIP
7**

Make It Girl-Informed to Understand Barriers

■ Finding out what's keeping girls from playing is key to **designing inclusive, supportive, positive, girl-oriented programming**.

Common barriers easily overcome include:

- Not knowing how / when to sign up for sports programming
- Knowledge gaps re: sports
- Never having played before
- Gender inequity, such as girls' teams / leagues / divisions getting "less"
- Attitudes of families, communities, and institutions impeding girls' play
- Obligations (e.g., job to support family; caretaking of siblings)

**TIP
8**

Make It Inviting to Break Down Barriers

■ Use inviting, clear team, division, and league information for sign-ups; **include images of girls actively playing in outreach materials**.

- Explain rules and game to girls brand new to the sport; novices welcome!
- Ensure girls' offerings are gender equitable (facilities, schedules, etc.)
- Share information with girls, families, and all re: why girls in sport benefit (ideally in multiple languages and in engaging ways)
- Offer practice / games when girls are available; explore childcare help for girls with family-oriented obligations

**TIP
9**

Make It Collaborative With Girls

■ **Voice and Choice** - Share power with girls to help design your program

■ **Effort, Learn from Mistakes, Mastery** - Celebrate progress, not just outcomes

■ **Balance** - Instill healthy competition and fun; mindful of girls' range of motivations

