



# Female Football Club Guide



play.afl



# Female Football Club Guide

To assist clubs to provide an inclusive environment

To be used in conjunction with the Australian Football Match Policy

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH AFL STATE AND TERRITORY AFFILIATES:



Australian Government  
Australian Sports Commission

The AFL gratefully acknowledges the support of the Australian Government for AFL Development Programs, through the Australian Sports Commission.



# Female-friendly clubs guide

- ▶ What having females at our club means to us ...
- ▶ A guide to setting up female-friendly clubs

## Quick-view checklist

Following is a quick checklist for your club to work through.

- 1. First impressions of your club:**
  - ✓ List of strategies to welcome new members
- 2. Fun:** the 10 things parents and coaches need to know
- 3. Auskick:**
  - ✓ Setting up a new all-girls Auskick group
  - ✓ Including females in your mixed gender centre
- 4. Recruiting new junior and youth girls players:**
  - ✓ Strategies to recruit new female players in particular
  - ✓ Promotion ideas
  - ✓ Making membership affordable
  - ✓ How to apply for a seeding grant to take the financial pressure off your club
- 5. Coaching female footballers:**
  - ✓ Resources to help coaches
  - ✓ Getting the best out of all your footballers, including the competitive and social players
  - ✓ Addressing areas such as providing empathy for developing positive body image and the emotional needs of youth girls players
- 6. Facilities:**
  - ✓ What are appropriate facilities for female footballers?
  - ✓ State AFL affiliates who can help you acquire these
- 7. Showcasing the social aspects of your club:**
  - ✓ Providing social events
  - ✓ Catering for less-competitive players
- 8. Including everyone:**
  - ✓ Tips to include all-comers
  - ✓ Nurturing volunteers
  - ✓ Bringing diversity to your club leadership

## Further information

- ▶ Resources and website references
- ▶ Research bibliography
- ▶ State and Territory affiliates
- ▶ State and Territory Departments of Sport and Recreation

# What having females at our club means to us ...

For a number of years the AFL has surveyed numerous community football stakeholders to better understand the benefits associated with having women and girls involved at the community club level.

### Here's a selection of some recent testimonials:

"Our club loved having the girls. They brought in new volunteers and lots of fun."

**Victoria, youth girls, club president**

"Go for it, women improve the social fabric of the club, financially they offer value, they are diligent and good contributors of the club and they support social functions."

**Deer Park JFC, Victoria, club secretary**

"Having the team has added a new dynamic to our club and improved our club culture."

**Eastlake, ACT, football administrator**

"The junior girls have added lots of excitement and the parents of the girls really get involved."

**Hammond Park JFC, Western Australia, parent volunteer**

"For us it means the whole family can be at the one club – we start at Auskick and can go through to youth girls."

**Queensland, coach/parent**

These surveys, case studies and testimonials have helped shape this *Female Football Club Guide* as a way to support community clubs to become female-friendly clubs.





# A guide to setting up female-friendly clubs

In 2016, more than 380,000 females participated in Australian Football through introductory programs and competitions – this represents a growth of 27 per cent in the past 12 months.

With so many girls being introduced to the game each year, it is important to understand the benefits of becoming a Female-Friendly Football Club and some of the strategies you can use to attract more female members to your club.

## The benefits of being a Female-Friendly Club include the ability to attract:

- ▶ More members, supporters and volunteers
- ▶ More players
- ▶ Diversification, leading to better decision-making
- ▶ Wider sponsorship and fundraising appeal
- ▶ More-appealing social atmosphere

Setting up a new female football team for the first time can seem daunting to clubs that have traditionally catered for male players only. Clubs that have instigated a female team are full of praise for what the girls and women have positively added to their club. These clubs also report that recruiting female players was easier than they first expected, particularly those that followed a few simple steps.

## This guide provides the following:

- ▶ A series of checklists for your club to work through to ensure you provide a safe and inclusive environment.
- ▶ A summary of the opportunities to get girls involved with suggestions as to who within your club can take responsibility for implementing various strategies. A number of website links and organisations which can assist your club to successfully recruit and engage females.
- ▶ A series of Club Case Studies providing examples where clubs have instigated a new female team and provided a more inclusive environment for their female supporters.

Clubs who have already successfully recruited females will find the checklists useful for appraising their current strategies and providing fresh ideas for them to address to make the experience even better.

## Comprehensive checklist

The following checklist includes website addresses and organisations that can help your club.



## 1) First impressions of your club

Research tells us that some young people perceive football clubs are not for them. Providing an enjoyable and welcoming environment during the first visit is paramount to helping the girl feel connected – this is vital to ensuring new players return.

