

GIRLS, PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND CULTURE

Tools for Facilitators of Girls' Empowerment Groups



This information sheet has been developed by researchers at the British Columbia Centre for Excellence for Women's Health, in collaboration with Girls Action Foundation and the Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS). It is intended to support the work of facilitators of girls' empowerment groups.

It presents current resources for facilitators on:

- What we know about girls' physical activity and healthy living
- How to create fun, safe, culturally relevant physical activity programs for girls
- Starting conversations and sharing materials about physical activity with girls



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British Columbia
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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

Production of this document has been made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada.
The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of Health Canada.

Girls and physical activity: Why we need to support it

Being active for at least **60 minutes daily** can help teens (12-17 years):

- Improve their health
- Do better in school
- Improve their fitness
- Grow stronger
- Have fun playing with friends
- Feel happier
- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Improve their self-confidence
- Learn new skills

Source: The Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP)¹

PATTERNS AND TRENDS IN GIRLS' AND YOUNG WOMEN'S PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

- In the 2007 to 2009 Canadian Health Measures Survey, only 4% of girls (compared to 9% of boys) achieved the recommended levels of daily physical activity².
- Only 70% of girls participated regularly in sport during the previous 12 months, compared to 81% of boys³.
- Girls become less active as they transition from childhood to adolescence. Between ages 5-12, 56% of girls are not active enough. In the teen years, it's 70%⁴.
- Beginning at the age of 12, girls' involvement in physical activity declines steadily until only 11% are still active by age 16-17⁵.
- Only 10% of female students in BC enroll in physical education when it becomes elective⁶.
- Girls and young women who are physically active or involved in sports are less likely to use tobacco⁷.
- Girls and women from ethnic communities are the most underrepresented in the Canadian sport and recreation system⁸.
- The odds of weekly sports participation are almost 80% higher for Aboriginal boys than girls⁹.
- Aboriginal children who take part in extracurricular activities, such as cultural activities are more likely to take part in sports. Four in ten Aboriginal children participate in cultural activities⁹.
- Neighbourhood safety impacts girls and women's physical activity and there is a need for strategies that ensure that neighbourhoods are safe for walking, cycling, and other forms of physical activity.

INACTIVITY AND SEDENTARY BEHAVIOUR

- Sedentary behaviour plays a larger role than physical activity in predicting overweight among girls¹⁰.
- It has been estimated that 58% of girls (grades 5 to 8) spend more than 2 hours per day talking on the phone, texting, or instant messaging¹¹.
- Girls ages 10-11 from low-income neighbourhoods are two to four times more likely than their counterparts from more affluent neighbourhoods to be overweight or obese¹².
- Low self-esteem and weight concerns are strong predictors of smoking initiation in young women^{13,14}, factors which are also associated with inactivity^{15,16}.
- Children's television time has been linked to mothers' perceptions of neighbourhood safety where children in the least safe neighbourhoods tend to spend more time watching TV¹⁷.

NO NEED TO BE AN ATHLETE

To integrate physical activity into your empowerment programs for girls, you do not need to be an expert, in perfect shape, sporty or an athlete. Increasing physical activity opportunities can be as easy as integrating active games or ice breakers, walking instead of taking transit, or watching an instructional video (e.g. yoga, aerobics, zumba). Being willing to try something new yourself is a great way to show girls you do not need to be a pro, or an athlete or 'super-fit' to have fun and be active!

Included within this resource are projects to know about, resources to try and organizations to get involved with to support girls' physical activity and healthy living.

CANADIAN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY GUIDELINES

According to 2013 Canadian Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines, girls (5-11 years) and young women (12-17 years) should accumulate at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous-intensity physical activity daily. This should include: vigorous-intensity activities (which causes sweat and being 'out of breath') at least 3 days per week and activities that strengthen muscle and bone at least 3 days per week. More daily physical activity provides greater health benefits¹⁸.

Sedentary behaviour should be minimized, such as prolonged sitting.

Canadian Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines (5-11 and 12-17 years)

For health benefits, children (aged 5-11 years) and youth (aged 12-17 years) should minimize the time they spend being sedentary each day. This may be achieved by



Limit recreational screen time to no more than 2 hours per day; lower levels are associated with additional health benefits.



Limit sedentary (motorized) transport, extended sitting and time spent indoors throughout the day.

