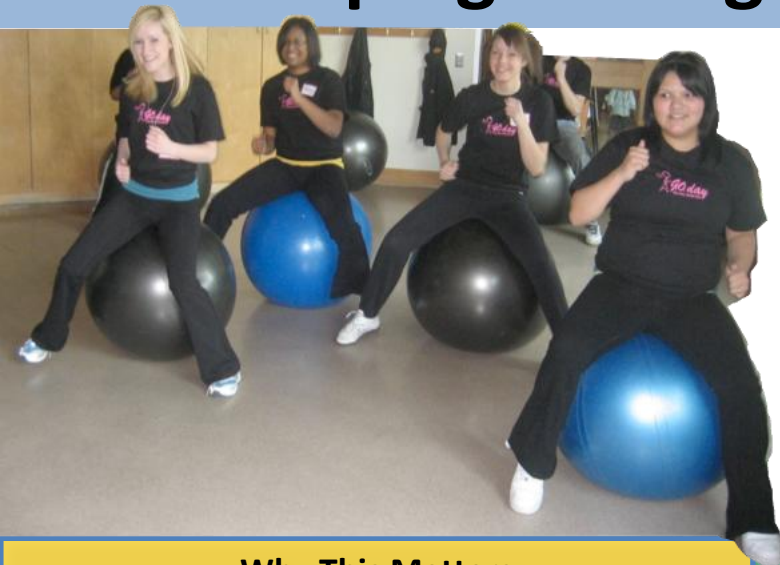


Keeping Teenage Girls Active

Centre for
Youth & Society



Educators seek to offer senior Physical Education (PE) programs that are interesting and meaningful for female students.



Why This Matters

Despite the educational aim to help students develop the skills, knowledge, and behaviours necessary to be physically active, typical PE programs in Canadian schools are leaving female students disillusioned and disengaged.

Key Facts

- ❖ In British Columbia, fewer than 10% of female students, compared to 24% of male students, choose to enroll in PE once it becomes an elective course after grade 10.
- ❖ Most adolescents are not meeting the recommended levels of physical activity set by established guidelines.
- ❖ Rates of obesity and type 2 diabetes are increasing among all adolescent population groups.
- ❖ Rates of inactivity in young women increase over time. 34.6% of 12-19 year olds are inactive, compared to 48% of 20-34 year olds.
- ❖ According to BMI self-reports, 10% of females become overweight or obese as they age. 18.4% of 12-19 year olds are overweight compared to 32% of 20-34 year olds.

What the Research Says

Programs which target the needs of adolescent girls have been shown to increase their levels of regular vigorous physical activity.

One program showed an 8% increase in girls' physical activity in intervention schools, compared to control schools that did not implement the program. These findings are noteworthy because high school girls tend to respond negatively to traditional PE programs.

UVic Researcher Sandra Gibbons found senior elective PE courses that retain high enrollment of female students tend to: (a) focus on lifetime physical activities, (b) involve students in course development, (c) use authentic assessment, (d) consider gender as a course design feature, (e) include value added options, and (f) foster a positive and respectful class environment.

The more teachers build motivational characteristics into the Physical Education program, the more likely it is female students will be motivated to continue participating.

What the Research Says

It is important to determine what motivates girls to stay active and healthy throughout their adolescence. Motivation has been identified as key to the initiation and continuation of physical activity.

In a questionnaire from the Girls Only Lifestyle Expo, girls indicated several reasons that stopped them from becoming physically active.

The top four responses were: lack of time (45% responded yes), friends not involved (41%), lack of money (31%), and lack of motivation (29%).

The top three ways that girls said they would become more physically active were: if friends register with me (60%), if I had more time (47%), or if the activity was available in town (41%).

Helpful Resources:

www.youth.society.uvic.ca to access more information on Sandra Gibbons' current research on motivating adolescent girls to be physically active.

What You Need to Know

- ❖ To guide development of girl-friendly PE programs and accompanying resources, it is important to understand the motivational processes that may determine whether female students find meaning and become engaged in their PE experience, or find the experience irrelevant and choose to disengage.
- ❖ Self-determination theory (SDT) proposes a three-part model to describe how motivation develops and its influence on behaviour. This theory suggests that motivation is influenced by an individual's need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.
- ❖ The tenets of SDT propose that individuals who perceive they are autonomous (having a sense of choice), competent (having a sense of efficacy), and related (having a sense of social attachment) will be intrinsically motivated to engage in certain behaviour.

Activities that adolescent girls prefer to engage in include: hiphop, yoga, dance fitness, bollywood dance, and boxing. Most of the preferred activities are not competitive and may provide a chance to socialize with other girls.