Description of task to be completed	Coach	Administrator/Committee	Team Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Strategies to welcome new female members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Select a peer buddy from player group to partner new players</li> <li>▶ Provide female role models</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Select a welcome officer to host new members</li> <li>▶ Provide same opportunities and conditions for the females as the males</li> <li>▶ Club facilities are clean and hygienically presented</li> <li>▶ All members of the club are featured in club memorabilia such as trophies, photos and banners</li> <li>▶ Offer discounts to current players who introduce new members</li> <li>▶ Volunteers and staff are qualified, friendly and approachable</li> <li>▶ Ensure your social media and website platforms are up to date and reflect the culture of your club – potential players will generally do research before contacting your club</li> <li>▶ Male members of the club display appropriate behaviours towards female members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Implement a 'try before you buy' series of sessions before requesting membership payment/registration fee from new members</li> </ul>





## 2) Fun: the 10 things girls want parents and coaches to know

Girls are more likely to stay involved in sport if they receive quality coaching and supportive parents. It is crucial for the adults involved in girls' sport to understand what they like and what they want from the coach, parents and their AFL experience. We list the 10 most important things that make AFL fun for young female footballers.

1. What fun means
2. Being in an all-girls group – why girls love hanging with girls
3. Socialising
4. Access to female role models
5. Listening to music
6. Ambition
7. Improve skills
8. Simply being able to play
9. Making their own decisions
10. Small-sided games

### Let's break down some of these ideas

#### Fun

Girls tell us that the No. 1 reason they play sport is to have fun with their friends. It is not about winning or claiming a premiership but simply about fun. Fun is often the first thing that gets lost in the delivery of sport to children. Coaches need to ask: "What do girls mean by 'fun'? How do I keep my football sessions fun for the players?"

If it's not fun, then why are you doing it?

#### For young girls, 'fun' means:

- ▶ Feeling connected to their teammates and coach – so let your players come up with a name for their group and provide times to chat
- ▶ No waiting time during drills and games – girls want to be involved and get their hands on the ball frequently so they can improve
- ▶ Being applauded for their efforts rather than for being the 'best'

Parents and coaches often talk about the fact that children's sport needs to have a winner and a loser to reflect "real life". However, kids know whether they win or lose a game, and there is nothing wrong with having a winner or loser in sport. When we talk to girls as to WHY they play sport, and WHY they keep returning to a sport, winning is simply not the motivator behind them playing sport.

#### Being in an all-girls group

Research tells us that girls feel safer being in an all-girls group to learn their football. By nature they are less competitive than boys, preferring to focus on skill development rather than winning.

- ▶ Girls worry less about being teased about their football when in front of girls only
- ▶ It exposes them to more female role models that are physically active. They tend to have a more-positive experience. This in turn allows girls to grow in confidence

We encourage clubs to look at setting up an all-girls Auskick group within a mixed gender centre or, where an Auskick centre does not exist, establish an all-girls Auskick group. That way the specific learning needs of the girls will be well catered for, ensuring they have the best first experience of AFL.

#### Socialising

Females enjoy a sense of connection to people so coaches should allow times for them to simply 'have a chat' and enjoy each other's company.

#### Female role models

Using female role models to help coach your girls or make guest appearances to meet the players exposes them to strong and confident women. This helps them be inspired and aspire to reach their potential.

#### Listening to music

Girls enjoy moving to music and singing along to popular tunes. The girls may even come up with a team song. Coaches can incorporate music into their warm-ups and cool downs. Ask the girls for their playlist.

#### Ambition: meeting expectations

Meeting expectations means understanding the differences between what the child wants to get out of Auskick and what you as a coach want to get out of the experience. Then compare this with parent expectations. Work on bridging the gap between the three different groups of expectations.

It's also important for coaches to understand the differences between what they see as fun compared with what the girls see as fun – in most cases there is a large difference and it is often what leads to players dropping out. Coaches (and parents) need to sit down with the girls and talk about expectations of their sport experience and what fun is for them, and try to bridge the gap that exists.

#### Improving their skills

Girls are no different to boys when it comes to being challenged. It's how coaches articulate the challenge where there is a difference. If you think the girls are playing to win, then you have missed the point. They want to improve their skills, so challenge them to use both sides of their body, run faster, jump higher, concentrate and be first-grab, clean ball-handlers.

#### Being able to play

A critical way to provide fun is through unstructured play. This means letting the girls enjoy their physical activity without a large set of rules or boundaries. This does not mean simply 'playing the game' all the time.



Play has a major role in enjoyment levels and children continuing to play sport. Coaches must understand the importance of providing players the opportunity to innovate, to create, to be in control of their learning and creating unstructured activities where the footballers have the decision-making power. This sense of 'ownership' in an activity or learning experience is not only positive, but improves levels of player motivation, allowing them to gain a better understanding of their own achievement.

An example of unstructured play is for a coach to put two defenders on three attackers in a grid and see how long the attackers can keep the football off the defenders. Or taking shots at goal from 10m out – what parts of the foot can you use to kick to the goals? What was successful and what didn't work? That's it! NO other instructions! See what they create!

Providing unstructured play opportunities is often difficult for coaches. You should not remove all the structured formal instruction activities. Coaches must find the right balance between structured and unstructured activity. They should also discuss the unstructured activity with parents so they have an understanding of what is being done and the reasons behind it.

Seek ways to add unstructured play into your sessions whereby the girls take control in order to discover what they can create to experience learning on their terms and problem solve. The opportunity to take ownership of decision-making will enhance them as athletes and as people. Sometimes as adults we simply need to get out of the way and let the girls play.

