



FEMALE FOOTBALL *Club Guide*





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TO ASSIST CLUBS TO PROVIDE
AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT
(TO BE USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE AFL JUNIOR FOOTBALL MATCH GUIDE)



In partnership with AFL State and Territory affiliates:



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission

The AFL gratefully acknowledges the support of the Australian Government for AFL Development Programs, through the Australian Sports Commission.



AFL GUIDELINES FOR THE CONDUCT OF AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL FOR FEMALE PLAYERS AGED 13 - 18 YEARS

FEMALE FRIENDLY CLUBS GUIDE

- » Female Friendly clubs checklist: Actively supporting the inclusion of females
- » Setting up a new female football team

FURTHER INFORMATION

- » Visual of pathway
- » Youth Girls Nationals
- » Womens State representative games

A GUIDE TO SETTING UP FEMALE FRIENDLY CLUBS

In excess of 194,000 females now play Australian Football. This represents a growth of over 165% in the last five years.

If female football was its own Australian sport it would exceed the number of all participants in Gymnastics and Sailing (both of which are global Olympic sports and have multiple formats of their sport).

With these facts in mind it is important to understand the benefits in becoming a female-friendly football club and attracting more female members to your Club.

The benefits of being a Female-Friendly Football Club include the ability to attract:

- » More members and supporters
- » More players
- » Diversification and lead to better decision-making
- » Wider sponsorship and fundraising appeal
- » Increased numbers of volunteers
- » More appealing social atmosphere
- » Families

There are three key areas of female participation in supporters, volunteers and participants including players. If your Club doesn't have female supporters or volunteers you are unlikely to attract female players or coaches for example.

If you are committed to being a Female Friendly Club and inclusive of all you should view the Club as a whole, which means discussing areas such as Club culture, facilities, policies and resources. For the purposes of this Guide we will specifically help your Club set up a safe and welcoming environment for a new female team.

Setting up a new female football team for the first time can seem daunting to clubs that have traditionally catered for male members only. Clubs who have instigated a female team are full of praise for what the girls and women have positively added to their club. These clubs also report that recruiting female players was easier than they first expected particularly those that followed a few simple steps.

This guide provides a series of checklists for your Club to work through to ensure you provide a safe and

inclusive environment. Opportunities to get girls involved are listed together with suggesting who in your Club can take responsibility for implementing the strategy. Tips and appropriate practices to ensure females are recruited and welcomed form part of the introductory comment before each strategy.

Web links and organisations that can assist your Club to successfully recruit and engage females are listed. A series of Club Case Studies providing real examples where Clubs have instigated a new female team and provided a more inclusive environment for their female supporters, can be found at www.aflcommunityclub.com.au

Clubs who have already successfully recruited females will find the checklists useful for appraising their current strategies and providing fresh ideas for them to address to make the experience even better.



1) First impressions of your club

Research tells us that today's young people perceive Clubs are not for them. A welcoming first visit that helps the girl feel connected and is fun is vital to ensuring new players return.

Description of task to be completed	Coach	Administrator /Committee	Team Manager
» Strategies to welcome new female members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Select a Peer Buddy from player group to partner new players » Provide female role models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Select a Welcome Officer to host new members » Club facilities are clean and hygienically presented » All members of the Club are featured in club memorabilia such as trophies, photos and banners » Offer discounts to current players who introduce new members » Volunteers and staff are qualified, friendly and approachable » Male members of the Club display appropriate behaviours towards female members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Implement a 'try before you buy' series of sessions before requesting membership payment / registration fee from new members

2) Recruiting new female players

The strongest recruiter of females is by a personal face-to-face/word-of-mouth promotion. Females are more likely to try a new experience if they know someone. Ask current club members (players, supporters and volunteers) to recruit female friends and relatives.

Description of task to be completed	Coach	Administrator /Committee	Team Manager
» Strategies to recruit new females	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Emphasise the social and health benefits in training sessions » Conduct clinics at local schools for girls 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Identify a female 'passionate driver' » Enlist the help of a female role model » Use digital platforms to communicate » Set up a Club Facebook page and Twitter account » Run a school based gala day for girls » Provide payment plans for families » Offer family discounts » Get a mouthguard provider connected to the club to offer discounts » Seek sponsorship and implement fundraising activities » Encourage players to umpire junior grades 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Where numbers are small in a Club consider combining with another Club

3) Addressing the key factors that influence a female's participation in sport

It is important that clubs understand the factors that impact most on young females leaving sport. The following checklist provides ideas Clubs can adopt to maximise their girls' participation. The strategies suggested are only a starting point so it is expected that clubs will explore others depending on what their female players see as relevant to their needs.

ENVIRONMENT FACTORS

Club rooms are important as they are the place where training sessions start, meetings and social events are conducted and where the club's achievements are displayed and celebrated. They say a lot about the culture and values of a club and are an important first impression to members.

