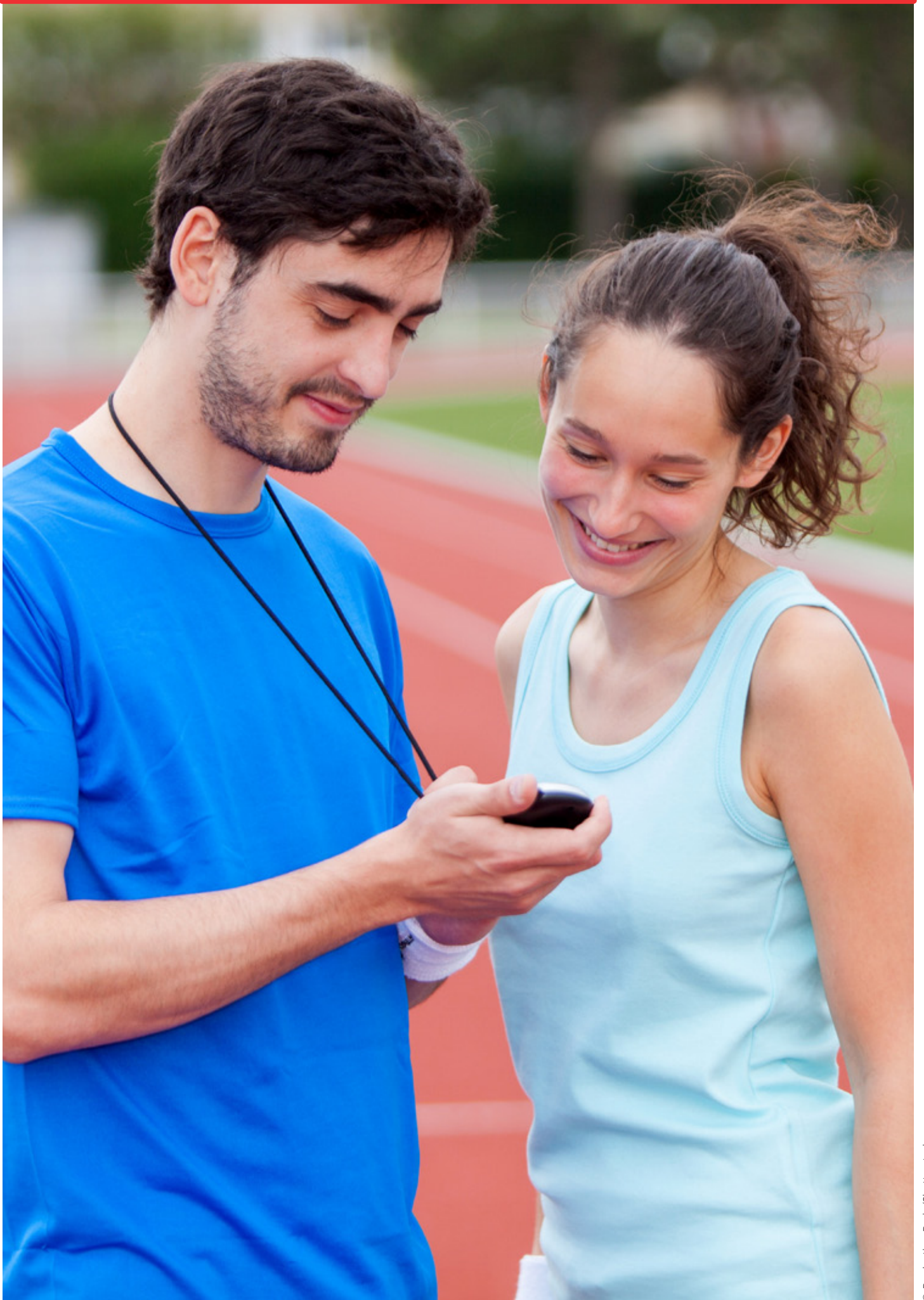


Helping the girls believe they can!

