

BRITISH JUDO

SUPPORTING WOMEN & GIRLS IN JUDO: COACHING GUIDANCE FOR COACHES & CLUBS

SUPPORTING WOMEN & GIRLS IN JUDO

INTRODUCTION

Women and girls play an important role in judo across all four Home Nations, as athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers, parents and leaders. There is already strong practice taking place across our clubs and communities, and this guidance aims to build on that work.

We also recognise that women and girls remain underrepresented in some areas of judo, particularly in long-term participation, coaching, volunteering and leadership. The reasons for this are varied and may include confidence, visibility, environment, session structure, life stages, physical contact, cultural considerations and wider social pressures.

The four Home Nations lead by the British Judo Association has established a Women and Girls Working Group to explore positive, practical ways to improve engagement, experience and retention in judo. This guide is intended as a practical resource for reflection and action, supporting coaches and clubs to create environments where more women and girls feel welcomed, supported and able to thrive in judo.



A WORD FROM THE PRESIDENT



ROWENA BIRCH
PRESIDENT, BRITISH JUDO

Judo is a sport that can bring such a rich range of experience and benefits to so many people, yet many miss out as they don't even get as far as walking in the door. Wouldn't it be great to see many more girls and women enjoying judo and feeling the dojo is a place for them?

My parents signed me up for ballet, my brother judo. I was made to sit on the side of the mat while my brother practiced, getting very bored, hating it. So, at 7 years old I asked if I could join in the judo classes as well. My grandma was a little surprised. 'Is that really a sport for a girl?' she asked, luckily, my mum just answered, 'of course it is!', so my judo journey began.

Overall, I feel that I experienced very few barriers to joining and progressing in judo. My club already had some excellent female role models and there were plenty of other girls on the mat for me to practice with if I wanted. By the time I got to teenage years it was just something I did, my family did, and so no consideration was ever given to the possibility of stopping. I had the support of great coaches and mentors who looked to develop the individual person and see the potential regardless of gender. Olympian, National Coach, Board member and now President were all available to me. However, I recognise for other people, with different ambitions, fears, experiences, culture and faith, there can be real and perceived blocks to joining our judo community and staying in it.

This guide is a really useful starting point, as it considers feedback from female judoka and also evidence based findings from research of the wider population, outside our sport. These facts and ideas are an excellent starting point for clubs, coaches and Home Country working groups to consider and experiment with, so we can unlock the love of judo for so many more.

LET'S GET CALLING ALL THE GIRLS....

SUPPORTING WOMEN & GIRLS IN JUDO

Welsh Judo welcomes and supports the development of this Women and Girls Coaching Guidance. We recognise the important role coaches play in creating positive, inclusive and supportive environments that help women and girls enjoy judo, develop with confidence and remain involved in the sport.

The guidance provides a valuable opportunity to improve understanding |across the coaching workforce, encourage more considered coaching practice and help ensure the experiences of women and girls are reflected in how judo is delivered.

We are particularly supportive of a collaborative Home Nations approach, providing coaches with consistent principles while allowing each nation to build on these through its own programmes, workforce development and participation activity.

For Welsh Judo, this aligns strongly with our continued work to improve opportunities and experiences for women and girls across the sport, both as participants and as part of the wider coaching and volunteer workforce.

At the Northern Ireland Judo Federation, we are committed to creating inclusive environments where every member feels valued, respected and supported. Our goal is to foster a welcoming atmosphere that encourages participation, growth and long-term belonging and retention across all levels of the sport.

We recognise the vital role of the female workforce — from athletes and coaches to volunteers and officials — and we actively promote opportunities for women to lead, contribute and thrive. Through targeted promotion and development initiatives, we ensure that women are represented, heard and empowered as equals within the Federation.

Our commitment extends beyond the mat. We provide practical support for women's health and wellbeing, including FAB bags for menstrual management at events, open conversations around menstruation, and awareness programmes addressing menopause. These initiatives help normalise important topics and ensure that every woman feels comfortable, confident and cared for within our judo community.

By embedding equality, respect and understanding into everything we do, we make women feel part of the Federation — not as participants, but as partners shaping the future of Northern Ireland Judo.