Improving access for girls and women involves taking a closer look at the physical environment of the club facilities, equipment and rules.

Description of task to be completed	Coach	Administrator /Committee	Team Manager
» Female-friendly facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Females have equal access to the facilities and equipment and are not allocated late evening time slots » Gym equipment is suitable for use by females such as availability of light weights 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Changerooms have lockable doors on cubicles (or shower curtains) » Club facilities are clean and hygienically presented » Sanitary disposal bin in every toilet » Adequate lighting in the car park » Social events do not always revolve around alcohol » Invite female input into how to improve facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Operate Buddy system to escort single females to their car at night after training and social functions

For more information on where to seek assistance to improve your Club facilities, contact your State Australian Football organisation directly. State contacts can be found at: <http://www.aflcommunityclub.com.au/> and on page 21 of this Guide.



4) Body image issues

Adolescent girls concerns about their body shape, weight management and the dislike of sweating are valid reasons they leave sport as an adolescent. They want to feel and look good so getting fit is a good selling point. Ill-fitting apparel and a lack of confidence as their body matures cause major difficulties for many young girls.

Description of task to be completed	Coach	Administrator /Committee	Team Manager
» Strategies to provide positive body image support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Encourage all girls no matter their size or body shape » Invite a local dietitian to discuss links between food, activity and health » Be flexible with clothing requirements accommodating the needs of various cultural groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Provide healthy food choices at the canteen / kiosk » Provide mirrors in the changerooms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Source an apparel provider who makes female shaped garments » Ask the girls for their ideas on apparel design and sizing

To better understand the implications of body image issues go to:

The Clearing House is a compilation of easy-to-read academic articles from researchers around the world who provide background about body image and recommendations to coaches:

<http://whv.org.au/publications-resources/clearinghouse-connectors/chc-physical-activity-and-body-image>

One hundred and ten of the United Kingdom's best female athletes describe some of the pressures they feel and the sources of these pressures to conform to a particular body "norm":

<http://sport.bt.com/womeninsport/bt-sport-survey-body-image-insecurities-rife-in-womens-sport-S11363867248465>

5) Opportunities to highlight social aspects of your Club

Females are drawn to a sport and stay involved because of the people. If their friends leave it is unlikely that they will stay involved even if they love the sport. Social opportunities therefore rank higher than skill development or the competition for females.

The role of the family changes between junior girls and youth girls ages. Where parents were supportive by providing transport and watching games, by youth girls it is peers who provide the most support. This is a major reason why young females do not make the transition from primary school age to secondary school age sport.

Description of task to be completed	Coach	Administrator /Committee	Team Manager
» Strategies to help promote the social aspects for females	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Focus on fun and participation rather than winning » Ask the girls what they want from their club experience » Incorporate music into training sessions » Link youth girls up with junior girls » Mentor Youth Girls who can help coach a junior girls team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Provide a range of activities to cater for the girls' desire for socialising » Develop the female pathway so girls can play from five years through to the top age group » Conduct some female only social events such as a movie night, ten pin bowling, fashion parade etc » Encourage parents to take on roles in female teams through car pooling, coaching, umpiring, watching games and other roles around the club 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Conduct an exit survey to ascertain why the girls leave the club / AFL

INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

Girls have so many competing activities in their lifestyle that as they get older sport tends to play a smaller role. Numerous competing activities impact on an adolescent's available time such as study, part-time work, relationships and other sports.

Description of task to be completed	Coach	Administrator /Committee	Team Manager
» Strategies to help participants manage being time poor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Ask the girls what suits their overall timetable and conduct training on those days/times » Be flexible with your approach to the girls commitment encouraging them to attend at least one training session a week or play them every two weeks » Provide the opportunity for them to get fit and stay involved 		
» Strategies to meet the girls desire for less competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Place striving for excellence ahead of winning » Provide good skill learning in a fun and social environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Provide more social physical activities that cater for different skill levels and broad range of health interests such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » AFL Active » AFL 9s » A 'pay as you play' version of AFL that requires less commitment than full sided games » Zumba or yoga 	

SOCIETAL FACTORS

Some girls relate incidences of teasing, bullying and feelings of non-acceptance when they go to a club. This can be a strong deterrent to them getting involved in a male-dominated sport in particular where members may be influenced heavily by stereotypes of what a female should be like. Often being a strong, athletic female is not part of that stereotype.

Description of task to be completed	Coach	Administrator /Committee	Team Manager
» Strategies to promote inclusion of all members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Implement a Code of Conduct and an education process should the Code be breached » Explain context and football terms especially to multicultural players 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Focus on developing the pathway from Auskick onwards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Be prepared to learn and educate players about the various cultural backgrounds of players within the team.