#### Making their own decisions

Coaches need to adopt an athlete-centred approach to their coaching. This is about considering the player first

and realising it is about the education and learning of the footballers. Having a coach-directed approach (dictator) does nothing to enhance learning. John O'Sullivan (*Changing the Game Project*) writes: "We have far too many training environments that are too coach-centric. Conventional wisdom tells parents to look for these environments, with the domineering coach constantly shouting instructions and solving problems, laying out dozens of cones and clearly in charge. These coaches make all the decisions and tell players where to go, when to go and why to go. The game no longer belongs to kids. Kids do not get to make game like decisions in practice and play fearful of making mistakes and incurring the coach's wrath. Then game-time comes along, and we wonder why the kids cannot figure it out for themselves."

#### Small-sided games

This means providing small-sided games for athletes to grow and develop their skills of the game. Coaching research, along with real-life examples, highlight the importance of small-sided games when it comes to developing the fundamentals of the game and enhancing decision-making skills in confined environments. It is also more fun for athletes to be involved in a small-sided game as opposed to a traditional training drill, and it allows for players to self-manage or self-govern. Even Hawthorn premiership coach Alastair Clarkson provides small-sided games in every training session because it helps his players understand each other's strengths and solve problems for themselves.

**Above all else, realise this is about the girl's ambition – not yours as the coach!**

### 3) Auskick: where the football journey starts

The NAB AFL Auskick program makes learning to play AFL fun, safe and easy for boys and girls. Through weekly sessions they will have fun learning the skills of the game in an exciting, social and safe environment. The AFL Auskick program has centres that operate all over the country. Visit [aflauskick.com.au/#/centre-finder-panel](http://aflauskick.com.au/#/centre-finder-panel) to ensure your club is included.

The program also provides a great opportunity for parents to interact with their kids through the activities, have the opportunity to make new friends, learn about the game and spend quality time with their children.

If your club is unable to provide an all-girls group, still welcome girls to your centre. You may be able to start with small numbers and build to an all-girls group within your centre over time. It also means that in line with the AFL Junior Match Policy, the girls can choose to move between male or female groups should they feel confident enough and have the necessary skills to do so.

#### Setting up a new all-girls auskick group

If you have a number of girls at your centre, consider growing the numbers to make a separate group at your centre. Our research (AFL Victoria, Junior Girls Survey, 2011) shows that girls want to play in single-gender groups.

#### Reasons for this include:

- ▶ In a mixed gender setting, girls feel intimidated or excluded from learning the game to the level they would like
- ▶ Female players feel the males do not pass the ball to them
- ▶ Often experience teasing from male players

#### There are other key considerations that have been well researched such as:

- ▶ Girls' motivation to participate is more about being social and to learn new skills whereas males are more likely to be motivated by the contest and winning
- ▶ Females are more likely to improve skills in single-gender settings

As with any new club or team, the club needs to identify a 'passionate driver'. A mum, dad or a local women's league player/s who can provide that female role model as well as invest some time and energy into recruiting players and parents to the centre.

Once you have found the right person, contact your local Development Officer (see State and Territory Affiliates at the end of the Guide to locate the relevant personnel). They will provide you with support, guidance and resources to get you going.

Description of task to be completed	Coach	Administrator/Committee	Team Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Strategies to set up a new all-girls Auskick group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ The first few sessions need to be fun! Lots of locomotor skills such as running, jumping and agility. Plus ball control such as rolling, tapping along the ground, throwing and chasing. Leave kicking instruction until a few weeks into your program or start with a round ball</li> <li>▶ Make the sessions full of activity and less about 'coaching'</li> <li>▶ When you introduce kicking make it about kicking long bombs rather than hitting targets or kicking technique. Let the girls experiment first</li> <li>▶ Use a variety of ball sizes and shapes to introduce players to ball control. Progress from kicking a soft round ball first so players can have early success</li> <li>▶ Give them activities they can do at home or in the park such as trying to handball or throwing their ball into a bin, jumping over their football, bouncing a ball off a tree and predict where to chase it</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Send a female role model to local schools to promote your group</li> <li>▶ Provide an incentive for the current players to 'bring a friend' such as discounted membership (two for one), give-aways to those bringing a friend/s</li> <li>▶ Organise a 'Come N Try' day to get players involved in a fun set of activities together with their parents</li> <li>▶ Make the day full of colour and fun such as playing music, provision of female role models, taking photos using a variety of different ball shapes and sizes</li> <li>▶ If boys turn up and want to play, include them or give them the information about your club's male Auskick group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Buddy up girls who don't come as sisters or friends. This will help dispel any 'newcomer' nerves</li> <li>▶ Ensure there is one football for every participant so they handle the football a lot during each session</li> <li>▶ If numbers are small, combine Auskick with junior girls until the club has enough for separate groups. The juniors can help teach the Auskickers!</li> </ul>

### 4) Recruiting new female players

Clubs have told us the strongest recruiter of female players is through personal, face-to-face or word-of-mouth promotion. Women and girls are more likely to try a new experience if they know someone. Invest in the people that shape the experience and can ensure female participants are welcomed, feel cared

for and are regularly communicated with.

