

# Physically literate girls

The need for schools to develop girls who are physically literate

# For the benefit of our community



“Physical literacy is lifelong holistic learning acquired and applied in movement and physical activity contexts. A physically literate person is able to draw on their integrated physical, psychological, social and cognitive capabilities to support health promoting and fulfilling movement and physical activity.”<sup>1</sup>

## Did you know?

**Physically literate girls do twice as much activity than those who are not.**

They are happier and more trusting of other children and higher levels of resilience exists in children who demonstrate competency in these aspects of physical literacy<sup>2</sup>:

- 1 Enjoyment
- 2 Competence
- 3 Confidence
- 4 Understanding
- 5 Knowledge

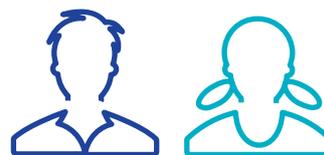


## However...



**Physical literacy decreases with age.**

Physical literacy decreases with age. As girls grow older they report lower levels of enjoyment, confidence, competence and understanding, particularly during the teenage years.<sup>3</sup>



**Girls perceive physical education as less relevant.**

Girls are less likely than boys to link sport and physical education to life skills development, with girls 14-16 years perceiving physical education as less relevant.<sup>4</sup>

# The role schools and teachers have in supporting physical literacy

Within the school environment there are many opportunities to contribute to enhanced physical literacy.

Three of these opportunities, their objective and some characteristics which are key to improved outcomes for girls are outlined in the table below.<sup>5</sup>

Schools need to specifically address the barriers, challenges and needs facing some girls and create opportunities to address their needs, goals and aspirations.



Opportunities	Objective and characteristics
<p><b>Quality Health and Physical Education (HPE)</b></p>	<p>Provide a quality HPE program which encompasses physical literacy, meets the state curriculum requirements, is taught by a qualified HPE teacher and maximises student participation addressing the barriers many girls face in HPE.</p>
<p><b>Inclusive Co-Curricular Program</b></p>	<p>Provide a broad range of sports and physical activities including competitive, non-competitive, team and individual sports and physical activities for students including opportunities to participate before, during and after school.</p>
<p><b>Partnerships with local community</b></p>	<p>Engage with a diverse range of community groups through the use of clinics, information sessions and open days to enhance opportunities for students to engage in physical activity and develop their physical literacy.</p>

# The state of play in sport and physical activity



## Did you know?

- Physically active girls will be healthier, happier, have higher self-esteem and body confidence AND have better health outcomes in adult life.<sup>6</sup>
- Girls and women who participate in sports are less likely to take drugs, engage in abusive relationships, or have unwanted pregnancies.<sup>7</sup>
- Sport and physical activity improves academic and career performance. Girls who play sport are more likely to graduate from high school, receive post-graduate degrees, and earn more money. Sport is known to improve the memory and form traits such as discipline and perseverance that improves academic performance.<sup>8</sup>
- Physical activity participation trends of females vary throughout their life stages (see 'Life stages' timeline, page 7).

## However...



**Insufficient levels of physical activity.**

Globally Australia is ranked one of the worst performers for 11-17 year old girls with over 90% of girls surveyed reporting insufficient levels of physical activity.<sup>9</sup>



There is a marked decrease in sport participation by girls during the 12-14 years of age and from 17+ years.<sup>10,11</sup>

# Different activities for different life stages<sup>12</sup>

**0-4  
YEARS**

Swimming,  
gymnastics, dancing

**5-8  
YEARS**

Swimming, agility  
activities, and  
beginning to play sport



**9-11  
YEARS**

Peak of participation,  
varied sport activities



Drop out rate in  
sport becomes  
prominent

**12-14  
YEARS**

**15-17  
YEARS**

Active recreation  
becomes dominant,  
team sport still evident

Team sport  
drastically reduced,  
health/endurance  
activities and fitness

**18-24  
YEARS**



# Barriers to participation



Girls face many barriers in their sport journey, the majority of which are an emotive response to their sporting experience. These barriers include:

## Body image

One in four girls are unhappy with their body image at 11-14 years of age, and this increases to one in three girls by the time they reach 14-16 years.<sup>13</sup>