Source: The Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology (CSEP) [Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines and Canadian Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines](#) (available in [French](#), [English Inuktitut](#) and [Inuinnaqtun](#))

How you can support girls to stay active

Girls' group facilitators can support girls' well-being by integrating physical activity into girls' groups in ways such as:

- ✓ Limiting sedentary behaviour (sitting for long periods, etc.)
- ✓ Active play (create physical activity opportunities through games, visiting community facilities, or inviting a guest instructor to teach a new sport or physical activity)
- ✓ Active discussion (e.g. go for walk while discussing an issue or topic)

CAAWS' ON THE MOVE INITIATIVE - GETTING GIRLS ACTIVE!

The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) is a national non-profit organization dedicated to increasing opportunities for girls and women to participate and lead in sport and physical activity in Canada.

On the Move is CAAWS' national initiative designed to increase opportunities for inactive girls and young women (ages 9-18) to participate in sport and physical activity. Through On the Move, CAAWS works with program leaders and decision makers to create positive programs and inclusive environments that support girls' participation in sport and physical activity. On the Move provides a number of practical resources designed to support quality program development and implementation, and CAAWS has led projects examining the sport and physical activity experiences of Aboriginal, newcomer, and racialized girls and young women. The On the Move Top 10 Success Factors (see insert, next page), provide a list of key program characteristics to help make your program or event, a success!

CAAWS' ON THE MOVE TOP 10 SUCCESS FACTORS

1. **Emphasize Fun!** – Physical activity should be a fun experience. Create a social environment that emphasizes participation over skill and celebrates personal bests and accomplishments.
2. **Introduce a Variety of Physical Activities** – Girls and young women are often unaware of the many physical activities available. Integrate traditional and non-traditional activities, and promote opportunities within your community by visiting pools, arenas, courts, climbing gyms and parks.
3. **Allow Input into Program Design** – Value the interests and ideas of girls and young women. Ask what sports and physical activities they are interested in, and create opportunities for them to plan and make decisions.
4. **Provide Female-Only Opportunities** – Many females feel uncomfortable or are restricted from participating in front of males for cultural or religious reasons. Provide girls and young women with opportunities to participate in physical activity in their own way.
5. **Create a Positive Environment** – Create a safe and inclusive environment. Think about your own and others' actions, and listen to participants' (and their parents') concerns and needs. Consider language, visual images, physical environment, policy and practice.
6. **Teach the Basics** – Investing time in developing girls' and young women's physical literacy and fundamental movement skills will help them build a foundation for life-long active living.
7. **Move More** – The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines recommend 60 minutes of moderate or vigorous physical activity per day. Ensure girls and young women are actively engaged to contribute to the health outcomes of your program.
8. **Be a Positive Role Model** – Try new activities, demonstrate healthy, active living, and respect participants' needs, interests and experiences. Have fun with participants, and cheer them on. A connection with the program leader will support girls' and young women's regular participation.
9. **Transportation** – Deliver programs at schools or in target neighbourhoods to increase accessibility. Provide, coordinate or support transportation when necessary (e.g. pick-up participants in your organization's van, organize a walking school bus, provide bus tickets).
10. **Food** – A healthy snack will fuel girls' and young women's participation, and provides an opportunity for tasting experiences or educational sessions supporting healthy eating choices.

Source: CAAWS (2012).

On the Move Top Ten Success Factors. Available online, see CAAWS website, 'publications': <http://www.caaws.ca/>

CAAWS Reports and Publications related to Girls Physical Activity

(Available in English and French online, see CAAWS website, click on 'Publications': <http://www.caaws.ca/>)

- **On the Move Handbook**
Provides a step by step process for creating a fun, female only physical activity program, with lots of background information, success stories, and tips.
- **Making Healthy Connections with Racialized Communities: Girls and Young Women's Experiences with Sport, Physical Activity and Healthy Living**
Discusses the unique sport and physical activity needs, interests and experiences of girls and young women from diverse ethno-cultural communities, shares insights and experiences from community and program leaders, and provides recommendations to enhance program and service delivery.
- **Aboriginal On the Move After School Success Stories**
In 2010-2012, CAAWS partnered with the National Association of Friendship Centres and five member Centres to support the development and delivery of active after school programs for Aboriginal girls and young women.
- **In Her Voice: An Exploration of Young Women's Sport and Physical Activity Experiences**
Provides insight into the sport and physical activity needs, interests and experiences of girls and young women (ages 13-18) based on focus group discussions. Practical recommendations support the creation of positive programs and inclusive environments.
- **Actively Engaging Women and Girls: Addressing the Psycho-Social Factors**
Provides background information and recommendations to address the psycho-social factors that influence female athlete development, leadership and life-long participation in sport and physical activity. A supplement to Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L), a movement to improve the quality of sport and physical activity in Canada.