If you believe it would be beneficial, the AFL and its state bodies can assist with the provision of female role models, provide promotional materials and advice on how to connect your club to local schools.

Description of task to be completed	Coach	Administrator/Committee	Team Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Strategies to recruit new female players</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Emphasise the social and health benefits in training sessions</li> <li>▶ Females need more reassurance to participate</li> <li>▶ Conduct clinics at local schools for girls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Identify a 'passionate driver' who can facilitate development of a new female team</li> <li>▶ Make it easy for females to act: right time, right place, right welcome, right company, right gear</li> <li>▶ Enlist the help of a female role model</li> <li>▶ Use digital platforms to communicate</li> <li>▶ Set up a club Facebook page and Twitter account</li> <li>▶ Run a school-based 'Come 'N Try Day' for girls</li> <li>▶ Answer any correspondence from potential players promptly to ensure you capture them when they are most interested in joining</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Where numbers are small in a club, consider combining with another club</li> <li>▶ Implement a buddy system for recruits. Existing players text and ask if they want to go to training together; after the first few sessions, text to say: "Great to see you tonight, you did really well. See you next week!"</li> <li>▶ Provide detailed information to players and parents, not just the basics of timings and venues – rather, what sort of clothing to wear, when change rooms are available, what to do if the weather is poor, etc</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Strategies to make club membership affordable</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Seek a Seeding Grant from your league or state organisation</li> <li>▶ Provide payment plans for families</li> <li>▶ Offer family discounts</li> <li>▶ Get a mouthguard provider connected to the club to offer discounts</li> <li>▶ Seek sponsorship and implement fundraising activities</li> <li>▶ Encourage players to umpire junior grades for pocket money and fitness</li> </ul>	



## 5) Coaching female footballers

Up until the onset of male puberty, there are very few physiological differences as to how girls and boys participate in AFL. Once boys move through puberty, their larger bodies mean they will have enhanced physical abilities over females, for example: kicking the ball further or jumping higher at a ruck contest. Further to this, within a mixed-gender team, the skill acquisition of a non-athletic boy is greater than for a non-athletic girl. (Source: Dr Fleur McIntyre, University of Notre Dame)

Another key gender difference across any age group lies in motivations to play the game. Boys are more likely to participate for the competitive nature and the outcome of the contest. Girls tend to be more motivated by improving their skills and place greater value on how they fit into the team. Promoting the health benefits of sport is also more likely to appeal to girls than boys.

Unlike boys, girls are less likely to have progressed from NAB AFL Auskick and junior football through to youth girls. At Women's League level, clubs are still attracting new players who have never played AFL before. Many girls will not have had the opportunity to participate in youth girls competitions, so their senior-aged club may be their first exposure to playing Australian Football. This brings with it the need to introduce the physical skills such as giving and receiving a tackle safely, while introducing the basic skills of the game.

The reasons females leave sport are due to three main factors:

1. Environmental
2. Individual
3. Societal

These factors do not work in isolation and could mean there are multiple influences on a young female's physical activity behaviour. When designing programs or strategies to promote participation in AFL by girls and young women, it is important to consider all of these influences.

Coaches who understand these key considerations and work to support their footballers through them, will be highly successful in retaining players and providing a fun learning environment.

### Key factors in detail

#### Environmental factors

- ▶ Too competitive where players prefer the social aspects over the competition
- ▶ Poor coaching
- ▶ A big jump in skills required from under-12 to the next level which makes the sport less fun to play
- ▶ Club setting is too unwelcome
- ▶ Facilities are not female-friendly

#### Individual factors

- ▶ Lack of or perceived lack of skill
- ▶ The sport is no longer enjoyable
- ▶ Lack of time – numerous competing activities impact on an adolescent's available time, such as study, part-time work, relationships and other sports
- ▶ Body image issues – concerns about their body shape, weight management and dislike of sweating
- ▶ Cost of participation
- ▶ Injuries
- ▶ Friends no longer participate

#### Societal factors

- ▶ Pressure to conform to popular ideals of beauty and what represents femininity
- ▶ Being teased for being involved in a predominantly male pursuit
- ▶ Lack of support in transition from primary school age to young adult

The following provides ideas clubs can adopt to maximise their girls' participation. The strategies suggested are only a starting point, so it is expected clubs will explore others depending on what their female players see as relevant to their needs.

It is well documented that good coaching is the key reason young people continue to participate in a sport. Clubs should support their coaches to attend courses that will improve their skills and hence heighten the enjoyment and skills of their players.

When coaches are teaching female athletes for the first time, there are specific areas they should be mindful of to get the best out of their footballers and ensure their players return.

There are few differences between coaching male and female footballers. Coaches who stick to good coaching principles such as striving to achieve individual goals, putting development ahead of winning and allowing time for the girls to socialise, will get the best out of their footballers.

There are a number of resources and courses that can assist coaches to optimise their performance. An online module Understanding Female Footballers can be found at [aflcommunityclub.com.au/index.php?id=801](http://aflcommunityclub.com.au/index.php?id=801) and is especially s for the first time, whether you are a female or male coach.