A guide for coaches, leaders and activators to support more women and girls to enjoy sport and physical activity





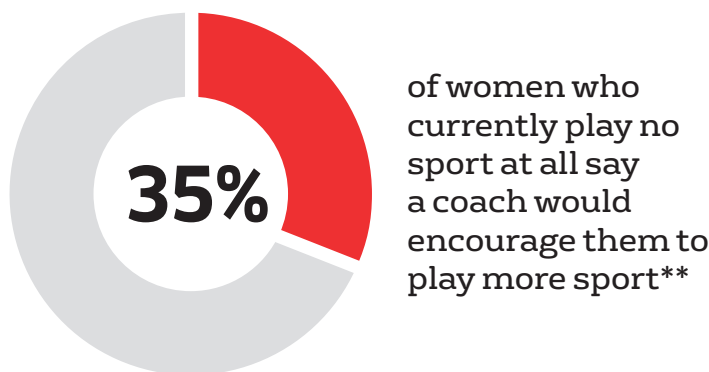
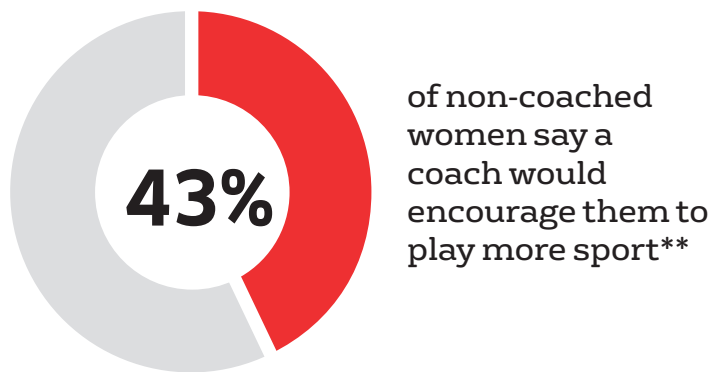


THE FACTS

2 million fewer women than men regularly playing sport but...*

13 million women would like to take part more in sport*

over **6 million** of those women are **not** currently active*



‘Coaches have a key role in getting more women playing sport, and playing more often.’**

‘Coaches can help women and girls to build self-belief and confidence, irrespective of their ability or their experience in sport.’**

These facts are not surprising. The general public have a very positive view of coaches, describing them as patient, passionate and friendly - these are just the characteristics you need to support female participants.

As a coach, you can make or break the experience. Therefore, ensure your female participants are appropriately supported along the way.

* Reference: Adults (16+) sports participation (millions) – Active People Survey results for 12 months to October.
** Reference: Perceptions of Coaching, 2015, sports coach UK.

Recognising Women's Needs and Values

Selling being more physically active to women is so much more than knowing your activity or sport. It's about knowing the women in front of you. Can you boost their confidence, overcome their fear of judgement and make them feel that this particular activity is suitable for 'women like them'?

This is where you can make a huge difference, helping women recognise that being active with friends and enjoying it is a viable option to them. For many, it's not about training hard and winning competitions, but about feeling good in an environment that suits their own needs, surrounded by a group of new friends. Once someone has felt that buzz for the first time, it can be very empowering, and in itself a real incentive to keep coming back for more.

Sport England and Women in Sport have spent a lot of time speaking with women to understand what they want and what their barriers to getting and staying active are. Sport England have produced

'Go Where Women Are', which has provided a lot of useful information for everyone involved in offering activity and sport to women.

The most important thing you can take from this research is the idea of making the sport or experience suit the audience. Allow women to make the activity fit around them – keep in mind the six core values, as identified by Women in Sport.

Key message: Women have wide-ranging values which will change, depending on their own personal circumstances, over time.

What can you do? Talk to them! Provide what women want, not what you think they need or what has previously been the norm. If it's not working, try a new approach. It doesn't have to be how it has always been.

A Complex Value System





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Understanding Your Audience

So, what is stopping women getting active or staying active?

Sport and physical activity can fill some women with dread, with fear of judgement the key issue.

For many women, sport has baggage:

- ✗ Reminiscent of school
- ✗ Too competitive
- ✗ Unfeminine
- ✗ Aggressive
- ✗ Not aspirational
- ✗ Getting sweaty
- ✗ Changing in front of each other
- ✗ No equipment or clothing
- ✗ Don't know anyone
- ✗ Not fit enough
- ✗ Forgotten the rules
- ✗ Family comes first
- ✗ Male leaders/coaches

Reference: Go Where Women Are, 2015, Sport England.