BRITISH JUDO

SUPPORTING WOMEN & GIRLS IN JUDO

JudoScotland is pleased to support the launch of this guide to supporting women and girls in judo. We recognise the value of positive, encouraging and understanding role models within sport, and this begins with the coach. Coaches play a huge role in the development and enjoyment of a young judoka, helping to shape their journey within judo and create positive experiences.

The gender gap in sport remains an important issue across all the Home Nations. Women and girls continue to participate in sport at lower rates than men and boys. There is a clear opportunity to encourage greater participation, address barriers and create more inclusive sporting environments where everyone feels welcome and supported.

JudoScotland recognises the value of shared learning and best practice. Through collaboration across the Home Nations, we have explored the challenges and barriers women face in judo and learned what each Nation is doing to overcome them. By sharing insights, experiences, and examples of what works well, and learning from what doesn't, we can continue to develop our approaches and build on good practice across our sport.

In Scotland, this guidance will complement the ongoing work of JudoScotland, clubs, coaches, staff and partners to create welcoming, supportive and inclusive environments where women and girls can thrive. By working together, we can help ensure that every woman and girl has the opportunity to enjoy judo, develop her skills, reach her potential and feel empowered to continue her journey in the sport.

JudoScotland

Throughout my journey in judo, some of the biggest influences on me have been the strong female role models who showed me what was possible. Their support, encouragement and leadership helped shape not only the coach I am today, but also my confidence and belief in myself.

That experience is why I feel so strongly about creating positive environments for women and girls in our sport. Every female judoka should feel welcomed, valued and supported to achieve their goals, whatever they may be.

By understanding and embracing the needs of women and girls, we can help more people enjoy the benefits of judo and inspire the next generation to stay involved and thrive.

I am proud to support this guidance and the positive impact it can have in making judo a more inclusive, welcoming and empowering sport for all.

Chloe Cowen, GB Home Nations Coach, British Judo

ENGLAND JUDO



CONTEXT & RESEARCH: FEMALE ENGAGEMENT IN SPORT

The statistics for women & girls both engaging and retaining membership fall short of the demographics of gender in the UK

Together, we aim to celebrate and build on existing successes, while providing coaches and clubs with guidance and support to help create positive, inclusive environments for female judoka. This guide is intended as a practical resource to encourage reflection, conversation and action across the judo community.

CONTEXT:

Women and girls' data on engagement in sport in the UK

The engagement of women and girls in sports in the UK is a significant concern, with various factors contributing to their lower participation rates. Here are some key statistics and insights:

Physical Activity Levels: In 2021/22, men were 4.8% more active than women, and in 2022/23, boys were 6.8% more active than girls. This trend indicates a persistent gender gap in physical activity levels.

Gender Gap in Enjoyment of PE: The enjoyment gap in physical education (PE) is much more pronounced and has widened since 2016. Girls' enjoyment of PE has fallen from 74% in 2016 to 63% in 2023.



sportscotland
the national agency for sport

All of the Home Nations face similar challenges in encouraging female participation in sport and physical activity. According to SportScotland, 8% fewer women than men meet the recommended minimum levels of physical activity. This gender gap is even more pronounced among school-aged children, with only 55% of girls meeting the recommended levels of physical activity compared with 66% of boys. Participation in school-based physical education improves these figures, increasing them to 67% for girls and 76% for boys, but the significant gap remains.

SportScotland's 2021 club membership data also highlight the disparity in organised sport, showing that women and girls account for only 26% of club members in Scotland. This demonstrates that a significant proportion of women and girls are not participating in organised physical activity, highlighting the need for greater opportunities and targeted initiatives to increase female participation in sport.

Challenges to Participation: Fear of judgment, lack of confidence, and not having enough time are among the practical and emotional pressures that stop many women from being as active as they would like.

Support for Active Girls: The LGA's Culture, Tourism and Sport (CTS) Board launched a call for evidence to support women and girls to be active, highlighting the need for a national strategy and better data to inform future work.

These statistics and insights underscore the need for continued efforts to encourage and support women and girls in sports and physical activity, addressing the barriers they face and promoting their participation in ways that suit their individual needs and preferences

Sport England's This Girl Can campaign recently completed some research which shows there are a mix of practical and emotional pressures that stop many women from being as active as they would like. In fact, 39% of women aged 16 and over are not active enough to get the full health benefits of sport and physical activity, compared to 35% of men.