## Body image issues

Adolescent girls' concerns about their body shape, weight management and the dislike of sweating are valid reasons they leave sport as an adolescent. They want to feel and look good, so getting fit is a good selling point. Ill-fitting apparel and a lack of confidence as their body matures cause major difficulties for many young girls.

Coaches should be mindful of players who may not be hydrating sufficiently or eating the right foods and at the right time before training and games.

State bodies conduct regular coach education sessions and specific modules on coaching female footballers. We encourage all coaches to attend courses to increase their understanding and provide the best-quality experience for themselves and their players.

Description of task to be completed	Coach	Administrator/Committee	Team Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Strategies to provide positive body image support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Encourage all women and girls no matter their size or body shape</li> <li>▶ Invite a local dietitian or nutritionist to discuss links between food, activity and health</li> <li>▶ Education on correct hydration will also be helpful</li> <li>▶ Be flexible with clothing requirements, accommodating the needs of various cultural groups</li> <li>▶ Coach and staff comments to women or girls should focus on performance and/or output and never be about what they look like, even if intended to be positive. "You're looking really fit" can be reworded to "You're running really well"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide healthy food choices at the canteen/kiosk</li> <li>▶ Provide mirrors in the changerooms</li> <li>▶ Provide apparel designed specifically for females</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Source an apparel provider who makes female-shaped garments</li> <li>▶ Ask the women and girls for their ideas on apparel design and sizing</li> </ul>

### To better understand the implications of body image issues, go to:

The Clearing House is a compilation of easy-to-read academic articles from researchers around the world who provide background about body image and recommendations to coaches:

[whv.org.au/publications-resources/clearinghouse-connectors/chc-physical-activity-and-body-image](http://whv.org.au/publications-resources/clearinghouse-connectors/chc-physical-activity-and-body-image)

Some 110 of the United Kingdom's best female athletes describe the pressures they feel and the sources of these pressures to conform to a particular body "norm":

[sport.bt.com/womeninsport/bt-sport-survey-body-image-insecurities-rife-in-womens-sport-S11363867248465](http://sport.bt.com/womeninsport/bt-sport-survey-body-image-insecurities-rife-in-womens-sport-S11363867248465)





## Displaying empathy when dealing with young players

Adolescence can be a difficult period in the lives of youth girls. Their body makes adjustments, they deal with changes to their maturity socially and emotionally, begin to understand their sexuality and deal with issues such as academic achievement, relationships, taking on part-time work and family tension. As they strive to make their own decisions and consolidate their sense of connection in their world, these challenges leave them vulnerable to emotional states and behaviours (Luciana, 2014).

Girls in the 14-17 age groups are more likely than boys to suffer from the perception of not being good enough, perfectionism, sexual confusion, fear of failure, body image hatred and lack of self-esteem (Berger, 2014). This makes it difficult for many of them to overcome adversity while falling into a heightened state of self-consciousness and self-centredness.

Some issues that may arise where the player can appear to react in an 'out of character' manner include but are not restricted to:

- ▶ Their reaction to sustaining an injury. When girls are 'winded' for the first time or roll an ankle, they may get distressed and take some calming down. Or when they receive a tackle or solid bump, they may be agitated
- ▶ Seeing their daughter react in this manner may initiate distress in some parents, who have not seen their daughters react this way before
- ▶ Girls are more likely to discuss their relationships more openly than males, which may include experiencing same-sex attraction. A players' emerging same-sex attraction and the beginning and ending of any subsequent relationships will require acceptance, support and compassion
- ▶ Feeling the player has not eaten before a game and is vomiting or feeling lethargic and nauseous
- ▶ Players don't feel connected to the team, for example, perceiving they are not being kicked the ball or feeling socially isolated



Description of task to be completed	Coach	Sports Trainer/ First Aid Officer	Team Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Displaying empathy to your youth girls/ female footballers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Display compassion and steadfast support, especially if the girl is clearly distressed</li> <li>▶ Collaboratively create goals, then hold the player accountable for achieving them</li> <li>▶ An authoritarian coach will not be successful, particularly if a girl is in an emotional state. Authoritarian-style coaches are unlikely to be successful with any young player</li> <li>▶ Concentrate on the players' strengths</li> <li>▶ Cultivate trust and be open-minded</li> <li>▶ Ask players what they need to help them achieve their potential</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Stay calm and encourage the player to do so</li> <li>▶ If a player is injured, clearly explain what you are going to do to help alleviate the pain and what the repair process is – for example, a cut on the eyebrow area always results in copious blood, but is actually easy to repair</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ If a player is injured, assist by keeping the parents calm</li> <li>▶ Provide avenues for players to show their strengths</li> </ul>



## Catering for a player's other interests and commitments

Girls have so many competing activities in their lifestyle that as they get older, sport tends to play a smaller role. Numerous competing activities impact on an adolescent's available time, such as study, part-time work, relationships, religious commitments and other sports. For many girls, football is not their first sporting priority and so flexibility is required by coaches to ensure girls can include football in their sporting pursuits.

