

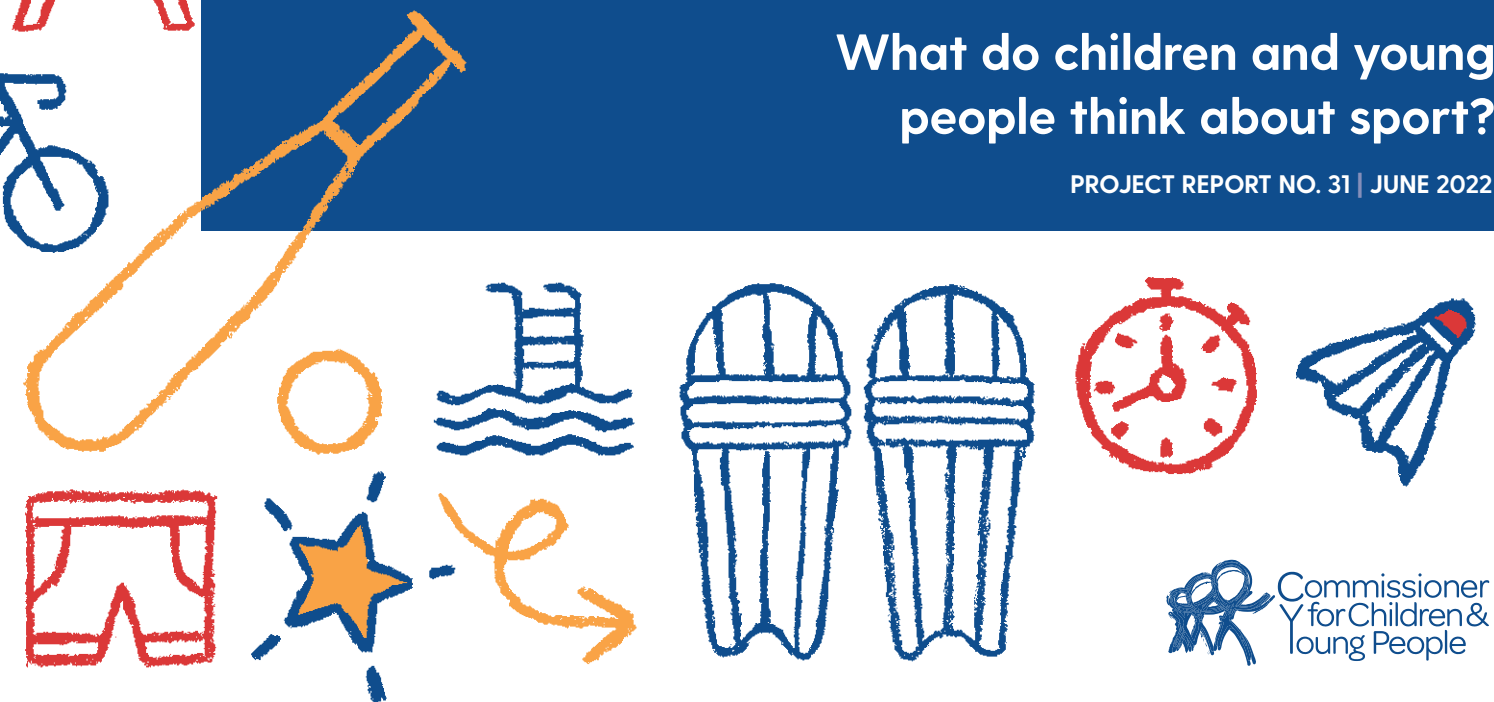
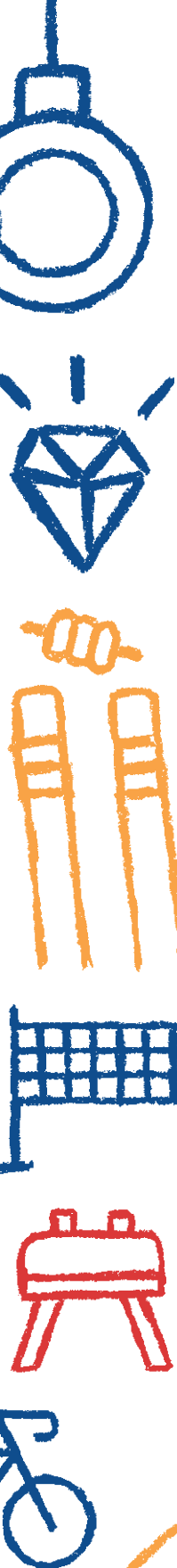
South Australian
Commissioner
for Children and
Young People
2022

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More Than a Game

What do children and young
people think about sport?