## Low confidence

Girls who participate in physical activity at school identified low confidence and a dislike of being watched as significant barriers, particularly at 14-16 years.<sup>14</sup>

## Prioritising schoolwork

Girls identify schoolwork as a barrier outside of school, particularly 14-16 years. This suggests girls prioritise schoolwork and need encouragement to stay active.<sup>15</sup>

## Gender constraints

Gender constraints and expectations can negatively influence adolescent girls involvement in sport.<sup>16</sup>

## Less focus on competition

A focus on competition is less desired by girls than boys.<sup>17</sup>

## Feeling uncomfortable

Girls from culturally diverse backgrounds are less likely than their peers to be physically active primarily based on feeling uncomfortable.<sup>18</sup>

“ Schools have a vital role to play to support girls in their development of physical literacy. At times this role is undervalued. A whole-school approach underpinned by quality HPE and which embraces daily play, sport and physical activity can support enhanced physical literacy outcomes for girls.”<sup>19</sup>

# What can your school do to support girls?



Successful activities from global case studies include:

- Principals, senior leadership teams, teachers and parents support HPE and sport teachers and understand the holistic benefits associated with physical literacy.
- HPE is delivered in an inclusive, equitable manner with improved access to learning by all and aspects of health, nutrition, sense of community and wellbeing are addressed through quality health curriculum as part of HPE.
- Co-curricular programs and cross-curricular approaches are designed to enhance participation through the provision of a variety of opportunities.
- A project lead champions the importance of inclusion and equity throughout the school including the introduction of a girls voice group to listen, learn and take action; leadership programs which include peer-to-peer mentoring; and collaboration with other local schools to provide positive role models.<sup>20</sup>
- Physical literacy is clearly understood to be relevant to girls' lives, it resonates at a personal level to boost relevance and the 'how to' messages focus on activities girls are familiar with.<sup>21</sup>
- Girls from diverse backgrounds are recognised as role models who positively influence and advocate with their peer group.<sup>22</sup>
- Girls are involved in the design and delivery of sport and physical activity, as a result it increases their confidence and empowerment.<sup>23</sup>
- The power of friends are recognised to drive progress.<sup>24</sup>
- HPE lessons are a vehicle to deliver wellbeing programs.<sup>25</sup>
- Enjoyment of HPE is prioritised and girls are given freedom of choice of activities.<sup>26</sup>
- Development of self-confidence is a focus in HPE lessons, school sport and physical activity opportunities.<sup>27</sup>
- Extra-curricular activities including aerobics, self-defence, Bollywood dance and girls-only sessions were introduced as a result from surveying girls<sup>28</sup> these could be conducted in partnership with the wider community.
- PE uniforms chosen by girls had a major impact on participation rates.<sup>29</sup>
- Religious and cultural festivals such as Eid and Ramadan are recognised when arranging events.<sup>30</sup>
- School grounds are unlocked during holidays to provide safe and familiar environments for girls to embrace play, sport and physical activity.<sup>31</sup>

