



May 2024

Breaking Barriers

Supporting Disabled Teenage Girls to be Active Research



In partnership with:



This research was led by Access Sport in partnership with the Sweaty Betty Foundation, Women in Sport and Nuffield Health.



“We want to ensure that all disabled teenage girls have equal opportunity to access community sport and exercise. This research provides vital findings which will inform our work to make community sport clubs more inclusive.”

Helen Rowbotham, Access Sport CEO



“Nearly two-thirds of disabled teenage girls want to be more active, but face barriers we don’t fully understand. This research gives us fresh insight and acts as a catalyst for change to ensure that every girl has the opportunity to experience the wide-ranging benefits of movement.”

Afsana Lachaux, Sweaty Betty Foundation Director



“All teenage girls are at risk of dropping out of sport but disabled girls experience additional barriers to participation and as a result enjoy sport less. This is unacceptable and cannot continue. This vital research marks the start of that change. All girls deserve to experience the joy and life-long benefits of sport and we must ensure they are not being pushed out.”

Stephanie Hilborne OBE, Women in Sport CEO



“This research provides valuable data to help us understand and identify the barriers disabled teenage girls face when accessing physical activity and sport. Critically, we need deeper insight into the experiences disabled girls face to ensure they aren’t excluded or miss out on all the benefits that sport and physical activity brings. Our ambition is that this data and these valuable partnerships, will help build more inclusive programmes and initiatives that will improve the health of disabled girls and allow them to be more active.”

Davina Deniszczyk, Medical and Charity Director, Nuffield Health



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1. Executive Summary

Disabled teenage girls' enjoyment of and positive attitudes towards sport continue to be lower than their non-disabled counterparts but, in contrast, we know that 67% of those that responded to our survey want to be more active. It's time for the sector to step up and take action, creating accessible offers and providing inclusive coaching which allow everyone to feel welcome, take part and have fun.

Women in Sport's 'Reframing Sport for Teenage Girls' research has shown that too many girls are disengaging from sport and exercise in their teens¹. The 'Supporting Disabled Teenage Girls to be Active' research found that whilst they want to be more active, disabled teenage girls are no exception to this disengagement. This means that they are not benefiting from the wide-ranging benefits that sport has to offer. This research also highlighted that inactivity is contributing to disabled teenage girls experiencing worrying mental health issues, including being less happy and more anxious.



Often, the unique experiences of disabled teenage girls can be lost when viewed through research focused solely on girls or disabled young people. The primary goal of this research was therefore to understand their experiences so that we can create engaging sport and exercise offers that work for them.

The research explored disabled teenage girls' experiences, attitudes and barriers towards sport and exercise. It focused on teenage girls, aged 11-19 years, who have any of the following:

- A disability or impairment
- A long-term health condition
- A neurodiverse condition such as ADHD, Autism, Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia, and Tourette's syndrome.

We utilised both surveys and focus groups, termed 'Listening Labs', in a mixed methods approach.



Key Findings:

Many disabled teenage girls understand the benefits of playing sport or exercising and want to do more.

67%

of disabled teenage girls want to be more active.

Disabled teenage girls are frustrated by the lack of suitable opportunities outside of school.

53%

said they would take part in sport and exercise if there were more opportunities outside of school.

Disabled teenage girls face additional barriers to being active compared to non-disabled teenage girls.

54%

of disabled teenage girls feel coaches or instructors don't understand their impairment, health condition, illness or disability.

Girls only opportunities help girls find joy in sport and, for many disabled teenage girls, participating with other disabled girls is important.

54%

of disabled teenage girls want to take part with other disabled girls.

Coaches and instructors play a key role in creating a non-judgmental and welcoming environment.

50%

of disabled teenage girls said it would be easier for them to be active if coaches or instructors could adapt activities to their needs.

Recommendations

Access Sport recommends sport and exercise providers use these findings:

1. To build their understanding of disabled teenage girls needs and their attitudes towards sport and exercise.
2. To provide more inclusive offers for a disabled teenage girl audience, that prioritise fun and are judgement-free.
3. To better educate coaches in disability-inclusive sport and exercise. This will ensure disabled teenage girls can take part and feel included.

Access Sport recommends commissioners, funders and policy makers use these findings:

4. To embed and prioritise inclusive coaching in the education and professional development of the sport and exercise workforce. Training will help coaches understand the needs of disabled teenage girls and build confidence in adapting their sessions to meet support needs.
5. To invest in more inclusive opportunities both in and out of school for disabled teenage girls. There is a sport for everyone and, from our work with a wide range of sports and activities, we know that all sports can be made to be inclusive.
6. To ensure future research focused on teenage girls' experiences recognises that they are not a homogenous group and applies an intersectionality lens. Multiple social categorisations such as race, disability or socio-economic status should be used to examine teenage girls' experiences.

Supporting Disabled Teenage Girls to be Active Toolkit

These recommendations form the basis of the Supporting Disabled Teenage Girls to be Active Toolkit which supports community sport providers, funders and policymakers to engage disabled teenage girls in sport and exercise.

You can read the full document by clicking on the link below.

Breaking Barriers Toolkit >

2. Introduction and Background

2.1. Introduction

Women in Sport's Reframing Sport for Teenage Girls research highlighted that teenage girls are not a homogenous group and advocated for understanding girls 'start-point', as key to creating effective offers which inspire girls to be active¹.

Disabled females make up 12.2% of females aged 10-19 years old in England². This has increased significantly since 2011 when disabled females made up 6.8% of this age group². Yet the unique experiences of disabled teenage girls can often be lost when viewed through research focused solely on girls or disabled young people.

