



HOW CAN CLUBS ATTRACT, RETAIN and DEVELOP WOMEN & GIRLS IN PADDLESport?

Potential Barriers:

There are several barriers that face women in sport in general as well as those more specific to Paddlesport. The following list highlights just a few issues that may prevent women and girls to take up and stay in sport.

- **Lack of time**
- **Lack of childcare**
- **Personal safety**
- **Body image**
- **Clothing and equipment**
- **Lack of self-confidence**
- **Parental and adult influence**
- **The male-dominated culture of sport**
- **Sexual harassment and abuse**

Interesting facts

- Women and girls respond better to the **social, health and well-being characteristics** of sport rather than competition.
- Adolescent females place greater emphasis on **self-comparison** and comments from adults than do adolescent males, who rely more on competitive outcomes as their basis for **personal judgement** of physical competence.
- Girls, on average, have **less self-confidence** than boys and rate their performance or ability more negatively than boys
- Self Confidence is also linked to competition. Although some women enjoy the competitive element of sport, many girls and women are **turned off sport because it's competitive**.
- For many girls training is too **time consuming, boring and repetitive**
- For women and girls the relationship between **body image** and physical activity is a vicious circle; the more **self conscious** they feel about their bodies, the less likely they are to take part in sport, and yet, participation in sport has a positive effect on girls' perceptions of their bodies.

HOW CAN CLUBS ATTRACT AND RETAIN WOMEN & GIRLS?

There is no one-size fits all approach for clubs trying to attract women and girls. The following guidance should be used, not as a 'must do' list, but as useful information that may help highlight areas where your club could improve, or considerations to take into account when looking to increase and maintain the number of Women and Girls participating at your club.

- The first contact is crucial; **clubs should be welcoming** to new comers. Try to create a friendly, pleasant and reassuring first experience. Do not advertise for new members if you don't really want them. New members will quickly leave if the clubs seem cliquey and unfriendly.
- Use **positive images of women and girls** in all club promotional material. Use a variety of images, not just those which show the idealised female figure.
- Where possible purchase club kit or **equipment** that is **female oriented**. Consider suitable colour and size.
- Ideally the club should be in an **accessible location** which can be reached in a **safe** and sustainable way. For example; consider suitable lighting around the club during the winter months.
- **Avoid** making women sign up for extended periods at the first visit. Women often do not feel comfortable making **long term commitments** without knowing what they are getting in to.
- Clubs that are **family friendly** encourage joint participation and help solve any childcare issues.
- **Changing rooms** and toilets should be pleasant environments, which are reliably **clean** and functioning and separate from the men's changing areas, providing suitable **privacy**.
- Clubs that **link to local schools** and **youth clubs** can ensure that girls, who enjoy the sport in other settings, feel comfortable in joining the club.
- Make sure all women and girls, regardless of skill or experience, get the chance to be an **active part of all club activities**.
- Promote beginner and intermediate sessions for women and girls as **fun**, open and **non competitive**.
- Encourage and develop **female role models** in your club- coaches, volunteers or other paddlers. A mentoring or buddy system could be set up for older or more experienced girls/ women to mentor those who are younger or less experienced.
- **Sexist attitudes and behaviour should be challenged and not tolerated**.
- Work towards an **equal balance** of men and women, girls and boys in all areas of the club; coaches, volunteers, participants and committee members.

COACHES

- Ensure you provide gender, age and skill-level **appropriate coaching** and competition to enable all women and girls to develop their skills at their **own pace** and reach their competitive potential, if they wish to do so.
- Coaches should consider their coaching style to ensure that women and girls are **encouraged and supported**.
- Try to be as **flexible** as possible in allowing women and girls to decide **how often** and **when** they come to the club to paddle.

HOW CAN CLUBS RETAIN and DEVELOP TEENAGE GIRLS?

Teenage girls drop out of sport at a faster rate than boys. Reasons for this can be very different from the reasons why girls don't play sport in the first place. It is important to remember that different girls may have very different reasons for playing and for dropping out of sport.

Some reasons include;

- **Peer group/ social values**
- **Enjoyment/ Other priorities**
- **Confidence**

The following ideas, again, won't work for everyone but may help keep a number of girls in the Paddlesport for longer.

- Run **social events** alongside club events so that girls make new friends as well as keeping the existing friends they may have joined with.
- Hold a **new members night**, where everyone is encouraged to **bring along a friend**.
- Give girls **positions of responsibility** within the club as they enter their teenage years. (e.g. assistant coaches for younger age groups, officiating at events, volunteering)
- Consider **female only sessions**.
- Keep **changing rooms** and **facilities clean** and **attractive**. Where possible provide mirrors and hairdryers. If you hire facilities from another provider (e.g. a local authority) apply continuous pressure to ensure they are of consistent high quality.
- Introduce more **fun elements** to training – don't always stress the competitive element. Many girls respond well to **continuous improvement**, rather than winning at all costs.
- Use coaching styles that **build confidence**, rather than confrontational approaches
- Provide girls with the **opportunities** to **provide feedback** and **make decisions** about what they like and what they might want to change about their paddling sessions.
- **Don't allow boys to dominate mixed sessions**.
- Ensure training sessions are **mixed** and **varied** and consider using different sports as part of the training.
- Don't apply pressure on girls to compete at **higher levels** of competition **than they want to**.
- **Speak to parents** regularly to re-assure them about ways in which studies can be prioritised alongside sport. Remind them that regular physical activity boosts academic results.

Coaches

- If putting girls into adult or **mixed groups** cannot be avoided then do so in a **sensitive** manner.
- **Don't pressure** women and girls into competitive sessions if they don't want to.