Think about what is holding women back and how you can address these barriers to support women to overcome their fears. The more aware you are of what the problems are, the more you are able to empathise and provide a suitable solution within your own sessions.

By delivering experiences that are social, fun, don't focus entirely on the technical skills and are flexible (in terms of payment, not having to turn up every week, and location) you will be providing what many women want. This will often be their catalyst for change, as they will want to come back for more.

Key message: For many women, sport has baggage, and many of them have had poor experiences of sport in the past.

What can you do? Don't expect women to change to suit your coaching session and coaching style. Talk to them and ask them what they want.

The Fear of Being Judged



We are all our own greatest critics. It is much easier to stay in your comfort zone and avoid perceived judgement from others than it is to get out there and try something new for the first time in ages. It is a real worry for a lot of women who would otherwise love to get more active. The very real fear of being judged can be a crippling barrier to overcome.

Fear of being judged is, for many, an important all-encompassing concern, which can resurface in the form of another more 'acceptable' barrier.

- While many women may cite lack of time as the reason they do not manage to do any exercise, their real concern may be that spending time on exercise will be perceived as self-indulgent and imply neglect of domestic, maternal or familial duties. Although times are changing, women are still the primary carers for children and other family members.
- Judgement can come from all angles: from immediate friends and family (afraid of not living up to their expectations); from other women (not matching up to their standards); and from men (dismissive of their ability).
- It is a barrier that remains relevant even with sportier women, who fear they cannot perform as well as they used to. Fear of judgement from their own peers is just as real for many women.
- This shows the importance of going beyond initial responses and getting to grips with the core issues that lie at the heart of women's decision making.

Key message: Women can have a fear of being judged by many different people, including family and friends. This will affect their self-confidence.

What can you do? Being aware of this fear of being judged and understanding the real motivation behind explanations for lack of activity can help you to inspire and support women. Talk to women.



'Throwing yourself around in Lycra? I would feel embarrassed, I just would. The instructors are all size six with not a bead of sweat on them. Then there's me, just flagging.'*

Practical Tips for Coaching Women

If you can bring along the passion you have for being active and can empathise with the women and girls in your session, you are starting from a great place. Also, remember both the practical considerations and the emotional factors that may make it easier for women to engage in sport and exercise.

Practical

- Right time – be open, or run sessions to suit the women you are targeting
- Right place – close to where women feel safe and with adequate facilities (changing rooms, hairdryers, no mirrors in class, etc)
- Right welcome – make sure the welcome is warm and reassuring; tell women what your session will involve
- Right company – introduce women to other participants and show them they will be with people like them
- Right gear – simple clothing that allows free and safe movement; where relevant, provide equipment and/or be knowledgeable about what equipment to buy and from where.

Personal/emotional

- Right time – reinforce the notion that time exercising **is** time that should be spent on themselves
- Right place – provide experiences that don't make women look silly, unattractive or on show in unfamiliar and open environments
- Right welcome – provide activity that suits their level; women shouldn't feel exposed as lacking ability or familiarity with the steps, equipment, etc
- Right company – reduce the fear of not fitting in or being able to keep up with the group
- Right gear – reduce the fear of looking like the odd one out by wearing the wrong thing.

Key message: Some women lack self-confidence to become active as they are fearful of the environment they are going into.

What can you do? You can help build self-confidence and develop a sporting habit in your female participants by providing them with a positive first experience. Don't forget to continue to support their progression, achievement and sense of belonging.

'All four of us admitted that we were quite intimidated before we actually went to the first session. None of us had played for such a long time, and we thought it would be really professional. What my friend did find out was that it was very informal "Back to Netball" and you didn't have to be ace at it. This was definitely appealing.'*



Women as Influencers in Your Session

We often hear that there are not enough female role models in sport, and the evidence seems to support this. When we think about high-profile people in sport, it seems much easier to produce a list of influencers and sporting heroes who are male. The women, it seems, are in short supply, but are high-profile role models the only solution to getting more women and girls active? Women admire sporting heroes such as Jessica Ennis-Hill as role models in life, but not necessarily as inspirations to getting active.

Women in Sport produced a report called 'What Sways Women to Play Sport?' which looks in depth at the way people can influence or 'sway' women and girls to get involved in sport. It also considers other factors that impact on participation.