The 'Supporting Disabled Teenage Girls to be Active research' detailed within this report therefore aimed to:

- Amplify the unique voice of disabled teenage girls, that would otherwise be overlooked
- Identify the barriers that prevent disabled teenage girls from taking part in sport and exercise
- Improve our understanding of disabled teenage girls so that we can better tackle the causes of exclusion
- Provide guidance to providers, funders and commissioners on the inclusion of disabled teenage girls.

2.2. Background

Girls' well-being is declining and disabled girls are no exception. Since 2009 the percentage of girls, aged 7-21 years old, reporting they are very happy, has decreased from 40% to 17%³. Disabled girls score even lower across well-being measures when compared to non-disabled girls. In the latest Active Lives data disabled girls (aged 5-16 years old) scored on average 5.5 out of 10 for happiness, compared to non-disabled girls who scored 7.1 on average⁴.

Research shows that when teenage girls are active, they are healthier and happier. However, Women in Sport found that too many girls (43%) disengage from sport and exercise in their teens¹. This is also true of disabled teenage girls. The Youth Sport Trust's Girls Active Survey found that disabled girls, in school years 3-6, took part in 60 minutes or more of physical activity for an average of 3.6 days per week. As disabled girls got older, their participation in physical activity decreased to 3.2 days per week for girls in school years 7-13⁵. Their enjoyment of physical activity also decreased with age. 85% of disabled girls, aged 7-11 years old, reported enjoying physical activity compared to 66% of disabled girls aged 11-18 years old⁵.



The gap in positive attitudes towards sport and exercise is perhaps where the starkest challenges exist between disabled and non-disabled teenage girls. The Youth Sport Trust found that 66% of disabled teenage girls enjoyed physical activity⁵. This was low compared to non-disabled teenage girls (71%)⁵. Disabled girls (ages 5-16) were also less likely to feel confident playing sport and exercising compared to non-disabled girls⁴ – 67% of disabled girls felt confident playing sport and exercising compared to 80% of non-disabled girls⁴.

Women in Sport's existing research into teenage girls found that:

- Teenage girls understood the benefits of being active and wanted to do more
- Many teenage girls failed to engage in organised sport outside of school PE
- There were complex barriers that stop teenage girls taking part in sport and exercise. These included a lack of self-belief, concerns over their capability, fear of judgement/being watched and body image concerns
- Teenage girls wanted a wider variety of fun, exciting and accessible opportunities to get active¹.

Overall, it is clear that disabled teenage girls experience similar issues as non-disabled teenage girls, such as poor well-being, low physical activity levels and negative attitudes toward sport and exercise. However, the intensity of these issues is greater for disabled teenage girls.

In this research we therefore wanted to understand if the findings and recommendations from Women in Sport's research were also applicable to disabled teenage girls and whether there are additional issues related to disabled teenage girls' impairments that impact their experiences of sport and exercise.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Scope

This research project focused on teenage girls, aged 11 -19 years, who have any of the following:

- A disability or impairment
- A long-term health condition
- A neurodiverse condition such as ADHD, Autism, Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia, and Tourette’s syndrome.

This report uses “disabled teenage girls” as an overarching term that encompasses the range of impairment types listed above.

We chose to focus on disabled teenage girls aged 11-19, as this is reflective of the young people we seek to engage through Access Sport’s work. We engage disabled young people with varying additional support needs through our pan-disability work.



3.2. Research Methods

To understand disabled teenage girls' experiences and attitudes towards sport and exercise, we used a survey and focus groups, which we called 'Listening Labs', to capture the diverse and authentic voices of disabled teenage girls.

Listening Labs:

- Seven Listening Labs with disabled teenage girls in England
- In total, we spoke to 27 girls from seven schools and community groups. The girls ranged in age from 11 to 18 years old
- The girls that took part attended either mainstream or Special Educational Needs (SEN) schools or colleges.

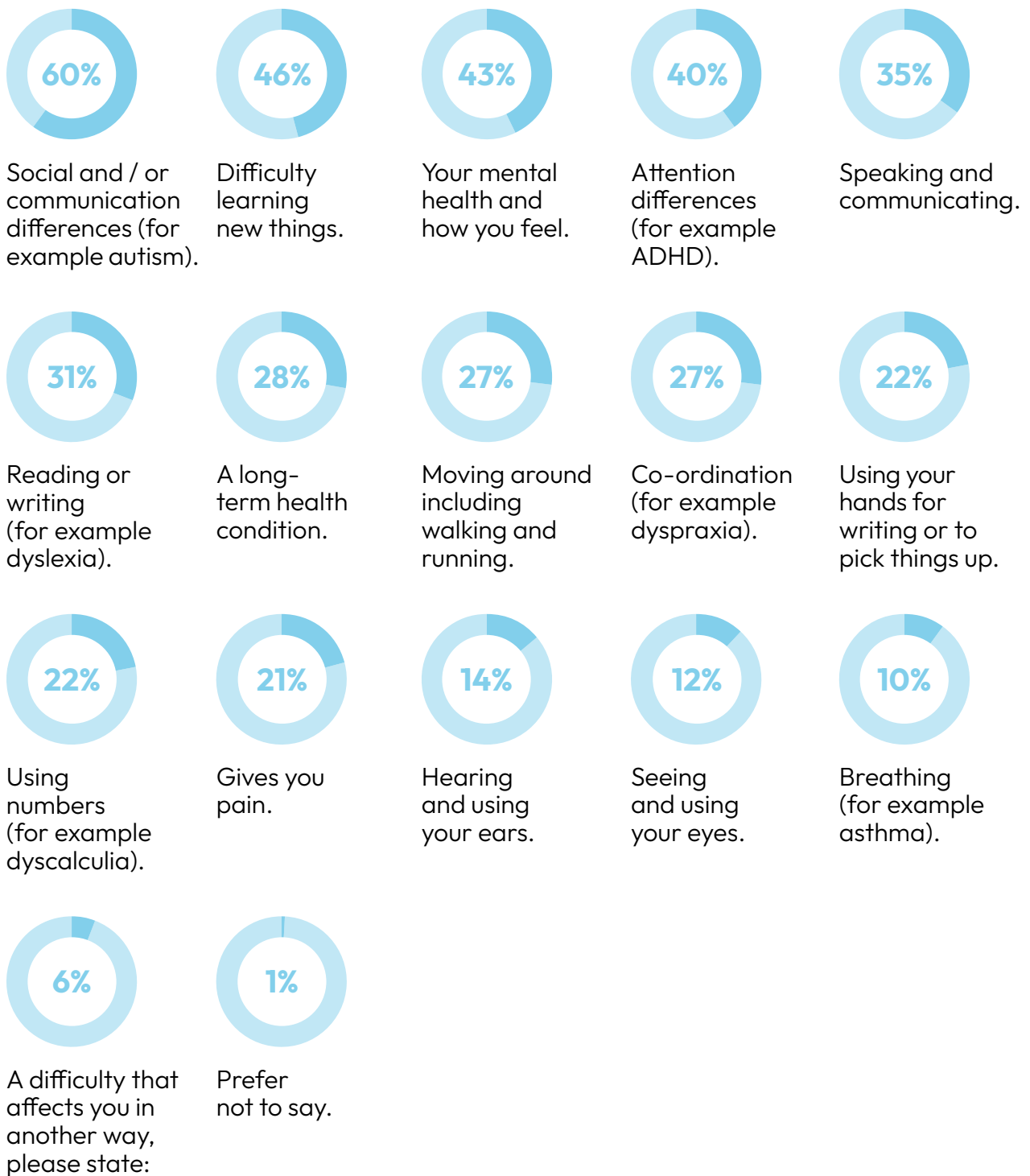
All the girls took part in sport and exercise in school with only a few girls taking part outside of school. All the quotes in this report come from girls who took part in the Listening Labs.

