

Coaching Girls Effectively

By The Coaching HER® Team

Coaching girls effectively is about being aware and intentional. The data shows that girls who feel heard by their coaches are 2.5 times more likely to stay in sport (Aspen Institute Project Play, 2020), and athletes with positive coach relationships report better mental health and confidence (Tucker Center, 2018). Coaching matters not just in what is taught, but in how girls experience the environment. Girls experience the world and sport differently than boys, due to societal expectations and biases, including how some coaches 'coach' them. To coach girls effectively while reducing gender stereotypes, the Coaching HER® curriculum focuses on shifting from "traditional" coaching (which is often based on how boys are coached) to a gender-responsive model.

Research shows coaches often perceive girls as physiologically inferior, psychologically weaker, and socially unsuitable to sport, compared to boys. These common gender stereotypes fail to create inclusive, safe, and empowering environments for girls, reducing retention in sport (Goorevich & LaVoi, 2025). A common stereotype is that girls are "fragile" or "less competitive" than boys. Coaching HER® suggests pushing back by keeping expectations high. In reality, girls want to be coached seriously and taken seriously, as athletes. They want clear feedback, challenges, and opportunities to improve. So what does coaching girls more effectively actually look like? It starts with coaching the individual, not the stereotype. Set high expectations based on each athlete's skill and effort. Be specific with feedback so girls know how to improve. Use language that focuses on growth, learning, and confidence, not stereotypical assumptions about physicality, ability, toughness or motivation.

Coaching more effectively also means listening and engaging. Simple check-ins—asking girls how they're experiencing practice, what helps them learn, what they want to improve, or what makes them feel supported—send a powerful message. When girls feel safe sharing their thoughts, engagement increases and trust grows.

Finally, coaching more effectively means creating opportunities for connection and leadership. Encourage teamwork, recognize effort, and invite girls to lead warm-ups, drills, or team conversations. These small shifts reinforce that girls belong, are capable, and are valued.

Coaching girls effectively isn't about changing who girls are, it's about changing how we coach. When coaches make intentional adjustments, girls are likely to stay in sport longer, develop confidence, and carry the benefits of sport far beyond the season. Important Note: Coaching education works best as a steady stream of information.. Coaching better doesn't happen in a single training or one-time workshop, it happens through consistent learning over time. A monthly focus (i.e. one module, one concept, or one reflection) gives coaches space to learn, try something new, and adjust. Topics like challenging stereotypes, belonging, communication, leadership, or confidence can be introduced one at a time and reinforced throughout the season. This approach respects coaches' time while recognizing that coaching girls effectively is an ongoing skill-building process, not a box to check.

Sources

Aspen Institute Project Play. (2020). *State of Play: Trends and Developments in Youth Sports*.
Deloitte. (2023). *Women's Sports: The Next Generation of Growth and Opportunity*.
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Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport. (2018). *Developing Physically Active Girls: An Evidence-Based Multidisciplinary Approach*.