PROJECT REPORT NO. 31 | JUNE 2022



The Commissioner's Role

The South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People is an independent statutory position, established under the Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016 (*the Act*).

The Commissioner's role includes advocating for systemic change to policies, programs and practices that impact the rights, development and wellbeing of South Australia's children and young people.

This work is informed by the experiences and insights of children and young people themselves, with a specific focus on those who struggle to have their voices heard.


The Commissioner's strategic agenda was formulated with direct input from children and young people. In particular children and young people asked the Commissioner to facilitate their involvement in decision making and to create opportunities for them to experience authentic participation in the adult world.

The Commissioner is working with a number of partners on this agenda including ways in which children and young people can have input into the design and delivery of policies, processes and practices that relate to delivery of services aimed directly at them.



Suggested citation

Connolly, H. Commissioner for Children and Young People, South Australia (2022). *More Than a Game: What do children and young people think about sport?* June 2022.

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Commissioner's Foreword

This report reflects the hundreds of conversations I have had with children and young people about their perceptions and experiences of sport.

As in all areas of life children and young people have many and often differing views on what they enjoy about sport, what they dislike and what they would change in order to either improve their enjoyment of sport or increase participation levels.

While many children and young people say participation in sport is key to building their self-confidence, others referenced being judged or bullied in sporting environments with their confidence in their body type or their basic skills and abilities undermined as a result. Where some children and young people play sport either 'as a relief' or as 'an escape' from stress, others described sport as being 'a source of stress'.

Children and young people often say that their motivation for sport and the confidence sport provides is linked to their feelings of belonging. There are, however, contrasting views and experiences around how inclusive and safe organised sport is. Where some children and young people describe the community surrounding sport as being 'a place for everyone', others highlighted the opposite – that sport is 'not for everyone' insofar as it can be 'cliquey', 'exclusionary' and 'overly competitive'.

Many young people described the experience at a young age of being 'very quickly put into a box' of either being 'good at sport' or 'not good at sport'. From what they say this has consequences for how children think about themselves in relation to sport and physical activity over the long term, and how they then engage with and participate in sport as a result. Many children tell me



that ‘not all kids are sporty’ and that if they are ‘not interested in sport’ that they get less respect and can be excluded, shamed, or ignored. Many children and young people say that as a community we should equally celebrate achievements in other areas they are involved in. Too often only the sporting achievements are routinely recognised.

“

Despite diverse individual experiences, children and young people overwhelmingly reported that the most important factor when deciding whether to play sport is ‘how fun it is.’”

While experiences of sport vary between children and young people, they are heavily influenced by which sports they play and how good they are at it, plus whether it is sport in a club or sport played for fun. Other factors include how coaches, teachers, parents, team-mates, and opposition players treat them. Levels of enjoyment are also impacted by a young person’s capacity to commit their time and energy to it, the costs associated with their participation, and how easy or hard it is to navigate transport arrangements to enable regular participation and how supportive families are, particularly their views on the value of sport. In my conversations I have heard that as children get older it can be more difficult to maintain their involvement in sport.

Whilst many of the barriers to participation can be seen as individual choices and motivations, clearly there are systemic barriers that must be taken into account if we are to keep children connected to sports. It is important that the choice to not participate in sport is one that is freely made and not because of barriers related to culture, practices, cost and accessibility.



The lifelong benefits of participation on children's life outcomes should not be left to chance. It is important that we recognise that sports participation is more than a game, and that it is the responsibility of all of us to remove systemic barriers and to nurture participation.

The stark contrasts between children and young people's experiences, perceptions, and interest in sport, highlight the importance of providing a variety of strategies that add on to diverse motivations, values and expectations as well as the systemic issues around participation in sport.



Helen Connolly

Commissioner for Children and
Young People, South Australia



Introduction

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the right of every child to play, relax and participate in a wide range of leisure activities. Sport is not only recognised as an ‘enabler’ of this right it is also associated with other human rights, and with broader social and educational development and outcomes.¹

All children have the right to ‘survive and develop healthily’ (Article 6), live a life free from discrimination (Article 2), have a say in matters affecting them, and have their views taken into account (Article 12). Whether they play sport for fun or aspire to become professional athletes or officials, all children should be able to participate in sport within a safe and enjoyable environment where they are heard, known, and valued.

