

## DAY 1 CHECKLIST

# HOW TO COACH AND SUPPORT WOMEN AND TEEN GIRL ATHLETES

This checklist, created by Gatorade in partnership with the [Women's Sports Foundation](#), is designed to support women and teen girl athletes. This resource serves as a guide for athletic directors, coaches, trainers, program leaders, and others who are working with female athletes, to create safe and inclusive environments for all girls and women.

### Topics Covered:

- Establish Core Values
- Model Inclusive and Supportive Language
- Create a Physical and Emotional Safe Space
- Keep Athletes Engaged
- Support Positive Mental Health
- Support Menstrual Health and Well-Being
- Offer Uniforms that Reflect Respect
- Provide Access to Equitable Resources
- Identify Women Coaches and Athletes to Serve as Role Models



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## ESTABLISH CORE VALUES

Set high expectations and support athletes wherever they are in their sport development. For those new to sports, focus on the importance of teamwork, communication, and goal setting. Help athletes learn from their mistakes and let them know they may not succeed right away. Nurture the development of their skills over time.

- ❑ Break through the more-limited ideas of what it means to be an athlete. Women and teen girl athletes may face additional pressure to physically look a certain way. It is important as their coach or trainer to make them feel confident and comfortable in their own bodies.
- ❑ Help athletes establish personal goals and achievements vs. trying to compare them against one another.
- ❑ Establish team guidelines on defining harassment and how to confidentially report harassment.
- ❑ Establish clear consequences for those who violate team rules or policy.

## MODEL INCLUSIVE AND SUPPORTIVE LANGUAGE

- ❑ Refer to women and teen girl athletes in gender-neutral terms; avoid saying “you guys” or “let’s go girls.”
- ❑ Women and teen girl athletes may face forms of discrimination and bias that can also be compounded by race, ethnicity, disability, religion, gender identity, perceived sexuality, etc. Empower athletes to challenge racism and other forms of discrimination when they see it.
- ❑ Acknowledge that everyone’s experiences are different and create opportunities for athletes to develop understanding and empathy.

## CREATE A PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SAFE SPACE

- ❑ Create an environment where athletes feel comfortable speaking up, taking chances, trying new things, and sharing what’s on their mind. For example, break into smaller groups when discussing sensitive topics and encourage turn taking.
- ❑ Build relationships both with and among the athletes in your program.
- ❑ Take the time to connect with players as individuals, by asking about their interests in school or other activities.
- ❑ Hold the team accountable for preventing and stopping bullying.
- ❑ Keep an eye out for the rules of the game, safety of space and equipment, and how hard and long athletes play. For example, on the field, if you observe anything concerning, stop immediately, assess the situation, and take corrective action (e.g., first aid, hydration, rest, supportive coaching) as necessary.
- ❑ Provide ample time for a warm up and cool down and ensure that hydration and rest are built into the session.

## KEEP ATHLETES ENGAGED

- ❑ Encourage athletes to talk about what they like and find fun and joyful about sports, along with their motivations to play.
- ❑ Set individual and team goals that include both skill-specific goals and broader goals (i.e., communication and teamwork). Measure progress, not just the end result.
- ❑ Offer constructive feedback. Recognize and verbalize growth and the development of new skills as you see them unfold.
- ❑ Encourage athletes to follow and watch women’s sports and use these opportunities to spark conversation with your team.



## SUPPORT POSITIVE MENTAL HEALTH

- ❑ Establish an open and supportive team environment where athletes feel comfortable speaking up and knowing who to turn to within the school or community when they need additional support.
- ❑ Introduce mindfulness and/or meditation to help athletes connect with their physical and mental health and manage stress. [We Play Interactive™](#) is a free digital resource that includes 30 activity-based modules and includes meditative breathing exercises.
- ❑ Be observant of athletes' mental health and become familiar with warning signs that might indicate a problem. This includes, but is not limited to:
  - A change in the athlete's overall effort or performance during practices and games
  - Less interaction with teammates
  - Increased anxiety about game day performance
  - Difficulty concentrating during practice
  - Overall mood swings interacting with teammates and coaches

### Other more general warning signs can include:

- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities
- Restlessness or edginess
- Irritability
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Decreased energy, fatigue, feeling "slowed down"
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Insomnia, early-morning awakening, or oversleeping
- Low appetite and weight loss, or overeating and weight gain

- ❑ If a coach or trainer notices any of these signs, they should contact their head athletic director or the school's mental health professional to follow-up with that particular athlete.
- ❑ At the start of the season, provide athletes with individual names and resources within the school or community they can turn to for help and support.
- ❑ There are times when you may need to act more quickly. Ask yourself: Is the individual's physical or mental health or safety at risk? If the answer is yes (or maybe), it's time to take more immediate action.
  - Thoughts of death or suicide and suicide attempts all require immediate attention.
  - Follow your team/league/program's protocol for safety and/or contact the appropriate authorities immediately. When in doubt, make the call.

For more information on supporting women and teen girl athlete's mental well being visit [Athletes for Hope](#).

## SUPPORT MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

- ❑ Encourage athletes to speak up if they are experiencing concerns about menstruation that may impact their practice or game.
- ❑ If athletes are not comfortable directly talking to a particular coach about menstruation, identify another adult within your athletic department they can turn to.
- ❑ As menstruation can cause symptoms that may impact an athlete's output, encourage athletes to listen to their bodies and get extra rest, hydration, and nutrition as needed.
- ❑ Menstruation can be a time to focus on cross training, slower paced endurance, and strength training.
- ❑ Assure athletes at the start of the season that they will not be penalized for their practices or game day performance.
- ❑ Ensure that school bathrooms are accessible and appropriately stocked at all times with menstrual products.



## OFFER UNIFORMS THAT REFLECT RESPECT

- ❑ Be mindful of ordering or providing uniforms that all athletes can feel comfortable participating in (i.e. if Field Hockey uniforms are skirts or skorts, provide a shorts option for any athlete who feels more comfortable wearing shorts instead).
- ❑ Be mindful of ordering and requiring athletes to wear white bottom uniforms. If your school's uniforms are white bottoms, consider changing to a non-white color bottom uniform for menstruation inclusivity throughout the season.

## PROVIDE ACCESS TO EQUITABLE RESOURCES

- ❑ Make sure you are providing women and teen girl athletes access to the same type of training equipment, training hours, and practice times as boys' and men's teams.
- ❑ Ensure athletes have access to sports equipment that are the right size for women and teen girl athletes to use.

## IDENTIFY WOMEN COACHES AND ATHLETES TO SERVE AS ROLE MODELS

- ❑ Identify women athletes or women coaches within your school or sports community to serve as mentors for younger women athletes to turn to for questions and support.

### RESOURCES AND BEST PRACTICES ON COACHING WOMEN AND TEEN GIRL ATHLETES

As research has shown that athletes respond better to more collaborative coaching styles, here are several resources to turn to on coaching women and teen girl athletes:

**Women's Sports Foundation We Play Interactive:**  
<https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/get-involved/we-play-interactive>

**University of Minnesota's Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport CoachingHer:**  
<https://coachingher.com>

**For an Additional List of Tools and Resources Visit Women's Sports Foundation:**  
<https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org>