Using positivity and encouragement is key to building confidence and developing sporting habits. A positive atmosphere is vital and is best created by the participants. Your role is to make the environment welcoming, and to create an environment for such an atmosphere to develop naturally.

Six areas (or 'sway factors') were identified as part of the research. These can help you recognise how to evolve your session for women, which will unlock opportunities that positively impact on their sporting behaviours.

Key message: Your most powerful influencers to getting more women into your session probably exist within your session.

What can you do? Empower your participants by making them aware of how they can encourage more women to get more active.





BELONGING

Making her feel included and valued

What you can do:

Ensure that participation in sport is enjoyable and an experience she wants to keep repeating. Ensure she is getting out of your session what she wants, and open her eyes to new things. Keep lines of communication open and welcome honest feedback. Work together to find solutions to critical feedback. Provide ways of communicating outside of the session times (eg closed Facebook page, WhatsApp, etc).

SUPPORT

Ensuring she has behind-the-scenes support

What you can do:

Encourage her to bring along family members or friends to the session. Talk about her family and friendship circles. Remember key dates that are important to her (upcoming birthday, anniversary, hospital appointment for a parent, etc). Invite parents of younger participants along to watch sessions/matches and speak to them about how they are doing. Encourage and endorse achievements.



TOGETHERNESS

She is stronger

What actions you can take:

Buddy her up with another participant with the same/similar goals for motivation. Try and match similar personalities (a mismatch will be detrimental). Create an environment based around friendship and being social. Allow time at the beginning and end of the session to have a chat. Allow time within the session to talk through what they are doing and celebrate achievements as a group.



POSSIBILITIES

Opening her eyes to what she can do

What actions you can take:

Start off by talking to your participant. Understand what she wants to achieve and how you can support her on this journey to be her 'personal best'. Acknowledge each step she achieves towards her personal goals. Maybe buddy her up with another participant with the same/similar goals for motivation.



SWAY FACTORS

PROGRESSION

Giving her a sense of direction

What you can do:

Skilled feedback and structured guidance from someone with more expertise than her helps sustain participation along the journey. Provide praise only when it is earned. Do not over praise, as it sounds superficial. Talk to her and provide realistic goals. How far does she want to be pushed? What does she want to achieve? Is it realistic? Try and break down the milestones if you feel they may be a little ambitious, but don't quash her enthusiasm.

INTERNALISE

Helping her reflect on her achievements

What you can do:

Focus her shift to feeling good by making her aware of her personal progress. What could she do to be even better? What impact is this having on her outside of your session?



Help Women to Develop a Sporting Habit

You understand the motivations and barriers that exist for some women, but how do you inspire confidence in your participants and reassure them that the activity itself will be a positive experience?

It is important to recognise the atmosphere of your session. Who or what is it created by?

- Is it by the women themselves?
- What is your style of instruction?
- Make note of the physical environment (use of music/being in an open public space)
- What intrinsic (feeling/looking better) and extrinsic (social interaction) incentives are you using to encourage women to carry on?

Overall motivation and communication is vital.



Here are some practical tips to retain your female participants:

Communication

Communication is key, both in generating enthusiasm and providing reassurance.

Potential participants and experienced sportspeople will benefit from coaches who can recognise personal barriers and motivations, and use appropriate language and delivery methods of communication as detailed here.

- Develop a more personal, frequent style of communicating with the women and girls you attract.
- Address fears head-on before the session itself. Reassure participants that activities will be safe and women will be supported.
- Use myth-busting communications to make it clear that you don't have to be super fit and that others will be beginners as well.
- Provide the personal touch in communications, such as text message reminders about forthcoming sessions, or messages to offer encouragement after missed sessions.
- Use words that resonate with the target audience: freedom, fun, exploration.
- Ask for feedback and input in to decision making.



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Motivation

Ongoing motivation will ensure women remain engaged, which will support their retention in your sessions.

Things to consider:

- Offer the right kind of carrot – consider the things women value the most.
- Support women by providing them with the advice and tools they require to start, continue or come back to you, having lapsed once or a number of times already.
- Celebrate what is being achieved. Don't let women beat themselves up about what they do or don't have. It's about self-improvement, not about being the best or better than others.
- Reinforce achievements regularly and with sincerity.
- For those who relish a challenge, setting goals and encouraging progress towards them will be important.