A number of targeted supplements with practical recommendations are available, including:

- **Recommendations for Community Program Leaders and Coaches**
- **Recommendations for Educators and School Administrators**
- **Recommendations for Families and Caregivers**
- **Active After School Programs for Girls and Young Women: Policy and Recommendations**
Describes a vision and strategic directions for quality active after school programs for girls and young women.
- **Active & Free: Young Women, Physical Activity and Tobacco**
A practical tool to support your work towards encouraging a healthy lifestyle for young women by keeping them physically active and tobacco-free... for life.
- **Disordered Eating in Sport: Taking a new direction**
Many active girls and women fall into disordered eating habits due to lack of education and many women with eating disorders delay effective treatment due to myths and fears that hold them back from recovering a healthy weight.
- **Self-Esteem, Sport and Physical Activity**
The younger years in a child's life are critical for producing positive self-esteem and may be influenced by personality, parenting techniques and role modeling. Coaches, physical education teachers and active living leaders can positively influence self-esteem and provide girls and women with ongoing incentive to participate and personally succeed in physical activity endeavours. Includes check lists, to help build self-esteem in girls and young women.

What girls say

The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) asked girls their opinions on what makes it easy to be active.

Three common facilitators to physical activity were identified across each group:

1. Enjoying the activity
2. Feeling successful and skilled
3. Easy access to physical activity

Reasons girls said they stay away from physical activity:

1. Feeling unskilled
2. Feeling self-conscious
3. Lack of interest

MAKE IT EASY FOR GIRLS TO BE ACTIVE: GIVE THEM SKILLS

To support girls' participation, provide them with opportunities to build their skills and knowledge. A main concern for participants was feeling unskilled — adolescent girls are hesitant to try a new activity or participate in activities in which they feel unskilled or were afraid of being unsuccessful. They became discouraged if they did not feel successful in an activity or they did not see improvements right away. Many identified not knowing how to play as one of their most frequent barriers to physical activity. They spoke about pressure, competition, fear of being singled out or made fun of, being embarrassed to try, feeling self-conscious, etc. Don't assume girls know the basic skills of a sport, or the rules of the game.

Source: CAAWS (2009). In Her Voice: An Exploration of Young Women's Sport and Physical Activity Experiences. Available online on CAAWS website, click on 'Publications': <http://www.caaws.ca/>

Bringing in culture

PRINCIPLES FOR PROGRAMMING FOR ABORIGINAL YOUTH

How do we make programming relevant for Aboriginal youth overall? Here are four guiding principles that have been identified for successfully working with Aboriginal youth.

1. Understanding and integrating cultural identity: cultural identity can be a powerful protective factor. It is important youth have the skills to be successful in their traditional community as well as in the dominant culture.
2. Increasing engagement: It means providing a range of roles for youth to be involved and providing them with opportunities to become leaders in addition to participants.
3. Fostering youth empowerment: There are two types of empowerment that are important for youth, particularly those who belong to a culture or gender that has been marginalized: 1) personal empowerment and 2) social empowerment which requires opportunities and support for youth to become agents of social change themselves.
4. Establishing and maintaining effective partnerships: Partnerships are important because of the emphasis on extended family and social networks among traditional cultures. Partnerships are the source of cultural teachings and priorities, particularly when program leaders and participants are not from the same communities. Partnerships increase buy-in from youth and communities.

Adapted from: Crooks, et.al (2009) Engaging and Empowering Aboriginal Youth: A toolkit for service providers.

Girls Action Foundation has published research reports on the empowerment of racialized girls. See *Northern Girls Research Review*, *Racialized Girls Research Review* and *Our Communities Our Words* all available for downloading from the Girls Action Foundation's website: <http://girlsactionfoundation.ca/>. See 'Resource Centre'.

MAKING LINKS FOR ABORIGINAL GIRLS

As girls group facilitators we need to think about gender specific programming for girls that takes culture into account. Here are some examples:

Métis Women's Jigging Circle (Toronto) (<http://www.nwrct.ca/>) Métis culturally-inspired physical activity program run by Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto's Paamsiiaadaa Fitness Group. Métis and other Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women of all ages participate in a free weekly drop-in traditional Metis jigging circle open to all levels of jiggers including beginners.

