

Keeping Girls in Baseball

Introduction

Girls and women continue to leave sport at significantly higher rates than boys, particularly during adolescence. Research consistently demonstrates that girls benefit from sport participation through improved confidence, leadership, social connection, physical health, mental well-being, and lifelong engagement in physical activity. However, barriers such as fear of judgment, lack of belonging, body image concerns, limited access, financial pressures, transportation challenges, and negative sport experiences continue to push many girls away from sport.

Baseball Canada is committed to creating environments where girls not only join baseball but choose to stay involved throughout childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. This resource provides evidence-informed strategies that associations, clubs, coaches, volunteers, and administrators can implement to create positive, welcoming, and sustainable experiences for girls.

Why Keeping Girls in Baseball Matters

Girls who remain engaged in sport are more likely to:

- Develop confidence, leadership skills, and resilience.
- Build meaningful friendships and social networks.
- Experience improved physical and mental health.
- Continue participating in physical activity into adulthood.
- Become future coaches, officials, volunteers, and sport leaders.

At the same time, research shows that participation alone is not enough. Girls stay in sport when they feel valued, connected, safe, competent, and supported.

Understanding Why Girls Leave Sport

Research identifies several common reasons girls disengage from sport:

1. Fear of Judgment

Many adolescent girls report worrying about being judged by teammates, coaches, peers, or spectators. Concerns about performance, appearance, and social acceptance can significantly affect participation.

What Associations Can Do

- Promote effort, learning, and improvement over winning.
- Encourage positive sideline behaviour from parents and spectators.
- Establish clear expectations for respectful communication.
- Celebrate individual growth and personal achievements.

2. Lack of Social Connection

Friendships and belonging are among the strongest predictors of continued participation for girls. As girls get older, social factors become increasingly important.

What Associations Can Do

- Build intentional social opportunities into programming.
- Create team-building activities beyond practices and games.
- Encourage peer mentorship between older and younger athletes.
- Foster welcoming environments for new players.
- Train coaches to prioritize relationships as much as skill development.

3. Body Image and Confidence Concerns

Adolescence often brings increased concerns about appearance and self-confidence. Uniforms, public performance, and comparison with others can create barriers to participation.

What Associations Can Do

- Focus coaching language on strength, skill, and performance rather than appearance.
- Offer uniform options that prioritize comfort and choice.
- Highlight diverse examples of successful female athletes.
- Create environments where mistakes are viewed as part of learning.

4. Menstrual Health Challenges

Many girls report that menstruation affects their comfort and confidence in sport participation. Unfortunately, menstrual health remains a topic that is often avoided.

What Associations Can Do

- Normalize conversations about menstrual health.
- Ensure washrooms and menstrual products are accessible at facilities.
- Educate coaches on how menstruation may affect participation and performance.
- Create flexible environments where girls feel comfortable communicating their needs.

5. Financial and Access Barriers

Registration fees, equipment costs, travel requirements, and transportation challenges can limit participation opportunities.

What Associations Can Do

- Promote financial assistance programs.
- Offer equipment lending or exchange programs.
- Reduce unnecessary travel requirements where possible.
- Partner with community organizations to support participation.

What Keeps Girls in Baseball?

Fun Must Remain the Priority

Girls consistently identify fun as one of the most important reasons they participate.

Associations should:

- Prioritize enjoyment at every age level.
- Balance skill development with game-based learning.
- Create opportunities for success for all participants.
- Recognize that positive experiences are more important than short-term competitive outcomes.

Create Female-Centered Opportunities

Girls benefit from seeing themselves represented throughout the sport system.

Associations should:

- Recruit and support female coaches.
- Increase opportunities for women officials and administrators.
- Showcase female athletes in promotional materials.
- Celebrate local female role models and leaders.

Build a Sense of Belonging

Every participant should feel that they matter.

Associations should:

- Welcome every player by name.

- Create inclusive team cultures.
- Monitor and address bullying, exclusion, and negative behaviours.
- Ensure all athletes feel valued regardless of skill level.

Provide Developmentally Appropriate Experiences

Adolescence is not simply an extension of childhood participation.

Associations should:

- Recognize changing social and developmental needs.
- Offer flexible participation pathways.
- Create opportunities for recreation, development, and competition.
- Avoid one-size-fits-all programming.

Recommendations for Associations

Association Leadership

- Include girls' participation and retention goals in strategic plans.
- Collect participation and retention data annually.
- Seek feedback directly from girls and families.
- Allocate resources specifically toward girls' programming.

Coaches

- Build relationships before focusing on performance.
- Foster positive team culture.
- Encourage athlete voice and input.
- Promote confidence through constructive feedback.

Parents and Guardians

- Emphasize enjoyment and personal growth.
- Support positive sport experiences.
- Encourage persistence through challenges.
- Celebrate effort rather than outcomes.

Players

- Support teammates.
- Welcome new participants.
- Help create positive team environments.
- Serve as role models for younger athletes.

References

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