Survey:

We also undertook a survey which used similar survey questions to those in Women in Sport's Reframing Sport for Teenage Girls research¹.

- 162 responses from disabled teenage girls aged 11-19 years old
- The impairment types varied but broadly reflected the impairment types of young people in England, where the most prevalent impairment types are speech, language and communication needs, followed by social, emotional and mental health needs and moderate learning difficulty (Figure 1)
- Girls responding to the survey were able to tick multiple impairment types. 17% of disabled teenage girls selected one impairment type with the majority choosing two or more impairment types.

Figure 1:
Do you have difficulty with any of the following?

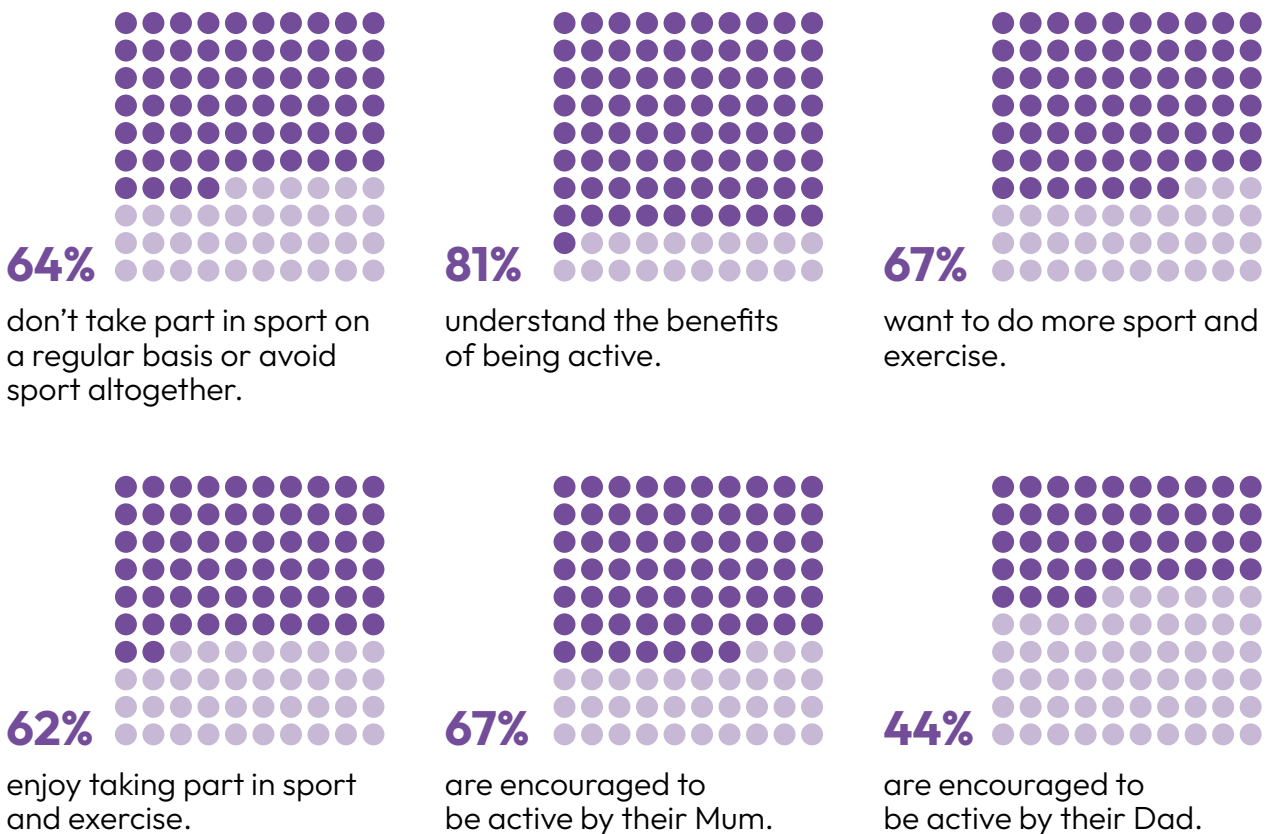


4. Findings

4.1. Many disabled teenage girls understand the benefits of playing sport or exercising and they want to do more.

Our findings show that even though disabled teenage girls don't exercise or take part in sport regularly they want to be more active and understand the benefits of being active. Their mum and dad are key influencers in their lives so should be utilised as a source of support to encourage disabled teenage girls to be active.

