

ACTIVELY ENGAGING WOMEN AND GIRLS

Active for Life Stage Considerations Females age 12+*

Canadian Sport For Life (CS4L) is a movement to improve the quality of sport and physical activity. Active for Life is the final destination for all Canadians in **Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD)** – a training, competition and recovery pathway guiding an individual’s experience in sport and physical activity from infancy through all phases of adulthood.

In the **Active for Life** stage, women and girls enjoy lifelong participation in a variety of competitive and recreational sport and physical activity opportunities, and are engaged as leaders (coaches, officials, and administrators). Athletes can enter this stage at any time. Some will enter this stage after developing physical literacy in the **FUNdamentals** and **Learn to Train** stages, pursuing ongoing participation in recreational sport or unstructured physical activity. Others will move to this stage as their performance goals shift from the high performance pathway (i.e. from the **Train to Train**, **Train to Compete**, or **Train to Win** stages).

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FEMALE ATHLETES

Develop physical literacy: Many women and girls in this stage are not yet physically literate due to social and systemic barriers that limit opportunities for early sport and physical activity participation. **Physical literacy** is the motivation, confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding to value and take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life. “Learn to” programs provided by sport clubs, recreation centres and other organizations can build women’s and girls’ fundamental movement skills, sport specific skills, knowledge, and confidence – providing a stepping stone for participation in other sport and physical activity pursuits. Safe, accessible, culturally appropriate, female-only programs should focus on fun, and deliver age- and stage-appropriate skill development opportunities.

Create supportive conditions to (re)engage: Women’s and girls’ involvement in the LTAD pathway may be interrupted by changing priorities or life events (e.g. peer pressure, other interests, education and career, child-raising or caregiving, and illness or injury). Coaches, families, friends and others play an important role in creating “on and off ramps” that ease these transitions and make it easy for athletes to re-engage when circumstances allow. Collaborate to address the barriers to participation (e.g. lack of time, limited access and opportunity, injury recovery). Encourage athletes leaving high-performance sport to explore options for

less intense competition or masters-level events, or to try a new recreational activity that will meet their health and social needs. Invite a friend to try something new, or create a buddy-system to increase accountability and commitment to a program. Be active with your family to increase health and wellbeing.

Encourage leadership – Pursuing a leadership role is one way for athletes to expand or transition their involvement in sport and physical activity and maintain connection with their passion. Encourage athletes to be certified as coaches and officials, and to pursue sport-related post-secondary education. Sport organizations should develop policies and practices that recruit, retain and recognize female leaders. Actively mentor and sponsor emerging leaders to support their success.

Support diversity – Engaging women and girls in sport and physical activity for life requires the environments where they play, train, compete, volunteer, work and live to be inclusive and respectful of diversity. This includes diversity in gender, race, ethnicity, culture, ability, body size, and sexual identity. Leaders and decision-makers must consider language, images, recognition, recruitment of staff and volunteers, and accommodation of women’s and girls’ needs in their programs and organizations.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

LTAD Stage Considerations for Female Athletes series – <https://womenandsport.ca/learning-opportunities/presentations/long-term-development-for-women-and-girls/>
Actively Engaging Women and Girls: Addressing the Psycho-Social Factors – <https://womenandsport.ca/resources/publications/actively-engaging-women-and-girls/>
Other Actively Engaging Supplements
Recommendations for Families
Three Rs of Leadership Development
About CS4L and LTAD – <https://sportforlife.ca/>

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*Stage-related ages are guidelines only, and should consider developmental appropriateness and variations in readiness due to psycho-social factors.