

GIVING GIRLS A POSITIVE START WITH SPORT AT HOME

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Busting the Myths

WOMEN
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SPORT

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Gender stereotypes lead to biases and inequalities with wide-reaching consequences for the health and wellbeing of children. In sport we know that girls are limited by gender stereotypes which stifle their joy, take away their chances to learn skills, and reduce their natural confidence.



Recognise

Families spot and discuss stereotypes and challenge each other to change their thinking, language and behaviour.



Support

Families understand that girls may need more investment to start and continue in sport than boys due to limiting stereotypes.

Enjoy

Watching your daughter thrive in sport, seeing her play on equal terms with boys and admire your son's allyship. Daughters and sons are engaged in sport and loving it!



Below are some common myths and stereotypes to challenge around girls and boys in sport.

“Boys are naturally more active and physical than girls”

Before puberty there are only small differences in physique between boys and girls. But gender stereotyping means that on average, girls get fewer opportunities to be physically active in their early years, meaning that they may not feel as physically confident. This can then stop them from engaging in sport and active play. It is natural and important for all children to play, move their bodies and to be active and healthy.

“Girls are too fragile for sport and play”

It is understandable as adults that we may unconsciously treat girls and boys differently. We hear messages about boys being resilient and strong and girls fragile and sensitive. This can lead adults to be cautious and protective of girls and avoiding active play that is seen as more suitable for boys. In reality, the physical differences between the sexes at this age are small, and any differences in strength are made up for by greater flexibility in girls. We should expect girls to be resilient, strong and active from their earliest years and help them to express themselves freely and learn about their physicality through rough and tumble play, just as boys do.

“Boys need sport to let off steam more than girls”

On average, young boys have marginally more natural strength and stamina than girls but the difference is small. The concept that only boys benefit from ‘running-off’ energy is self-fulfilling, the less a girl runs about the less she enjoys running about. All children benefit from being active and it is vital to their development.

Sport and physical activity bring girls, as well as boys, health and wellbeing, teamwork, discipline, resilience and self-esteem. Just as these skills can help boys avoid trouble when they’re older they can help girls avoid internalising struggles.

Sport can change lives for everyone. It has equal value to girls and boys.



“Girls can’t play boys’ sports”



Society has excluded girls from numerous contact and team sports in the past. As parents and carers, we can also steer girls towards what we may see as more ‘feminine’ and aesthetic activities. This limits girls’ opportunities. Society is changing now and if families challenge the stereotypes too, girls can explore the full range of activities rather than missing out on sports like football, rugby or boxing. All sports have great value for girls and boys, children must not have their choice of sport limited by gender stereotypes or expectations.

“Boys need sports to become a man”

It is not inevitable that girls will drop out of sport as teenagers. This is a limiting narrative for girls that becomes self-fulfilling. If clubs and coaches provide enough positive and meaningful experiences for girls at a young age it can build a love of sport that becomes part of their identity. With this, girls can navigate the challenges of puberty and external pressures to conform to stereotypes which all too often lead to dropout. Girls need to see and hear strong messages that sport does matter for them, and that they do belong.

“Girls are either princesses or tomboys”

The gender stereotypes we’ve grown up with tell us that a girl is either a tomboy or a princess and nothing in between. This can put a girl off sport if she wants to be seen as feminine or make her feel excluded if she does play sport. Messages in society tell girls that their appearance is valued more than their skills, abilities and personality. It’s important we don’t reinforce this by only telling girls ‘don’t get dirty’, or constantly commenting on how pretty they are, when we tell boys they’re doing well at something. We need to show girls that we value them for who they are and what they do, not how they look. Sport is for all girls.