Figure 2:



Attitudes and influences

The survey found that the majority of disabled teenage girls enjoy being active (62%) and want to be more active (67%)(Figure 2). In the Listening Labs, most disabled teenage girls we spoke to were able to identify sports and activities they enjoy even if they don't like sports overall.

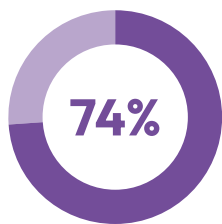
“I don't really like sports but I can do surfing. Surfing is fun but I don't like when I fall off when I try and do tricks.”

“I am not a big fan of sports but I like swimming but I can't really think of any more sports. I do swimming inside and outside of school but just for fun, not at a club.”

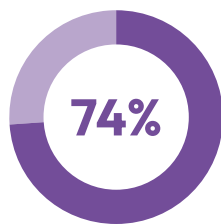
The survey also found that parents are key influences in encouraging disabled teenage girls to be active, with 67% saying their mum encourages them and 44% expressing their Dad encourages them (Figure 2). In Women in Sport's research teenage girls also felt less supported by their father/father figures¹.

“I love cycling with mum and dad. I like that you can be free, I love it because I actually taught myself how to do it.”

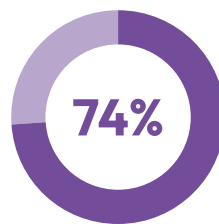
Figure 3:
Why is being active important to you?



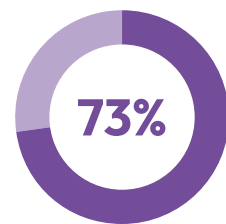
Feeling good about myself.



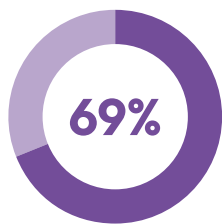
Having fun and feeling happy.



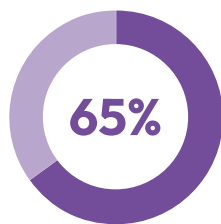
Good mental health and wellbeing.



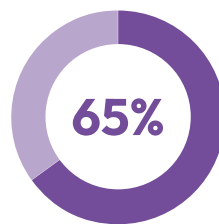
Keeping my body fit and healthy.



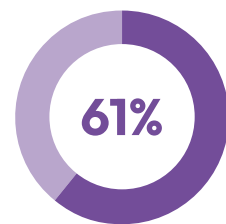
It gives me a sense of pride or achievement.



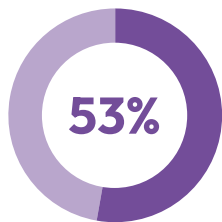
To spend time with friends.



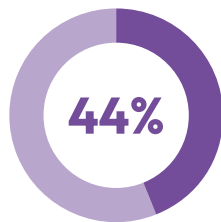
Building my confidence.



It helps me to be more independent.



It helps with my disability or impairment.



Looking good.

Reasons being active is important

Disabled teenage girls understand the benefits of being active (81%) and identified several different reasons why being active is important to them. Feeling good about themselves (74%), having fun and feeling happy (74%), and good mental health (74%) were highly rated by disabled teenage girls (Figure 3). These reasons were also reflected in the Listening Labs.

“It’s good for your overall health, a lot of people care about appearance but for me its about leading a healthy lifestyle, good for your mental health.”

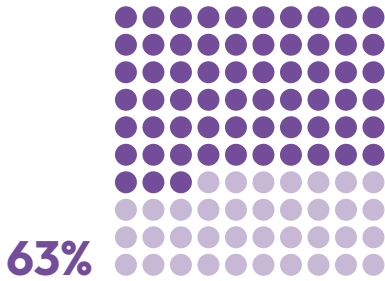
“I have ADHD so I need to do things. It’s good for mental health. At school I have to stick to the curriculum but outside you can do what you like and find what you like.”



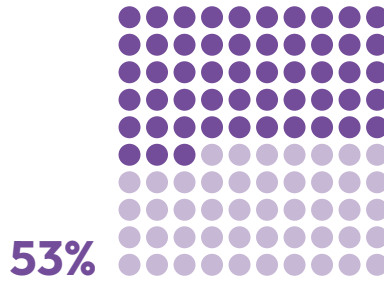
4.2. Disabled teenage girls are frustrated by the lack of suitable opportunities outside of school and struggle to enjoy sport in school, making provision outside school even more important.

Our research found that disabled teenage girls struggle to find sport and exercise opportunities outside of school and they don't feel comfortable joining in with school PE. This is leaving disabled teenage girls, who want to be more active, frustrated at their experiences of sport and exercise.

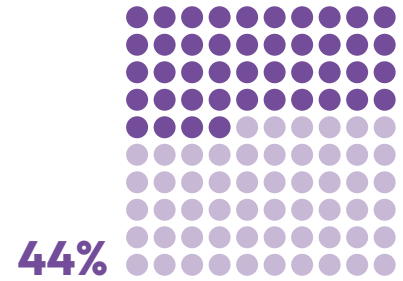
Figure 4:



would take part if it was easier to find opportunities nearby.