Description of task to be completed	Coach	Administrator/Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Strategies to help participants manage being time-poor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Ask the women and girls what suits their overall timetable and conduct training on those days/times</li> <li>▶ Be flexible with your approach to your footballers' commitment, encouraging them to attend at least one training session a week or play them every two weeks</li> <li>▶ Provide the opportunity for them to get fit and stay involved</li> </ul>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Strategies to meet the girls' desire for less competition</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide more social physical activities that cater for different skill levels and broad range of health interests such as: AFL Active, AFL 9s (a 'pay as you play' version of AFL that requires less commitment than full-sided games); get in Zumba or yoga instructors to conduct a session at the club during the home and away season</li> </ul>



## 6) Female-friendly facilities

Club rooms are important as they are the place where training sessions start, meetings and social events are conducted and where the club's achievements are displayed and celebrated. They say a lot about the culture and values of a club and are an important first impression to members.

Improving access for girls and women involves taking a closer look at the physical environment of the club facilities, equipment and rules. While there are ideal facilities for clubs to aspire to, it's important to realise that girls and women will still come to the club if they are clean and hygienic and not necessarily 'ideal'. Local government, leagues and the state football body can all assist clubs to achieve the best-possible facilities.

Many state Sport and Recreation Departments conduct a funding scheme to advise and support clubs who would like to improve their facilities.

Any approaches should be done in partnership with your state football organisation, which will assist clubs.

**NSW/ACT:** [sportandrecreation.nsw.gov.au/](http://sportandrecreation.nsw.gov.au/)

**Northern Territory:** [sportandrecreation.nt.gov.au/grants-vouchers/other-grants](http://sportandrecreation.nt.gov.au/grants-vouchers/other-grants)

**Queensland:** [qld.gov.au/recreation/sports/funding/](http://qld.gov.au/recreation/sports/funding/)

**South Australia:** [ors.sa.gov.au/funding/?a=144813](http://ors.sa.gov.au/funding/?a=144813)

**Tasmania:** [dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/csr/sportrec/funding\\_opportunities](http://dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/csr/sportrec/funding_opportunities)

**Victoria:** [sport.vic.gov.au/community-sports-infrastructure-fund](http://sport.vic.gov.au/community-sports-infrastructure-fund)

**Western Australia:** [dsr.wa.gov.au/funding/facilities-\(csrff\)](http://dsr.wa.gov.au/funding/facilities-(csrff))

For a comprehensive checklist of the 'ideal' female-friendly facilities, go to:

[aflcommunityclub.com.au/index.php?id=1823](http://aflcommunityclub.com.au/index.php?id=1823)



Description of task to be completed	Coach	Administrator/Committee	Team Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Female-friendly facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Female players have equal access to the facilities and equipment and are not allocated late evening timeslots for training</li> <li>Gym equipment is suitable for use by females such as availability of light weights</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Change rooms have lockable doors on cubicles (or shower curtains)</li> <li>Club facilities are clean and hygienically presented</li> <li>Sanitary disposal bin placed in every toilet</li> <li>Adequate lighting in the car park</li> <li>Invite women and girls to provide input into how to improve facilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Operate 'buddy' system to ensure all female participants get to their cars at night after training and social functions</li> </ul>

For more information on where to seek assistance to improve your club facilities, contact your state Australian Football organisation directly. State contacts can be found at: [aflcommunityclub.com.au](http://aflcommunityclub.com.au) and on the final page of the *Female Club Guide*.



## 7) Opportunities to highlight social aspects of your club

Females are drawn to a sport and stay involved because of the people. If their friends leave, they are less likely to stay involved even if they love the sport. Social opportunities therefore rank higher than skill development or the competition for females. The role of the family changes between junior girls and youth girls age groups.

Where parents were supportive by providing transport and watching games, by youth girls it is peers who provide the most support. This is a major reason why young females do not make the transition from primary school age to secondary school age sport.

Description of task to be completed	Coach	Administrator/Committee	Team Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategies to help promote the social aspects for females</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on fun and participation rather than winning</li> <li>Ask the girls what they want from their club experience</li> <li>Incorporate music into training sessions</li> <li>Link up youth girls with junior girls</li> <li>Mentor youth girls who can help coach a junior girls team</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide a range of activities to cater for the girls' desire for socialising</li> <li>Develop the female pathway so girls can play from five years through to the top age group</li> <li>Conduct some female-only social events such as a movie night, tenpin bowling, fashion parade, etc</li> <li>Social events do not always revolve around alcohol</li> <li>Encourage parents to take on roles in female teams through car pooling, coaching, umpiring, watching games and other roles around the club</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct an exit survey to ascertain why the girls leave the club/AFL</li> </ul>



## Including everyone

Of Australia's 23 million people, our communities look like:



Residents from **200** countries  
Speaking **300** languages



**51%** Female  
**1/4** Born overseas

**2.2m** Indigenous population speaking 60 languages

**3.5m** are hearing impaired

**4.2m** are disabled

With this diversity in mind, coaches and administrators should consider how to include everyone successfully into their club. For females, barriers to participation can take on numerous forms and prevent them joining a club. It is worthwhile for club committee members and coaches to view the AFL's Vilification Policy found at: [afl.com.au/staticfile/AFL%20Tenant/AFL/Files/Respect%20and%20Responsibility/National-Vilification-Discrimination-Policy.pdf](http://afl.com.au/staticfile/AFL%20Tenant/AFL/Files/Respect%20and%20Responsibility/National-Vilification-Discrimination-Policy.pdf)

This clearly outlines areas of discrimination and support clubs can seek to help alleviate such behaviours and barriers for all members.

