



The Big Picture



Everyone knows the importance of being active for a healthy life, but currently 1.8 million fewer women and girls play sport each week than men¹. Young children rarely need much encouragement to run around and play, but girls start to be less active from age eight, and by the age of 14, boys are twice as active as girls.

Perhaps it's not surprising when women playing sport are not very visible – many people would say that 'you can't be what you can't see'. Women's sport makes up 7% of all sports media coverage in the UK, which includes 10% of TV coverage and just 2% of newspaper sports coverage. After the 2012 Olympics, 75% of people surveyed said they wanted to watch more women's sport on TV, but they can't at the moment because it's rarely shown.

And then, women's sport gets far less investment than men's sport. In the two years to December 2013, women's sport received just 0.4% of reported sponsorship deals in UK sport. England reached the quarter-finals in the Women's World Cup in 2015, but the women in the team are paid a fraction of the salaries that Premier League footballers command; some work part-time alongside their footballing careers.

What You Should Know



Over the years, Christians have not had a very positive view of the body, teaching that what really counts is the soul. That view has more to do with ancient Greek philosophy, however, rather than biblical Christianity. In fact, our body, mind and soul are all interconnected and what we do with one affects the others. Being whole and healthy is about looking after our physical, spiritual, emotional **and** intellectual selves.

Girls can often have an unhealthy perspective on their bodies, thanks to common media messages. They aspire to be skinny and beautiful, but don't see the value in developing a strong, active, healthy body. They may be reluctant to get involved in physical activities because they don't want to get sweaty or messy, but don't appreciate that a good physical workout can leave you more confident, glowing with health and feeling great about yourself.

Youth workers are important role models for young women when it comes to physical activity. Within your team, what attitudes do you communicate? What kind of example do you set? Do you all encourage girls' participation and make it easy for them to get involved? Do you avoid making comparisons with the boys, whether favourable or not? Are female youth workers happy to be active and messy? Do they let girls see them without make-up and sweaty from having exercised? And if that's really not you, are there active or sporty women you could include in your youth work or recruit as volunteers?

Experts in the Field



- Women in Sport aims to transform the world of sport for the benefit of every woman and girl in the UK. Their website includes useful stories, information and resources. www.womeninsport.org
- This Girl Can is a project of Sport England which is a celebration of active women and girls. You can find their film on their website: www.thisgirlcan.co.uk. Use the hashtag #thisgirlcan on social media to connect your group's activity to lots of others.
- The Always' "Like a Girl" advert addresses the drop in confidence that many girls experience in puberty. <http://always.com/en-us/about-us/our-epic-battle-like-a-girl>
- Parkrun is a free 5k race that happens all over the country every Saturday. Find out your nearest one on their website: <http://parkrun.org.uk/>

Rachel's Story



Rachel* helps to run an open youth club at her church, where young people can turn up and choose what they do from a range of activities on offer. Invariably, the girls will sit around a table braiding each other's hair and painting their nails, while the boys all play football or snooker, dominating the space and making lots of noise. There's no overlap between the two types of activity; boys are active and fill the space and girls are passive and quiet. Of course, the young people have a free choice about what they do, but it's legitimate to ask how free that choice is given the pressure there often is to fit in what everyone else does.

Research among girls² into the reasons why they aren't more active cites boys' dominance of sport as one barrier. Girls often feel self-conscious participating in sport alongside boys because they feel their bodies are on show, and some associate boys with the aggressive competition that puts them off sport. Other barriers include lack of confidence, a lack of choice of activities in school PE, the way is sport is undervalued compared to more academic subjects, and the thought of getting sweaty and messy.

* Name has been changed to protect identity.

¹ All stats from Women in Sport: <https://www.womeninsport.org/resources/media-stats-pack/>

² Changing the Game for Girls, 2012 available from Women in Sport: <https://www.womeninsport.org/resources/changing-the-game-for-girls-ngb-factsheet/>

Jenny Baker is a marathon runner and the author of Equals: enjoying gender equality in all areas of life.

www.jennybaker.org.uk

Getting Stuck In



- **Show Sport England's *This Girl Can* film**, or Always' *Like a Girl* advert (links overleaf). Talk about the message of the films, and why they have been made. Find out who does and doesn't do sport, and the reasons why.
- **Provide a range of activities** in your youth work, including active, sporty, messy ones, and encourage young people to engage with all of them, not just those that come naturally.
- **Organise a trip to see a women's sport event**, or invite a woman from a local sports club to come and talk to your group about why she does sport and what she gets out of it.
- If there's a cause that your group want to support, get them to **run a sponsored 5k to raise money**. Find out if there's a local parkrun near you – a free 5k race that happens every Saturday. Ask a runner in your church to lead some beginners' running sessions for your group; start by running for 2 minutes, walking for 1 and build up over six weeks or so. Focusing on raising money will give them a reason to run, but once they get into it they might keep going!
- **Introducing girls to sport or activity** is probably best done in a single-sex session to take away any anxieties about what boys might think. Agree that you'll all get sweaty and be make-up free together so no one worries what they might look like. Find someone who can come and lead a Zumba or basic dance class for you, so you can have a laugh together.
- If funds allow, take your group on a **residential weekend** or trip where qualified instructors can introduce them to activities that none of them have done before, such as kayaking or archery, so they'll all be learning and trying something new together.