For the last seven years the Sport England Active Lives survey for Children and Young People, has consistently found that girls aged 5-18 years-old are less active than boys. The activity gap currently stands at 6%, with only 45% of 5-18 year-old girls meeting recommended activity levels versus 51% of boys.

When a girl finds her team, everything changes. With the right team around them, girls gain more than a sporting opportunity: they gain life-skills, self-belief and belonging. But currently 24% fewer girls than boys in England are playing team sport. That's 930,000 girls missing out on the joy and belonging sport can bring. Their latest research, supported by Metro Bank, explores why girls-only options matter – and what needs to change to close the team sport gap. ***Click here to read more***

Wales continues to experience a gender gap in sport and physical activity. Sport Wales data for 2024–25 shows that 56% of women participated in sport or physical activity in the previous four weeks, compared with 62% of men. The gap increases when looking at regular participation, with 32% of women participating three or more times per week compared with 40% of men.

The disparity is also evident in competitive sport, with only 13% of women who participate doing so competitively, compared with 24% of men.

However, the desire to do more sport and physical activity is almost identical between women and men, at 34% and 35% respectively. This suggests that lower participation should not simply be viewed as lower interest, but as a need to better understand and address the environments, experiences and barriers that influence whether women and girls begin, continue and progress within sport.

For Welsh Judo, this reinforces the important role that clubs and coaches can play in creating positive, inclusive and supportive environments for women and girls.



OUR GUIDE TO SUPPORT YOUR ENGAGEMENT OF WOMEN & GIRLS IN JUDO

What are our female Judoka are telling us?

JudoScotland and the Welsh Judo Association completed surveys with female members on their experiences in judo. These were the key issues raised by female judoka for consideration for coaches and clubs in engaging girls and women:



FEMALE-SPECIFIC COACHING

Training adaptation

Menstrual health

Hormonal changes

Menopause

Learning approaches



INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Physical contact

Culture & religion

Clothing

Childcare

Women-only sessions



FEMALE WORKFORCE

Female coaches

Recruitment

CPD environments

Revalidation & grading

Dan-grade opportunities



WIDER PATHWAYS

Beyond competition

Refereeing

Officials

Kanji Awards

Alternative progression



BELONGING & RETENTION

Confidence

Resilience

Friendships

Female Fighter Festivals

Female-focused coaching



PROMOTION & PERCEPTION

Where judo is promoted

How it is advertised

Beyond self-defence

Wider benefits of judo

QUESTION:

How can your club consult with its female members on what they think the club can do to make it more inclusive female members (inc intersectionality considerations re disabled women, women of colour, women of faiths, women from the LGBTQ+ and Trans Gendered community?



"THIS GIRL CAN" STATES

Mustn't put the onus on our women to solve this

We need to signpost and guide them

The sense of "othering" is real and must be avoided

Representation is vital - *One of Many*, **not** *One of a Few*

Social aspect is important, but not for all women

Having to find a "buddy" to get active with can be yet another barrier

Reframing physical activity = gym is only part of the solution

We need to address the underlying emotional barrier

RESEARCH FOUND:

7 IN 10 PARENTS

say girls-only options in team and contact sports are important

68 % OF PARENTS

say that having girls-only options in sport is important for girls of all ages

Key Findings

Of the 13 sports we analysed...

- 9 had lower participation rates for girls
- Only 1 in 6 opportunities to play sport were just for girls
- Only 20% of team sport opportunities were girls only
- Only 27% of contact sport opportunities were girls only

Mixed sport might sound equal, but when it's not proactively designed and managed with girls' needs in mind, it doesn't always guarantee equal participation – or a positive experience for girls.

Girls-only sport allows girls to thrive.

It provides a physically and emotionally safe space for girls to feel the joy and freedom of sport. Being with other girls who share their lived experience can be empowering and give girls a strong sense of belonging that can keep them engaged in sport.

Check out Women in Sport's Coaches Toolkit

IMPORTANT TOUCH POINTS IN WOMEN & GIRLS' DEVELOPMENT

The development stages of females in sport encompass various aspects, including physical, emotional, and psychological growth. These stages are influenced by factors such as puberty, hormonal changes, and the impact of sports on overall health and performance. Understanding these stages is crucial for coaches and educators to support female athletes effectively.



Female athletes progress through distinct developmental stages influenced by growth, puberty, hormonal changes, and social factors, all of which impact performance, training, and participation.