Talking their Language

Most importantly, remind your participants of the benefits that resonate with them.

Why is it good to be active?

- To feel good in mind and body.
- To become energised.
- For de-stressing purposes.
- For time with friends (new and known).
- To make progress.
- To be a part of something/have ownership.
- To feel empowered.
- To feel celebrated and rewarded.

Key message: Effective communication and motivation will lead to fewer women dropping out of your session.

What can you do? Take time to get to know your group and understand what makes them tick. Help them to recognise their own 'personal bests' and how they can achieve them.

Creating the Next Generation of Coaches

Have you ever thought that the women you are coaching could help you out?

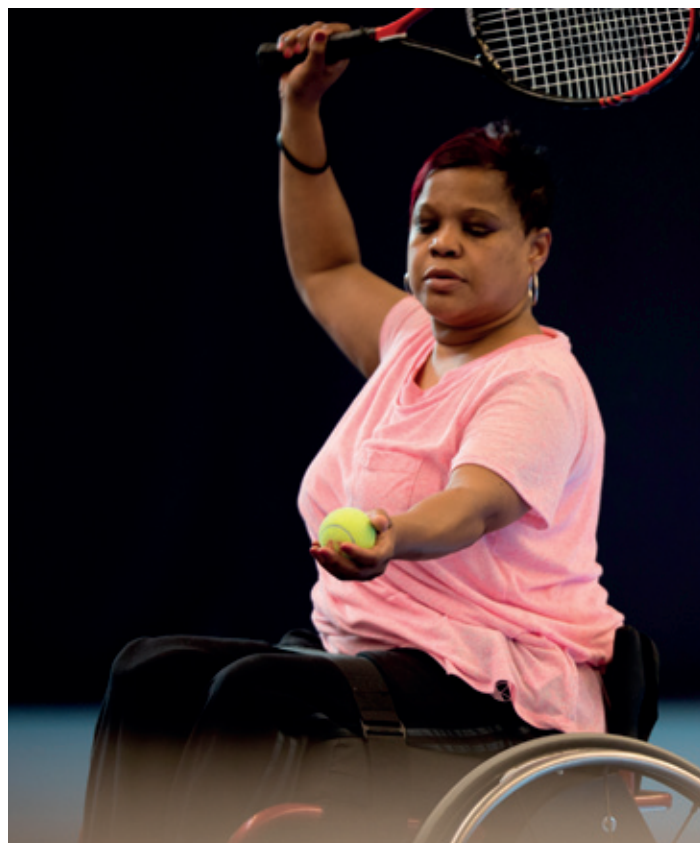
Are there some women in your session who have the skills and motivations to support you to run or organise your sessions for you?

If you don't ask, you will never know.

If we want more people to be active we will need more people to run sessions and support women and girls to get more active.

Who better than the participants themselves? They are passionate about what they do, they know the group, and they can identify with their motivations.

If people are coached, they are more likely to become coaches themselves. Women are currently massively under-represented in coaching, so why not help us find more great women to run more sessions for more people.



Here's how you could do this:

- Ask your participants if anyone wants to give you a hand.
- Have a chat after the session with whoever expressed an interest.
- Ensure you have a useful role for them to undertake. Keep the tasks simple and provide clear instructions. Make them feel valued.
- Be aware of not taking them away from what they truly love (taking part). Think about blending their participation with helping out.
- Talk to them after the session they have helped out in and see if they enjoyed it and want to do it again.
- If they are happy to, build up their tasks and responsibilities, but never assume or put too much responsibility on them.
- Find out what support is available either from your governing body or from your county sports partnership (CSP) to help them develop further.
- Know where to signpost them for further opportunities if they are keen to develop their skills in coaching.
- Be a role model to them. Show them how to be a good activator, leader or coach at your sessions. Help them to learn by your example.

Key message: Sport and physical activity needs more people to lead sessions. Women are an untapped resource in this respect.

What can you do? Ask her if she wants to help out, and support her along the way. Give her a nudge to step forward and do something more that she hadn't even thought about doing.

References

The content from this guide has been based on insight gained from the following Partner research:

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