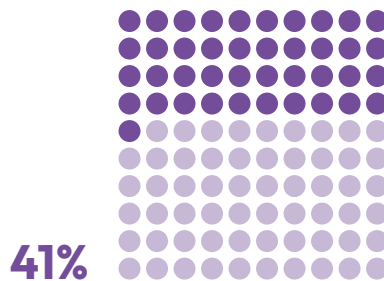
would take part if there were more opportunities outside school.



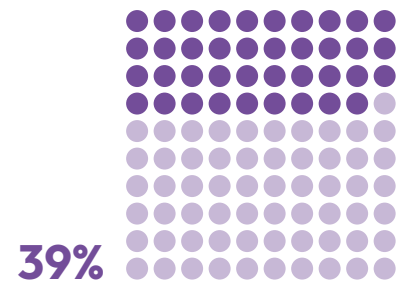
of disabled teenage girls take part in sport or community clubs.



take part in PE.



enjoy PE.



feel comfortable joining in with sport and exercise at school or college.

Where and how disabled teenage girls participate

Disabled teenage girls also told us that they would take part in sport and exercise if there were more options nearby (63%) and if there were more opportunities outside school (53%). This indicates that they feel there is a lack of suitable opportunities for them to be active. The survey findings also highlight that only 44% of disabled teenage girls take part in sport and exercise outside of school (Figure 4). Most of the girls we spoke to in the Listening Labs also do not take part outside of school. The girls we spoke to outlined that they often have to travel to find a suitable offer outside of school.

“I would do more if there was more happening. I have to travel a little bit to activities and it takes a bit of time.”

“I think more people would do it if it was easier to get to.”



PE and school sport

In addition to having a lack of suitable opportunities outside of school, disabled teenage girls also find engaging in PE and school sport difficult. Only 41% of disabled teenage girls enjoy PE and just 39% feel comfortable joining in sport and exercise at school or college (Figure 4). This is a concern as we know PE and school sport can be foundational in shaping young people's relationships with being active. Whilst the majority of girls we spoke to in the Listening Labs take part in PE, only 52% of survey participants said they participate in PE lessons (Figure 4). Many of the girls we spoke to outlined previous negative experiences of PE which impacted their enjoyment of being active.

“I didn't feel like I could join in with the activities in PE. The teacher didn't make any changes so that I could join in with everyone else. That's how I developed anxiety as well. I got diagnosed with it after that.”

“I didn't do PE in Year 10 and 11 because the teacher made me cry all the time. The teacher wasn't understanding. I like sports and liked PE in Year 7. Sports helps a lot with my anxiety. I would like to do more.”

The lack of suitable offers outside of school, coupled with feeling excluded or uncomfortable taking part in PE, left disabled teenage girls wanting more say in the shaping of their opportunities to be active.

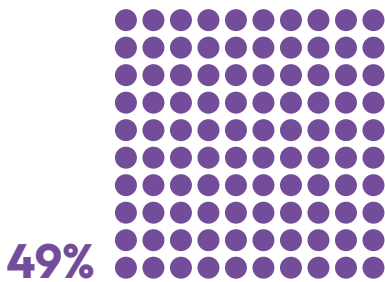
“I didn't like it but I had to do it for Duke of Edinburgh. I was forced to do it which made me not want to do it. I feel like when you're not given a choice it puts you off. If you get more choice, you are more likely to want to do it.”

4.3. Disabled teenage girls face additional barriers to being active compared to non-disabled teenage girls.

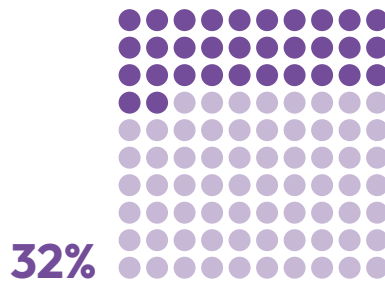
Disabled teenage girls face the same barriers to sport and exercise as non-disabled teenage girls, but there are additional complex barriers that mean many feel excluded from sport.

Figure 5:

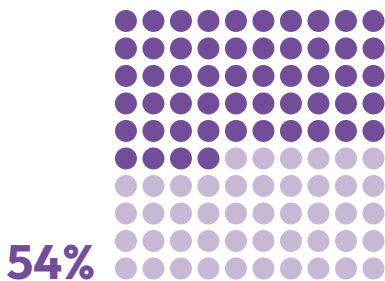
Shared Barriers:



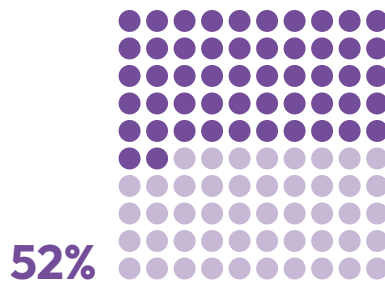
feel confident when they play sport or exercise.



find sport easy.

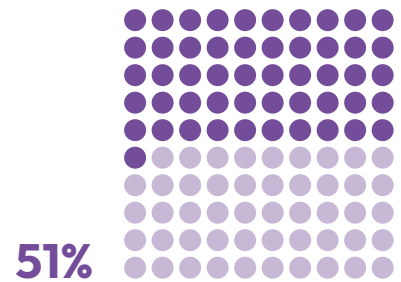


feel judged by others.

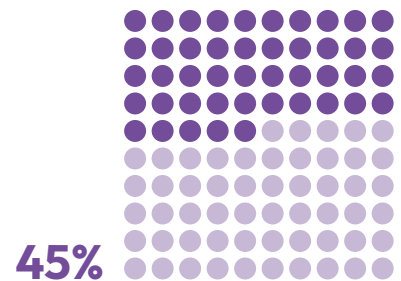


don't like others watching them.