Promoting Healthy Living among Aboriginal girls and young women (National Aboriginal Diabetes Association) (<http://www.nada.ca/wp-content/uploads/1030.pdf>) This report provides a summary of the findings based on a review of 10 community-based initiatives that focus on healthy living for Aboriginal girls and young women.

Aboriginal On the Move Digital Storytelling Videos (<http://www.caaws.ca/> click on 'programs') CAAWS Aboriginal Girls on the Move collection of stories speaks to the power of sport and physical activity in how we define ourselves and create our community.

Active Circle, Gen7 initiatives via Motivate Canada (<http://www.motivatecanada.ca/en/gen7>) GEN7 encourages young Aboriginal Canadians to live, and encourage others to live, an active and healthy lifestyle, part of which is achievable through increased participation in sport and physical activity.

Active After School Programs for Girls and Young Women – Success Stories from Five Friendship Centres (<http://www.caaws.ca/> click on 'programs') Provides an overview with key learnings from each site to support the creation of similar programs at Friendship Centres and other active after school program provides across Canada.

Making it safe and inclusive for all girls

Sport and physical activity programmes may choose different methods to ensure safety with consideration to local contexts and the specific needs of participants. There are crucial elements, however, which all programmes should consider when addressing safety. Female coaches, trainers and all staff are responsible for both assuring that the girls feel emotionally secure and comfortable within their sport environment and protecting them from physical harm. Other important factors include:

1. Providing safe areas where the girls can meet to participate in physical activity, and build their skills and confidence. These areas are free of any form of violence, free from any unfair judgment and are “girl friendly”.
2. Using a peer education non-hierarchical model where everyone is a teacher and everyone is a student.
3. Treating all participants equally and with respect; freedom of speech is highly esteemed and discrimination of any form is not tolerated.

Adapted from: [Women Win. Empowering Girls and Women through Sport and Physical Activity](http://womenwin.org/files/pdfs/EmpoweringReport.pdf) <http://womenwin.org/files/pdfs/EmpoweringReport.pdf>

A RESOURCE TO HELP YOU DESIGN AND FACILITATE INCLUSIVE GIRLS' PROGRAMS

Amplify: Designing Spaces and Programs for Girls: A Toolkit. Girls Action Foundation 2011. (<http://girlsactionfoundation.ca/en/amplify-toolkit-1>) In addition to this toolkit, Girls Action provides in-depth in-person training for facilitators of girls' programs.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIVITY PROGRAMMING WITH A TRAUMA INFORMED PHILOSOPHY

Girlvana Yoga (<http://www.girlvanayoga.com/>) (Vancouver) is a program designed for pre-teen and teen girls to learn yoga and meditation. The methodology is rooted in a self-discovery, tools to manage stress, and an understanding of honouring and loving oneself.

Yoga Outreach (<http://yogaoutreach.com/>) (Vancouver) partners with yoga instructors, community organizations, social service agencies, and correctional facilities to provide mindfulness-based yoga programming for our community's most underserved members. They also offer trauma sensitive yoga training.

The Art of Yoga Project: Nothing Beyond Her Reach (<http://theartofyogaproject.org/>) (California) is designed to help at-risk girls by focusing on early intervention and preparing girls for a positive future. We are leaders in revolutionizing the rehabilitation of girls by offering trauma-informed, strength-based, gender-responsive services.

Websites for girls and young women

Active & Free: Young Women, Physical Activity and Tobacco (<http://caaws-activeandfree.ca/e/index.cfm>) An information website, includes a cost calculator, tips for resisting peer pressure, staying active and tobacco free, and a healthy living pledge.

Kickaction.ca (<http://kickaction.ca/>) is a Canadian online community space for girls and young women who think for themselves, take a stand and act creatively to bring positive change to their communities and across the globe.

Websites for facilitators

Girls Action Foundation (www.girlsactionfoundation.ca)

Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) (<http://www.caaws.ca/>)

Provincial organizations increasing opportunities for girls and women to participate:

Alberta InMotion Network (www.inmotionnetwork.org)

Égale Action (Quebec) (www.egaleaction.com)

ProMOTION Plus (BC) (www.promotionplus.org)

Physical and Health Education Canada (PHE Canada) (<http://www.phecanada.ca/>)

Active and Safe Routes to School Program (<http://www.saferoutestoschool.ca/>)

Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (<http://www.cpra.ca/>)

Motivate Canada (<http://www.motivatecanada.ca/en/home>)

