New research finds girls' confidence and enjoyment in physical activity plummets as puberty begins

Friday 11 October, 2024

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New research released on International Day of the Girl by children's charity the Youth Sport Trust, highlights the deepening crisis of confidence girls face when they hit puberty, and the increasing impact of this on their physical activity levels and wellbeing throughout their teenage years and into adulthood.

Most girls in the UK begin their period at around 12 years of age, the age where their confidence to take part in and enjoyment of PE decline rapidly - according to this year's Youth Sport Trust Girls Active survey. Meanwhile the same survey has shown boys' experiences and attitudes remain relatively consistent across all age groups.

The Youth Sport Trust Girls Active survey is funded by Sport England National Lottery Funding and has been running since 2016, and this year received responses from more than 15,000 girls and boys aged between 7 and 18. Key findings from this year's survey showed:

- The number of girls enjoying PE drops dramatically throughout school life. 86% of girls aged 7 to 8 enjoy PE, compared to 56% of girls aged 14 to 15.
- 46% of girls aged 14-15 report a lack of confidence stops them being physically active compared to 26% of girls aged 7-8.
- PE kit continues to be a contentious issue for girls, particularly around the onset of puberty. Just 23% of girls aged 14 to 15 feel confident in their PE kit, in contrast to 65% of girls aged 7 to 8.
- 61% of girls aged 11 and over worry about leaking in their PE kit and 58% of girls this age would like to have more PE kit options to choose from.

Alongside more flexible kit options, girls also want more empathy and support from teachers, coaches and peers to encourage them to continue participating. 42% of girls aged 11 and over do not feel comfortable at all talking to their PE teacher about their period, despite the impact it is having on their confidence to participate. The Youth Sport Trust's Girls Active programme aims to tackle the barriers girls experience and helps to build a movement of girls and young women in primary and secondary schools, empowering them to take positive action through influencing, leading, and inspiring their peers. Results show 97% of leaders and 58% of participants across the programme felt more confident to take part in sport and physical activity.

Ali Oliver MBE, Chief Executive of the Youth Sport Trust said:

'Sadly we are not currently getting it right for girls in the UK when it comes to providing positive experiences of PE, Sport and Play in schools.

'We must proactively support girls through puberty, listening to and responding to their needs if we are to build their confidence and capability. Without this support, we know their experiences at school can alienate them from sport and physical activity for life. For too long, society has pressured girls to minimise the effects of puberty and 'keep calm and carry on', an attitude which can instil a deep sense of shame, with consequences for how they feel about physical activity and sport.

'Also amplified by this new research is a message from young women and girls. They want to do more physical activity in school, and are particularly motivated by fun and friendship alongside being fit and healthy.

The Youth Sport Trust is committed to ensuring all children and young people enjoy the life changing benefits that come from play and sport but as the new Secretary of State for Education Bridget Phillipson has rightly stated, ***"the health benefits of sport and play are obvious, and for girls in particular, focusing on what they can achieve helps them develop."***

The Girls Active programme which has been developed and evolved over two decades offers a blueprint for all schools and we are constantly seeking new partners and funders to help extend the reach of the programme."

The Youth Sport Trust and LEGO Group are proud to be working together to tackle barriers girls experience, empowering them to make positive change thorough participation in sport and play. After reading the results of the survey, **LEGO Team Unstoppable Ambassador and England footballer Lauren Hemp** said:

"It's disappointing to see such a drop in confidence and enjoyment in PE for girls as they go through puberty. What's equally concerning is that this can affect attitudes to physical activity throughout your life, which can have a huge negative impact on wellbeing, health and quality of life. It's so important we listen to girls and increase opportunities for them to be active in a way that works for them."

The Youth Sport Trust is calling upon the government to support schools to improve access to PE, Sport and Play for girls by:

- Listening to girls and empowering them to make choices about the kit they wear and how activities are delivered to build their confidence
- Increasing opportunities for girls to be physically active throughout the school day including through PE, in breakfast and co-curricular sports clubs, and at break times
- Training teachers in tackling gender stereotypes and education around body confidence and female biology.

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