**Barriers can take many forms. Here are a few areas to consider:**

- 1. Gender:** Females receiving trophies of lesser value than are given to males or the club's website conveying images of male teams but not female ones.
- 2. Stereotyping athletic females:** Some girls relate incidences of teasing, bullying and feelings of non acceptance when they go to a club. This can be a strong deterrent to them getting involved in a male-dominated sport, in particular where members may be influenced heavily by stereotypes of what a female should be like. Often being a strong, athletic female is not part of that stereotype.
- 3. Religious:** Wearing a hijab (full head scarf) should not exclude a player. League bylaws support the wearing of hijabs, long sleeve jumpers and full skins to encourage active involvement of players under religious or cultural constraints.
- 4. Pregnancy:** Familiarise yourself with your league's pregnancy policy and guidelines to assist any players who present as pregnant during the season. It is advisable for clubs to have a clear policy that deals with participation by pregnant women, because it is not helpful to anyone if the issue is first raised when a very evidently pregnant woman arrives to play. The requirement to sign an indemnity may also lead to discrimination, depending on its wording, and an indemnity may not be successful if there was failure to take reasonable care.

It is also strongly advised that clubs ensure they hold valid, up-to-date insurance that does not contain exclusions for pregnant participants.

- 5. Sexuality:** The following examples are based on –
  - ▶ A coach who hugs players as they come to the interchange bench. While this may be a perfect display of this coach's warmth, it is not an appropriate gesture and can make players and/or their parents feel uncomfortable.
  - ▶ Vilifying a person on the grounds of their sexual orientation. It is not uncommon for youth girls and women's league players to be same-sex attracted. Clubs should keep an open mind and be understanding of the tensions and pressures this attraction may result in at times.
  - ▶ Transphobia – vilifying someone on the basis of gender identity. Proactive sports administrators and coaches, particularly at women's league level, should educate themselves on transgender issues. 'Transgender' is an umbrella term that refers to a person whose gender identity is different to their physical sex as recorded at birth, for example, a player born a female who has male gender identification and now presents and lives as a man or a boy. When transitioning to being a boy or man and still using the female change rooms or wishing to continue to play in a girls or women's league team, may be difficult. Clubs should seek an understanding of the legal responsibilities they have around inclusion and be mindful to model respectful ways of engaging and supporting a transgendered player.

**For further information and guidance, go to:**

Australian Sports Commission:  
Play by the Rules [playbytherules.com.au](http://playbytherules.com.au/equality-network.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Out-for-Sport-Report.pdf)  
[equality-network.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Out-for-Sport-Report.pdf](http://equality-network.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Out-for-Sport-Report.pdf)

Guideline: Transgender people and sport > Complying with the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (PDF)  
[humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/index.php/our-resources-and-publications/eoa-practice-guidelines/item/1125-guideline-transgender-people-and-sport-complying-with-the-equal-opportunity-act-2010](http://humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/index.php/our-resources-and-publications/eoa-practice-guidelines/item/1125-guideline-transgender-people-and-sport-complying-with-the-equal-opportunity-act-2010)

Description of task to be completed	Coach	Administrator/Committee	Team Manager
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Strategies to promote inclusion of all members</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Implement a Code of Conduct and an education process during the pre-season</li> <li>▶ Should the code be breached, revisit education of the player/s</li> <li>▶ Explain context and football terms, especially to multicultural players</li> <li>▶ Use gender-neutral language, eg. don't use gender as a put down, as in saying to a boy, "That girl kicks better than you!"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Focus on developing the pathway from Auskick onwards</li> <li>▶ Does the club's membership reflect the community's diversity?</li> <li>▶ Implement the AFL's Respect and Responsibility program at the club</li> <li>▶ Provide opportunities for training all club members in this program</li> <li>▶ Ensure your coaches, committee and members are aware of the AFL Vilification and Discrimination Policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Be prepared to learn and educate players about the various cultural backgrounds of players within the team</li> <li>▶ Implement a change room roster to ensure all players can access showers or toilets without discomfort</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Strategies to help club personnel and members display empathy and understanding and respectful sexual behaviours</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Be aware that upper-age youth girls and women may be encountering sexuality issues and related challenges</li> <li>▶ Refer to the AFL's Respect and Responsibility Policy to ensure respectful behaviours are practised</li> </ul>		

## Bringing diversity to your club leadership

Women are significantly under-represented across coaching, management, media, commercial sporting activities and in bodies responsible for local, national, regional and international-level sporting events. In addition to providing role models, sport can provide girls and women with leadership experience that they can apply in other domains, such as employment, civic leadership and advocacy.