EARLY CHILDHOOD (PRE-PUBERTY)

Before puberty, girls and boys show minimal differences in body size, composition, and physiological responses to exercise, although individual variation exists. During this stage, participation in a variety of sports is encouraged to develop fundamental movement skills, coordination, and enjoyment. Multi-sport engagement supports long-term athletic development and reduces early burnout. Social support and positive reinforcement are crucial to foster confidence and motivation.

PUBERTY (ADOLESCENCE)

Puberty brings significant physiological and psychological changes. Increased estrogen leads to fat deposition in the hips and thighs, accelerated bone growth, and changes in body composition. Girls may experience mood swings, stress, and periods of insecurity due to rapid physical changes. Menarche typically occurs during this stage, and the menstrual cycle introduces fluctuating hormone levels that can affect energy, mood, and performance. Coaches should monitor these changes and adapt training to individual needs.

LATE ADOLESENCE TO EARLY ADULTHOOD

During this stage, athletes may specialize more intensely in their chosen sport. Training volume and intensity increase, and attention to nutrition, recovery, and injury prevention becomes critical. Female athletes are at risk of the female athlete triad, which includes disordered eating, amenorrhea, and osteoporosis, particularly in sports emphasizing leanness or weight categories. Monitoring energy availability, menstrual health, and bone density is essential for long-term performance and health.

Early Specialisation vs. Diversification

Research indicates that female athletes often continue participating in multiple sports throughout childhood and adolescence, deviating from early specialisation models. Early engagement in a primary sport is common, but maintaining diverse sport experiences supports skill development, reduces injury risk, and promotes long-term participation.

Social and Psychological Considerations

Girls often drop out of sports around age 14 at higher rates than boys due to social pressures, lack of investment in programs, or confidence issues. Participation in sport enhances self-esteem, resilience, teamwork skills, and academic outcomes. Positive role models and supportive environments are key to retaining female athletes and encouraging lifelong engagement.

SUPPPORTING WOMEN & MENOPAUSE IN YOUR CLUB

Supporting women during menopause in sport involves addressing the unique challenges they face, such as increased risk of osteoporosis, cardiovascular disease, and other health issues. Here are some key strategies to support women through this transition:

EDUCATE & EMPOWER

Health, sport, and exercise sectors should educate and empower women to take control of their menopause and health, offering training opportunities and guidance on the benefits of physical activity.

INCLUSIVITY & AWARENESS

There is a pressing need for greater inclusivity in sport and wider society to support women experiencing menopause. This includes improved awareness and education about menopause and mental health among the general population and those supporting women during this stage.

SUPPORTIVE COACHING

Coaches should provide empathetic support and recognise the emotional, physical, and psychological changes associated with menopause. Structural changes in sports should promote inclusion and longevity for women in their 40s and 50s.

REGULAR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Staff acknowledged that selection policies are generally well understood at senior levels, but less clear or less consistently communicated at cadet and junior stages. Mirroring athlete and parent feedback, staff identified non-selection moments as particularly critical for communication, development and retention.

There was consensus that the issue was rarely the selection decision itself, but rather how decisions are explained and followed up. Staff recognised the need for clearer guidance, structured feedback, and more visible progression routes for athletes not selected at specific points.

PERIOD POSITIVITY IN SPORT

The benefits of exercising during menstruation are often overlooked in sport. Research shows that staying active throughout the menstrual cycle can help alleviate common symptoms, improve mood, and support hormonal regulation. Despite these benefits, many girls feel uncomfortable taking part in physical activity while on their period.

According to Nuffield Health, more than four in five (84%) teenage girls in the UK say their interest in sport and fitness declined after they started their period, while almost one in four (23%) report feeling embarrassed to participate in physical activity during their menstrual cycle.

Sports clubs have an important role to play in creating an environment where girls feel supported and confident to continue participating. Simple, practical steps can make a significant difference.

Key actions for clubs:

- Provide free, easily accessible menstrual products in toilets and changing facilities.
- Ensure appropriate sanitary disposal bins are available in all toilets.
- Foster an open, supportive culture where menstruation is treated as a normal part of sport.