Additional Barriers:



feel their impairment, health condition, illness or disability gets in the way.



feel that there isn't anyone similar to them doing sport or exercise.

Shared barriers

The survey data showed disabled teenage girls experience many of the same barriers as non-disabled teenage girls such as lower confidence (49%), finding sport or exercise hard (32%), not liking others watching them (52%) or feeling judged by others (54%) (Figure 5).

“If someone is better at the sport than you it is harder and you are less confident.”

Most of the girls we spoke to do not see themselves as sporty and often feel they aren't good enough to take part. Lower confidence and finding sport or exercise hard were both barriers experienced, in previous research, by teenage girls¹.

“I would feel more confident doing sports inside of school than outside of school because I find it hard to blend in with students from other schools.”

“The girls I play PE with aren't confident playing in front of anyone.”



Feelings of judgment

The girls we spoke to identified how shared barriers, such as feeling judged by others, are amplified by their impairment. Disabled teenage girls explained that they feel judged for both their capabilities to take part, for example, if something has to be adjusted due to their impairment, and solely because they have an impairment.

“The teacher had to adjust stuff for me so that I could do it properly. I felt like some people could judge me for this.”

“People could say mean things about me and my disability even though they don’t know about me.”



Additional barriers

Disabled teenage girls also experience additional barriers compared to non-disabled teenage girls. Two additional barriers they experience are their impairment getting in the way of them taking part (51%) and not having anyone similar to them doing sport or exercise (45%) (Figure 5).

In the Listening Labs the girls we spoke to expressed several different ways their impairment gets in the way of them taking part in sport or exercise. This includes preventing them from even attending, feeling in pain when taking part and fears of injury.

“It depends on what the sport is, when I have to do any running because I can’t run, I’m in a wheelchair.”

“My anxiety gets in the way. Physically I can’t get out to do it. I’m worried about not knowing what to do or getting in the way of others.”



Lack of representation

Girls we spoke to in the Listening Labs interpreted 'not having anyone similar to them doing sport or exercise' in different ways, depending on multiple social categorisations. Some girls said they don't see anyone with their impairment taking part and are put off sport or exercise as a result.

“I don't see anyone who is deaf who takes part in sport.”

“If there isn't anyone else like me doing it, it puts me off. I would prefer if there were other girls there or people with the same health condition as me.”

Other girls we spoke to said they don't see girls of the same ethnicity or faith as them taking part, but they didn't explicitly relate this barrier to their impairment. This finding highlights the importance of considering multiple social categorisations such as race, disability or socio-economic status when examining teenage girls' experiences.

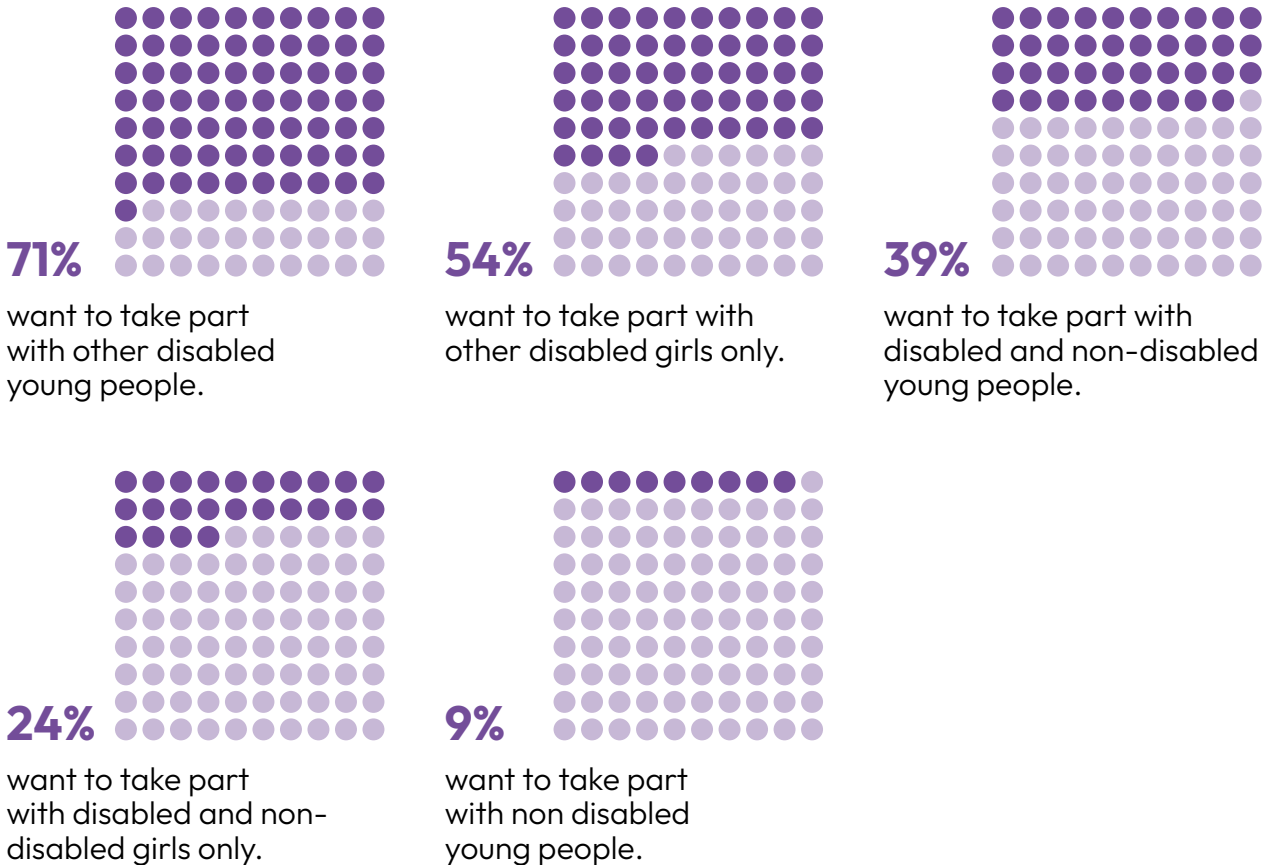
“Black Muslim girls aren't represented enough on social media doing sport – it's always white people or men.”