# References

1. Sport Australia. (2019). *The Australian physical literacy framework*. [https://www.sportaus.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/710173/35455\\_Physical-Literacy-Framework\\_access.pdf](https://www.sportaus.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/710173/35455_Physical-Literacy-Framework_access.pdf)
2. Sport England. (2019). *Active lives children and young people survey*. Retrieved from <https://www.sportengland.org/media/13851/active-lives-children-survey-2017-18-attitudes-report.pdf>
3. Ibid
4. Ibid
5. Sport Australia. (nd). *Physical literacy: Guide for schools*. Retrieved from [https://www.sportaus.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/702073/Physical-literacy-guide-for-schools.pdf](https://www.sportaus.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/702073/Physical-literacy-guide-for-schools.pdf)
6. Women in sport. (2016). *Women in sport girls strategy*. Retrieved from <http://www.womeninsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Ambitions-for-Girls-2016-Strategy.pdf?x99836>
7. EY. (nd). *Why female athletes make winning entrepreneurs*. Retrieved from [https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/en\\_gl/topics/entrepreneurship/ey-why-female-athletes-make-winning-entrepreneurs.pdf](https://assets.ey.com/content/dam/ey-sites/ey-com/en_gl/topics/entrepreneurship/ey-why-female-athletes-make-winning-entrepreneurs.pdf)
8. Ibid
9. Guthold, R., Stevens, G. A., Riley, L. M., & Bull, F. C. (2020). Global trends in insufficient physical activity among adolescents: a pooled analysis of 298 population-based surveys with 1·6 million participants. *The Lancet Child & Adolescent Health*, 4(1), 23-35.
10. Australian Sports Commission. (2017). *AusPlay focus: Children's participation in organised physical activity outside of school hours*. Retrieved from [https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0012/796827/AusPlay\\_focus\\_Children\\_Participation.pdf](https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/796827/AusPlay_focus_Children_Participation.pdf)
11. Australian Sports Commission. (2017). *AusPlay focus: Women and girls participation*. Retrieved from [https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/782345/ASC\\_AusPlay\\_Focus\\_on\\_Women\\_and\\_Girls\\_Participation\\_Final.pdf](https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/782345/ASC_AusPlay_Focus_on_Women_and_Girls_Participation_Final.pdf)
12. Australian Sports Commission. (November, 2017). *AusPlay focus: Women and girls participation*. Retrieved from <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2017-12/apo-nid122596.pdf>
13. Youth Sport Trust, Women in Sport. (2017). *YST Girls Active*. Retrieved from <https://www.womeninsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Girls-Active-statistics-1.pdf>
14. Ibid
15. Ibid
16. Carey, L. P. (2017). *'Sacrifice and compromise': the lived experiences of regional adolescent girls in regional Victoria, Australia who have dropped out of organised sport* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Southern Queensland).
17. Youth Sport Trust, Women in Sport. (2017). *YST Girls Active*. Retrieved from <https://www.womeninsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Girls-Active-statistics-1.pdf>
18. Sport England. (2018). *Active Lives Children and Young People Survey, Academic Year 2017/2018*. Retrieved from <https://sportengland-production-files.s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/active-lives-children-survey-academic-year-17-18.pdf>
19. Sport Australia. (nd). *Physical literacy benefits for schools*. Retrieved from [https://www.sportaus.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/913664/Physical-Literacy-Benefits-for-Schools.pdf](https://www.sportaus.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/913664/Physical-Literacy-Benefits-for-Schools.pdf)
20. Women in sport. (2016). *Women in sport girls strategy*. Retrieved from <http://www.womeninsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Ambitions-for-Girls-2016-Strategy.pdf?x99836>
21. Australian Sports Commission. (2017). *AusPlay focus: Women and girls participation*. Retrieved from [https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/782345/ASC\\_AusPlay\\_Focus\\_on\\_Women\\_and\\_Girls\\_Participation\\_Final.pdf](https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/782345/ASC_AusPlay_Focus_on_Women_and_Girls_Participation_Final.pdf)
22. Olive, L., Telford, R., Byrne, D., & Cunningham, R. (2019). Is physical education in Australian primary schools helping or hindering the mental health of young girls? *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, 22, S21-S22.
23. Youth Sport Trust, Women in Sport. (2017). *YST Girls Active*. Retrieved from <https://www.womeninsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Girls-Active-statistics-1.pdf>
24. Olive, L., Telford, R., Byrne, D., & Cunningham, R. (2019). Is physical education in Australian primary schools helping or hindering the mental health of young girls? *Journal of Science and Medicine in Sport*, 22, S21-S22.
25. Ibid
26. Owen, M., Curry, W.B., Kerner, C., Newson, L, Fairclough, S.J. (2017). The effectiveness of school-based physical activity interventions for adolescent girls: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Preventive Medicine* 105, 237-249 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2017.09.018>
27. Ibid
28. Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (nd). *Changing the game, for girls*. Retrieved from <https://www.womeninsport.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Changing-the-Game-for-Girls-Teachers-Toolkit.pdf>
29. Ibid
30. Sportscotland (2005). *Making women and girls more active: A good practice guide*. Retrieved from <https://sportscotland.org.uk/documents/resources/makingwomenandgirlsmoreactive.pdf>
31. Hanlon, C., Jenkins, C., Craike, M. (2019). Associations between environmental attributes of facilities and female participation in sport: a systematic review. *Managing Sport and Leisure*, 24(5), 294-306.