

CHAMPIONING *HER* JOURNEY:

ADDRESSING UNIQUE NEEDS IN GIRLS' SPORTS

54%

OF YOUTH WHO ARE ACTIVE IN SPORT RATE THEIR MENTAL HEALTH AS EITHER VERY GOOD OR EXCELLENT.¹

1. GIRLS SEEK THE OFF-COURT BENEFITS OF ENGAGING IN SPORT

Sport has the potential to enhance girls' life skill development and positively impact overall wellbeing.¹

Explicitly teaching life skills and providing opportunities to focus on holistic well-being and mental wellness can help to tailor quality sports programs to better meet the needs of girls and young women.¹

23%

OF YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS REPORT FEELING AS THOUGH THEIR COACHES LOOK LIKE THEM.¹

2. GIRLS NEED HEALTHY COACH RELATIONSHIPS

A healthy relationship with a caring coach could influence a girl's belonging in sport and assist in positive development.²

Having a coach who looks like them and sympathizes with their experiences can influence a sense of belonging and comfort.²

81%

OF YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS REPORT NOT HAVING ANYONE THEY CAN TALK TO ABOUT EXPERIENCES OF RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION IN SPORT¹

3. GIRLS REQUIRE INCLUSIVE CULTURE & ENVIRONMENTS

Creating an inclusive sport environment where the individual identities of teammates are welcomed by their fellow players and participants, and where individual cultures are acknowledged and respected at an organizational level, is important.³

Having a coach who enforces a discrimination and judgement free environment can positively influence sporting environments and girls sustained engagement in sport.³

64%

OF YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS DESIRE CHANGE FOR LIFE SKILL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH SPORT.¹

4. GIRLS SEEK ADVANCEMENTS, NOT JUST FINAL RESULTS

The process of seeing oneself progress & improve at something empowers young women and girls.²

The definition of success shifts when girls receive recognition and celebration for their growth and development, rather than solely for their athletic accolades.²

46%

OF YOUNG WOMEN AND GIRLS REPORT THAT THEY FEEL COMFORTABLE BEING THEMSELVES IN SPORT.¹

5. GIRLS SHOULD EMBRACE COURAGE OVER PERFECTION

Encouraging girls to embrace trying new experiences by fostering environments that value courage over perfection can build the necessary confidence and motivation to stay in sport.²

Coaches should aim to re-define girls' relationship with risk taking in sport by creating a culture of team trust and acceptance.⁴

56%

OF YOUNG WOMEN IN ONTARIO HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO PLAY A SPORT IN THE LAST YEAR.¹

6. GIRLS NEED SAFE, ACCESSIBLE & WELCOMING PHYSICAL SPACES

Access to safe, accessible and high-quality sport experiences can serve as a catalyst, fostering a range of benefits and positive outcomes for young women and girls in sport.¹

Offering girls only programs, supportive mentors and coaches, and physically safe/accessible environments are among the factors that create safe sport environments as defined by youth.¹

1. MLSE Foundation, Change the Game Research: Growing the Game Means Changing the Game, (January 2024).

2. Nike, Coaching Girls: A Guide for Coaches. How to get (and keep) girls playing, (June 2022).

COACHES CHECK LIST

1. GIRLS SEEK THE OFF-COURT BENEFITS OF ENGAGING IN SPORT

- ☐ Coaches should provide a safe space for girls to support their mental health through sport by integrating activities like mindfulness exercises, mental health check-ins, and team building.
- ☐ Coaches explicitly teach life skills when coaching girls by being positive role models, providing opportunities for girls to develop life skill through sport, and by debriefing the learnings from the program, highlighting how these life skills can be transferred to other environments.

2. GIRLS NEED HEALTHY COACH RELATIONSHIPS

- ☐ Coaches should use inclusive language that does not perpetuate masculinity and masculine cultures (ex. referring to the group as “guys” try to use “folks,” “everyone,” “team,”).
- ☐ Coaches should show up authentically and take interest in what is happening in the athlete’s life outside of sport.
- ☐ Coach relationships should encourage girls to take ownership of their athletic journey, empowering them to make decisions, set goals, and pursue their aspirations with confidence.

3. GIRLS REQUIRE INCLUSIVE CULTURE & ENVIRONMENTS

- ☐ Coaches should integrate more female athletes into their program plans and refer to them as mentors who positively exemplify specific physical skills and life skills.
- ☐ Girls should see coaches and role models that look like them and participate in sport.
- ☐ Coaches must enforce rules against discrimination, racism or negative communication within the team culture and environment.

4. GIRLS SEEK ADVANCEMENTS, NOT JUST FINAL RESULTS

- ☐ Coaches should provide opportunities for girls to develop a wide range of life skills including leadership, teamwork, resilience, and sportspersonship.
- ☐ Coaches should encourage girls to set personalized, achievable goals that focus on skill improvement, personal development, and enjoyment of the sport.
- ☐ Coaches should ensure that competition is balanced and age-appropriate, allowing girls to challenge themselves while also recognizing the importance of participation and personal improvement.

5. GIRLS SHOULD EMBRACE COURAGE OVER PERFECTION

- ☐ Coaches should ensure that they are empowering girls for the risks they take while trying something new rather than discouraging them for failing.
- ☐ Coaches should recognize a girl’s achievements and celebrate their successes both on and off the field to boost their confidence and self-esteem.
- ☐ Coaches should create and maintain encouraging environments and shout girls out for trying something new.

6. GIRLS NEED SAFE, ACCESSIBLE & WELCOMING PHYSICAL SPACES

- ☐ Girls have the opportunity to play in safe environments, with accessible female and gender-neutral washrooms.
- ☐ Girls have access to equipment, uniforms, and other attire that properly fits.
- ☐ Coaches are actively listening to the concerns, ideas, and feedback from the girls and consider their perspectives when making decisions.