Further actions:

- Keep a small supply of spare shorts or tracksuit bottoms available for participants in case of leaks or emergencies.
- Ensure coaches, volunteers and leaders are educated about the menstrual cycle and its potential impact on physical activity. Energy levels, strength, motivation and symptoms can vary throughout the cycle, and every individual experiences menstruation differently. Coaches who understand this and adopt a supportive, flexible approach can play a significant role in helping girls feel comfortable, confident and able to continue participating in sport.



CREATING A POSITIVE CLUB EXPERIENCE FOR WOMEN & GIRLS

Engaging women and girls in sports requires creating inclusive, supportive environments and offering diverse activities that empower them.

Make the First Experience a Positive One
First impressions matter. Welcome new participants personally, explain what to expect and introduce them to coaches and other members. Avoid assuming that someone already understands the club, the terminology or how a session works.

Listen to Women and Girls
Ask participants what they enjoy, what could make their experience better and what might prevent them from attending. This could include session times, training environment, kit, facilities, coaching style or the type of activity offered. Most importantly, act on feedback where possible.

Offer choice
Not everyone joins a club for the same reason. Some may want to compete, while others may be motivated by fitness, friendship, learning new skills or simply having fun. Provide different opportunities and avoid presenting competition as the only measure of progress or success.

Create a supportive club culture
Make it clear that women and girls are an important part of the club. Challenge inappropriate comments, stereotypes or behaviours and create an environment where everyone is treated with respect. Coaches and club leaders should set the standard through their own behaviour.

Help new participants settle in
Consider introducing a buddy system so that new members have someone they can speak to and train with from their first session. A familiar face can make returning for a second or third session much easier.

Provide opportunities for women and girls to lead
Give women and girls meaningful opportunities to develop confidence and leadership skills. This might include leading a warm-up, supporting younger participants, mentoring others, volunteering at club activities or progressing into coaching and officiating.

CREATING A POSITIVE CLUB EXPERIENCE FOR WOMEN & GIRLS

Make female role models visible
Showcase female athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers and club leaders. Role models do not have to be elite performers; relatable people within the club or local community can be equally powerful in demonstrating that women and girls belong in judo.

Consider female-focussed opportunities
Where there is a need, female-only sessions, introductory programmes, camps or social activities can provide an additional route into the sport and help participants develop confidence. These should complement, rather than replace, a welcoming and inclusive whole-club environment.

Think beyond the training session
For many participants, the social experience is an important part of belonging to a club. Create opportunities to build friendships and connections through team activities, social events, camps or informal club gatherings.

Ask women what they need
For younger participants, support from parents and carers can strongly influence whether they continue in sport. Communicate positively with families, explain development opportunities and help them understand how they can support their child's involvement.

Build links with your community
Develop relationships with schools, colleges, universities, youth organisations and other community groups. Partnerships can help introduce judo to women and girls who may not otherwise consider joining a club.

Promote the experience, not just the sport
When promoting sessions, show what taking part actually feels like. Use welcoming images and messages that highlight enjoyment, friendship, confidence, fitness and personal development alongside competition and performance.



FURTHER RESOURCES:

To support with the engagement of women and girls in judo, why not check out:



HOME NATIONS WOMEN & GIRLS FESTIVALS

Female-specific training days running throughout the year.

Welsh Judo - Girls That Judo
JudoScotland - Judo Girls Rise
British Judo Female Fighters Festival
NIJF - TO CONFIRM?

THIS GIRL CAN CAMPAIGN

This Girl Can is a Sport England campaign encouraging women and girls in England to become more active, regardless of ability, background or experience. (This Girl Can is an England initiative not nationwide)

SPORT ENGLAND'S THIS GIRL CAN

SPORT WALES CYMRU WOMEN'S SPORT

SPORT NI

SPORT SCOTLAND





BECOMING A PERIOD FRIENDLY CLUB

Freedom4Girls
Freedom4Girls campaign, educate, provide and deliver free products, run workshops, and work in partnership with a wide range of organisations to end period poverty

Click here for more information

Fab Little Bag
Discreet, Eco-Friendly Period Disposal Bags

Click here for more information

WEIGHT CONTROL GUIDANCE

British Judo, in collaboration with the Home Nations and Sport Wales, have launched dedicated guidance regarding weight management for youth athletes, developed over the past 18 months by a dedicated working group.

CLICK HERE TO READ MORE



BRITISH JUDO ASSOCIATION
UNIVERSITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON, GORWAY ROAD, WALSALL, WS1 3BD