Overall, the barriers disabled teenage girls experience often leave girls with negative experiences of sport and exercise and feed a perception that sport and exercise isn't for them which leads to them disengaging from sport and exercise altogether.

4.4. Girls-only opportunities help girls find joy in sport and, for disabled teenage girls, participating with other disabled girls is important.

The findings highlight that it is important for disabled teenage girls to take part in sport and exercise with other disabled young people or other disabled girls. Due to feeling judged by others being a barrier to disabled teenage girls, it is unsurprising that it is important to take part with other disabled young people who can understand their experience.

Figure 6:



Who do disabled teenage girls want to take part with

The survey data found that, overall, taking part with other disabled young people is important, with 71% of girls stating that they want to take part with other disabled young people (Figure 6). This finding differs from previous Activity Alliance research which found that overall disabled children were more likely to want to take part in activities with disabled and non-disabled children (44%) (Figure 6). Activity Alliance's research focused on a younger age group (5-16 years old) and was not gender specific⁶. This indicates that disabled young people's preference of who they take part with varies with their age and/or gender.

“If there isn't anyone else like me doing it, it puts me off. I would prefer if there were other girls there or people with the same health condition as me.”

“I would prefer to do sports outside of school with just girls to start with.”



Girls-only provision

Disabled teenage girls also expressed wanting to take part in girls only provision. 54% want to take part with other disabled girls only and 24% want to take part with a mix of disabled and non-disabled girls (Figure 6). In the Listening Lab discussions, disabled teenage girls stated their preference for girls only provision and described negative experiences of taking part with boys.

“I enjoyed sports for fun, but then this boy came and ruined it all. Every week he said I couldn’t play because I was a girl.”

“I just can’t stand the competitiveness between the boys, when they have the ball they don’t pass the ball to me.”

“I loved sport but did not like PE, at school was made fun of, people saying stuff in the changing room, having a different body type to other people so they made fun. I have self-conscious thoughts about body image, worried about the boys watching.”

In light of these findings and the identified barrier around judgement from others, it is understandable that girls-only or disabled girls-only provision creates a safe space for disabled teenage girls to be active.

4.4. Coaches and instructors play a key role in creating a non-judgmental and welcoming environment.

Coaches and instructors need to understand the support needs of disabled teenage girls to prevent girls from having a negative experience or being excluded all together. Disabled teenage girls want to take part in a judgement-free environment where fun is prioritised, and coaches, volunteers and teachers play an important role in creating this environment for them.

Figure 7:

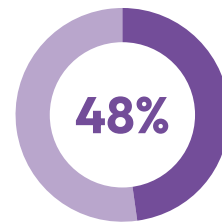
The role of coaches, volunteers and teachers



54% said that coaches or instructors don't understand their impairment, health condition, illness or disability.

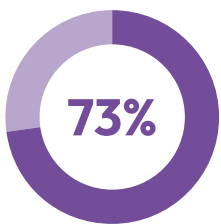


50% would find it easier to take part in sport/exercise if coaches or instructors were able to adapt to their needs.

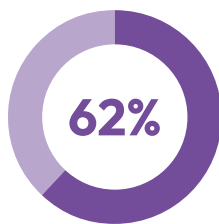


48% want coaches or instructors to give clearer instructions.

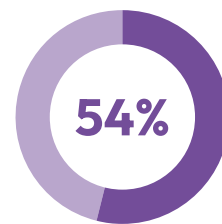
Creating a safe and inclusive environment



73% would take part in more sport and exercise if it was more fun/exciting or adventurous.



62% would take part in more sport and exercise if their friends did.



54% would take part in sports and exercise if they saw more people who look like them taking part.

The role of coaches and instructors

In both the survey and Listening Labs, disabled teenage girls emphasised the important role coaches or instructors play in their experience of sport and exercise. 54% of disabled teenage girls said coaches or instructors not understanding their impairment is a barrier to their participation that leaves them feeling excluded (Figure 7).

“Sometimes coaches understand a little but not as much as I would like them to.”

“A lot of the time, a lot of the scout leaders don’t really talk to me and think about what I would want to do. Sometimes that means the games we play aren’t as inclusive as they could be.”

Coaches adapting their practice to disabled teenage girls’ support needs was frequently identified as a factor that would encourage girls to be more active. 48% of disabled teenage girls said it would be easier for them to do more exercise if coaches gave clearer instructions and 50% said it would be easier to take part if coaches were able to adapt to their needs (Figure 7).

“Because I am deaf I can’t always hear the instructions.”

“I went swimming and a coach, not all coaches, didn’t understand that I have a learning difficulty, and kept shouting at me but I couldn’t understand the instructions because it makes me upset, but they didn’t understand that.”

Creating a safe and inclusive environment

The findings show that coaches need to create a judgement-free environment where disabled teenage girls feel included. This can be achieved by adapting an activity based on an individual's needs and prioritising fun. In our survey findings, 73% of disabled teenage girls said that they would play sport and exercise more if it was more fun/exciting/adventurous (Figure 7). In the Listening Labs, girls often associated sport and exercise with being fun when taking part with friends.

“It would be more fun if we did more sports that were less male dominated.”

“If I had no friends, I just wouldn't want to do it. But if I had friends there it would make me more confident.”