Olympic School Program (<http://www.olympicschool.ca/>)

ParticipACTION (<http://www.participaction.com/>)

Active After School Hub (Canadian Active After School Partnership) (www.activeafterschool.ca)

Active Healthy Kids Canada (<http://www.activehealthykids.ca/>)

Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability (<http://www.ala.ca/content/home.asp>)

Active for Life Magazine (www.activeforlife.ca)

Action Schools! BC - Action Pages (www.actionschoolsbc.ca)

Leisure Information Network - How to plan a Girl's Day event (<http://lin.ca/resource-details/5365>)

Women's Sports Foundation (US) (www.womenssportsfoundation.org)

Activities to inspire girls to get active!

1. Go as a group to try a new activity together – visit a local recreation centre, pool, skating rink, trail or park.
2. Integrate active games or ice breakers or play an instructional video (e.g. yoga, aerobics, zumba).
3. Bring in a female peer role model/guest from the community in to actively introduce a new activity, and share stories about being engaged in sport and physical activity, and how their activities have supported her happiness and health.
4. Plan a Girl's Day event. Girls Action Foundation provides support to girls' groups to organize activities on the February 14 National Day of Action (www.girlsactionfoundation.ca). (Another resource to help: <http://lin.ca/resource-details/5365>)
5. Need a conversation starter? Film and video clips can serve as a consciousness-raiser and springboard for discussion in girls' empowerment groups, about the importance of physical activity, barriers to participation, self-esteem and body image, the influence of the media, and more!

Here are some film/video clip examples:

Women of Winter (http://www.youtube.com/watch?list=UUfBEB0K4gH-blORPAlEeRTfg&feature=player_embedded&v=UldJlmrVWxQ#!)

Author: Canadian Olympic Team

Description: Canadian Olympic history is rich with powerful women of winter. With Sochi 2014 on the horizon, the Canadian Olympic team shares this compilation video of amazing female athletes who have inspired Canada for generations.

Length: 58 videos of varying length

Baseball Girls documentary (http://www.nfb.ca/film/baseball_girls)

Author: National Film Board

Description: This zany and affectionate documentary uses animation, archival stills, and live-action footage to detail the history of women's participation in the largely male-dominated world of baseball and softball.

Length: 48 min

Abby Hoffman - Hockey surprise He's a girl (<http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/sports/more-sports/fair-game-pioneering-canadian-women-in-sports/hes-a-girl.html>)

Author: from CBC digital archives

Description: Inspirational video about standing up for girls in sport.

Length: 2:05

Girls and Football (http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=5LHEO8RgC9o#)

Author: Girls and Football

Description: Girls' Empowerment through sport promotional video for South Africa.

Length: 2:18

Afghanistan's Girl Skateboarders (<http://vimeo.com/46337060>)

Author: Skateistan

Description: Skateistan began as a Kabul-based Afghan NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) and is now an International non-profit charity providing skateboarding and educational programming in Afghanistan and Cambodia.

Length: 2:21

Go Girl Go! Option: Athlete Campaign Video

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBYrnl68vk4&feature=related>)

Author: Nike Women

Description: Featuring Mia Hamm, Diana Turasi, Gabby Reece, Gretchen Bleiler and other women athletes, this Nike commercial tackles female bias in sport. It may lead to discussion about role models, women athletes in advertising, and ways that women athletes have overcome challenges.

Length: 0:30

Why Do You Play? Video

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dj_C7MOVj4U)

Author: Women's Sports Foundation

Description: Female athletes share why they love playing sports.

Length: 2:08

Dove - Beauty Pressure. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ei6JvKOW60I>)

Author: Tim Piper

Description: "Talk to your daughter before the beauty industry does".

Length: 1:20

6. Use images from the book [GREAT GIRLS- Profiles of Awesome Canadian Athletes](http://www.amazon.com/Great-Girls-Profiles-Canadian-Athletes/dp/0006385591) (<http://www.amazon.com/Great-Girls-Profiles-Canadian-Athletes/dp/0006385591>) to prompt a discussion. It has a series of profiles of great Canadian female athletes, from age eleven to age eighty-four. The book focuses on Canadian athletes – from superstars such as Hayley Wickenheiser and Clara Hughes to up-and-coming young athletes such as 11-year-old Sekwan Trottier and her younger sister Takawikin – two of the fastest Nordic skiers (in their age category) in Saskatchewan – to “retired” athlete Nora Young, who still rides a racing bike at age 84!

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