The composition and manner in which a board or committee operates, fundamentally impacts the operations of the club. Only a board operating under sound principles will be effective and facilitate the success of the club. It is well documented that diversity in decision-making has a positive financial impact on organisations. For a sporting club, that can mean more vibrant in membership and social events, a greater pool of volunteers and a sustainable and engaged membership.

### What clubs can do

Some members of your club may be capable of adding value to the committee, but may not have the confidence to put their hand up.

- ▶ Club leaders could mentor probable board members
- ▶ Ensure that each meeting contains inclusion and/or female participation as an agenda item
- ▶ Encourage and support willing members to seek relevant leadership, governance or self-development courses to prepare them for voluntary board roles

For further assistance with governance and board development, look to your local Sport and Recreation Department. They often conduct workshops and courses for developing board knowledge. See a list on the following Further Resources and Websites page.



# Further resources and website references

**Australian Football League**  
[afl.com.au](http://afl.com.au)

**AFL Community Football**  
[aflcommunity.com.au](http://aflcommunity.com.au)

**Australian Sports Commission**  
[ausport.com.au](http://ausport.com.au)  
[playbytherules.com.au](http://playbytherules.com.au)

**Womens Sport and Fitness  
Foundation**  
[wsff.org.uk](http://wsff.org.uk)

## State and Territory Affiliates

**AFL NSW/ACT**  
[aflnswact.com.au](http://aflnswact.com.au)

**AFL Northern Territory**  
[aflnt.com.au](http://aflnt.com.au)

**AFL Queensland**  
[aflq.com.au](http://aflq.com.au)

**AFL Tasmania**  
[footballtas.com.au](http://footballtas.com.au)

**AFL Victoria**  
[aflvic.com.au](http://aflvic.com.au)

**South Australian National Football  
League**  
[sanfl.com.au](http://sanfl.com.au)

**West Australian Football  
Commission**  
[wafc.com.au](http://wafc.com.au)

## State and Territory Departments of Sport and Recreation

**NSWACT Office of Sport and  
Recreation**  
[sportandrecreation.nsw.gov.au/](http://sportandrecreation.nsw.gov.au/)

**NT Sport and Recreation**  
[sportandrecreation.nt.gov.au/](http://sportandrecreation.nt.gov.au/)

**Queensland Department  
of National Parks, Racing,  
Sport and Recreation**  
[nprs.qld.gov.au/](http://nprs.qld.gov.au/)

**Tasmania Communities,  
Sport and Recreation**  
[dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/csr/  
sportrec](http://dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/csr/sportrec)

**South Australia Office  
for Sport and Recreation**  
[ors.sa.gov.au/](http://ors.sa.gov.au/)

**Victoria Sport and Recreation**  
[sport.vic.gov.au/](http://sport.vic.gov.au/)

**Western Australia**  
[dsr.wa.gov.au/](http://dsr.wa.gov.au/)

## Bibliography and Research References

Australian Bureau of Statistics  
(ABS). (2003) Participation in  
cultural and leisure activities,  
Australia. Canberra: ABS.

Australian Sports Commission.  
(2011) National Women and  
Sport Strategy.

Australian Sports Commission.  
(2006) About Time! Women in  
Sport and Recreation.

Australian Sports Commission.  
(2002) Guide to best privacy  
practices for sporting  
organisations. Canberra:  
Australian Sports Commission  
(available online on the Australian  
Sports Commission website at  
[ausport.gov.au/asc/corpdocs/  
privacy.htm](http://ausport.gov.au/asc/corpdocs/privacy.htm))

Berger, Jessica. (2014).  
From Paralysed to catalysed:  
Supporting Adolescent Females  
Through Positive Psychology  
Coaching. University of  
Pennsylvania.

Craike, J., Symons, C. &  
Zimmerman, J., Why do young  
women drop out of sport and  
physical activity? (2012)

Eime, R., Casey, M., Harvey,  
J., Payne, W., Girls Get Going:  
Resource for Tennis Clubs, (2011)

Football Federation of Victoria,  
(2011) Increasing Female  
Participation

Luciana, M. (2014). Adolescent  
brain development in normality  
and psychopathology. *Development  
and Psychopathology*, 25,  
1325 – 1345.

Sabo, D. and Veliz, P., *Go Out and  
Play: Youth Sports in America.*  
(2008)

Sport England. (2014) *The  
Challenge of Growing Youth  
Participation in Sport*

Sport and Recreation Queensland.  
(2001) *Why Don't Girls Play Sport?*

Transgender and Intersex  
Sport Inclusion Guidelines  
plus Guidelines: Transgender,  
People and Sport  
[humanrightscommission.vic.gov.  
au/index.php/our-resources-  
and-publications/victorian-  
discrimination-law](http://humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/index.php/our-resources-and-publications/victorian-discrimination-law)

Ulster Integraton Unit (2010)  
*Moving Forward Together*  
(available online [ulster.gaa.ie](http://ulster.gaa.ie))

Verve Research for the Women's  
Sport and Fitness Foundation,  
*The Ideal Sports Club for Women.*  
(2011)