5. Summary Findings

In this summary, we outline how sport and exercise providers can support disabled teenage girls to be active. To do this we utilised Women in Sport's eight Principles for Success¹ to highlight key values that should underpin support provided to disabled teenage girls.

How to support disabled teenage girls

These girls:

- Understand why being active is good for them but specific barriers related to their disability or impairment stifle their confidence and feelings of belonging, preventing them from taking part
- Want to be more active but need much more tailored support to feel included.

What do we need to do:

- Provide a wider range of inclusive and accessible opportunities, inside and outside of school, where disabled teenage girls can feel supported, free from judgement and able to focus on having fun
- Coaches, instructors or teachers need to understand and adapt or tailor their activity to the needs of disabled teenage girls
- Leverage the key influencers in disabled teenage girls' lives from an early age to encourage and challenge perceptions of being active.

Principles for Success

Women in Sport's Reframing Sport for Teenage Girls research identified eight core Principles for Success which can be used by providers to evaluate and enhance sport and exercise offers aimed at teenage girls¹. For this project, based on our research findings, we have chosen four of the principles which we feel should be prioritised for disabled teenage girls:

1. No judgement –

take pressure off performance and give freedom to simply play.

Disabled teenage girls told us that feeling judged by others (54%) is a key barrier that stopped them from taking part. The findings show that taking part in a judgement-free environment where sport is less serious/competitive is a key component in supporting them to be active.

2. Invoke excitement – bring a sense of adventure and discovery.

73% of disabled teenage girls said they would be more active if sport and exercise was more fun/adventurous/exciting. They told us that taking part with their friends (62%) was important and would make being active more fun.

3. Give girls a voice and choice –

allow girls choice and control to feel empowered.

Disabled teenage girls are frustrated by the lack of accessible opportunities available to them, with 63% saying they would take part if it was easier to find opportunities nearby. The findings of this research highlight that disabled teenage girls want more of a say in shaping their opportunities to be active.

4. Open eyes to what's there –

redefine sport as more than school sport.

Less than half of disabled teenage girls (41%) enjoy PE but, too often, this is their only experience of sport, and they don't understand what other forms of community sport look like. We therefore need to raise awareness of the different types of sporting opportunities that are (or could be) available for disabled teenage girls in local communities.

6. Recommendations

The following summary recommendations are based on the research findings and form the basis of the Supporting Disabled Teenage Girls to be Active Toolkit. To read the full toolkit, please click on the link below.

Breaking Barriers Toolkit >

Access Sport recommends sport and exercise providers use these findings:

1. To build their understanding of disabled teenage girls and their attitudes towards sport and exercise.
2. To provide more offers to a disabled teenage girl audience, that prioritise fun and are judgement free.
3. To engage disabled teenage girls' voices in the planning and delivery of disability-inclusive sport and exercise sessions. This will ensure disabled teenage girls feel empowered to take part and feel included.

Access Sport recommends commissioners, funders, and policymakers use these findings:

4. To embed and prioritise inclusive coaching in the education and professional development of the sport and exercise workforce. Training must help coaches understand the needs of disabled teenage girls and build confidence in adapting their sessions to meet support needs.
5. To invest in more inclusive opportunities both in and out of school for disabled teenage girls. There is a sport for everyone and, from our work with a wide range of sports and activities, we know that all sports can be made to be inclusive. Disabled teenage girls should have the same amount of local choice as their non-disabled peers.
6. To ensure future research focused on teenage girls' experiences recognises that they are not a homogenous group and applies an intersectionality lens. Multiple social categorisations such as race, disability or class should be used to examine teenage girls' experiences.

Access Sport is committed to embedding the findings of this research into our ongoing work to support community sports clubs, coaches and volunteers to be more inclusive.

References

¹Women in Sport (2022), Reframing Sport for Teenage Girls: Tackling Teenage Disengagement

²Office for National Statistics (2023), Disability by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales: Census 2021

³Girl Guiding (2023), Girls' Attitudes Survey 2023

⁴Sport England (2023), Active Lives Children and Young People Survey Academic Year 2022-23

⁵Youth Sport Trust (2023), Girls Active National Report

⁶Activity Alliance (2020), My Active Future Including Every Child

Research Partners



Access Sport is a national charity with a vision that no one should be excluded from the transformational benefits of community sport. Their mission is to make inclusion the norm by tackling the access barriers faced by disadvantaged and disabled young people. They do this by training, equipping, and supporting community sports clubs, organisations and volunteers to provide inclusive programmes, unleashing their potential to transform the lives of underserved young people in their local communities.



The Sweaty Betty Foundation is a UK charity empowering women and girls of all backgrounds to get active and stay active for life. They champion impactful programs and develop groundbreaking research to help girls discover the ways they love to move, in schools, communities, and online. They want every girl to have the opportunity to engage in fun, inclusive activities. Working alongside partners, they co-create and design programs to bring about systemic change.



Women in Sport is a charity whose purpose is to create lasting positive change for women and girls in sport and society. Their 'Reframing Sport for Teenage Girls' research (2019, 2022) has been instrumental in informing how the sector engages girls and young women. Where possible, and with the support of Women in Sport, the 'Supporting Disabled Teenage Girls to be Active' research aimed to reflect and build upon their original research questions and findings, allowing comparisons where appropriate.



Nuffield Health is the UK's largest healthcare Charity. Driven by its purpose to build a healthier nation, the Charity is committed to making the nation fitter, healthier, happier and stronger. In 2023, Nuffield Health launched Move Together – fun, inclusive and free exercise classes across the UK aimed at 11 – 16 year old girls. This programme was designed to provide a safe, confidence-boosting environment for young women to come together and explore new activities outside the school curriculum.



We would love to hear how you have used this research. Get in touch at:

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