Since 2017, I have engaged with thousands of South Australian children and young people through conversations, focus groups and surveys, both online and face to face.

I have heard first-hand that many children and young people lead happy, healthy lives. They value their friendships, family relationships, culture, and opportunities to learn, both at school and outside of school. They also value opportunities to participate in their local communities.

For many children and young people sport is an important part of their lives. And although children and young people are aware of the benefits of sport and physical activity, their experiences are not always fun, inclusive, or positive.

Indeed – although ‘how fun sport is’ is the most important factor when deciding to play sport – widespread perceptions and stereotypes about who sport is *for*, and who sport is fun for, can significantly impact a child or young person’s decision to participate.

This report focuses on children and young people’s perceptions and experiences of organised sport in South Australia. Based on over 1,500 responses to an online survey in 2021, it complements my wider engagement with South Australian children and young people in relation to their broader attitudes and ideas about physical activity and experiences of playing sport.

This report also furthers my work in promoting Article 31 of the UNCRC covered in my *Press Play* report, which provides a series of recommendations on ways to activate young people’s health and wellbeing through play. Noting that the importance of play is recognised for young children but rarely for teenagers, *Press Play* not only highlights how young people define play, it also identifies a range of strategies to address barriers to play being experienced by children and young people at the individual, community and systemic levels.

Over the past five years I have also been engaging with stakeholders across schools, sporting clubs and organisations; adults who are passionate about sport and willing to better understand and address barriers to South Australian children and young people’s participation in sport.

Current approaches aiming to improve child and youth participation in sport and physical activity do not appear to be consistently effective. Part of the problem could be that the voices of children and young people themselves are largely missing from adult discussions and decision making relating to removing barriers to their participation. This includes those conversations being undertaken in the media and within policymaking spheres.

To prevent young people from dropping out of sport in their teenage years, we need to better understand how children and young people define sport. This includes understanding what



motivates them most to get involved in sport, and what they need to stay involved through to adulthood. These influences include understanding the importance of people, places and resources, and how these impact on the choices children and young people make. It also means examining the opportunities they're being given to have a voice, and to experience feelings of inclusiveness and validation.

Australia's first National Sport Plan – *Sport 2030* – sets out a vision for the future of sport and physical activity in Australia. This vision includes ensuring 'future generations' are more physically active and equipped with the skills and knowledge they will need to live healthy and active lives.

Sport 2030 draws on research showing children who are physically fit and active achieve better academic results. It also shows that those who grow up playing sport are 10% more likely to remain active as adults.² The relationship between physical activity and academic results appears to be much stronger at an individual school level than it does at an individual child level, thus highlighting the significance that school culture has in embedding opportunities for physical activity within learning activities.³

The National Sport Plan also acknowledges that 'tackling physical activity' and building physical literacy – the social, psychological and physical capabilities that help us live healthy and fulfilling lives – requires greater connections between sporting organisations and other sectors, such as health, education, and infrastructure.

Sport 2030 also recognises the important role schools play in promoting physical literacy, both via school sporting infrastructure and curriculum delivery. The plan includes a commitment by state and territory governments to working with the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) to support the teaching of physical literacy within the Australian curriculum.⁴



In 2020, the South Australian Government's Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing launched *Game On*, a state-wide initiative aimed at 'reversing the levels of poor physical activity' and increasing 'active recreation' opportunities across the state.⁵ As in other parts of Australia, data from South Australia shows that a low proportion of children and young people satisfy the recommended 'physical activity guidelines', with only 24% of children aged 5 to 12 years currently meeting these requirements with this figure dropping significantly to 8% of 13 to 17 year-olds.⁶



To create 'active young people' is a priority outcome for *Game On*, which (like the National Sports Plan) sets a long-term agenda requiring collaboration across government and between a variety of sectors, including but also extending well beyond those that are currently involved in organised sport.

If we are to better understand the experiences, perceptions, expectations, values, and competing priorities of children and young people's participation in sport and physical activity, then we must listen to what they have to say on the subject. All of the above factors influence their ability and desire to participate in sport. Also important is their access to transport and to people, places and infrastructure that make them feel safe, included, known, and valued.

This report not only outlines children and young people's diverse perceptions and experiences of sport it also captures their suggestions for how sport can be more inclusive for all children and young people regardless of their age, ability, confidence, socioeconomic background, cultural background, gender or sexuality.

The aim of this report is to bring children and young people's voices to the fore in a way that will support change being made to the cultural conditions and infrastructure that currently surround sport and physical activity in South Australia. Doing so will encourage greater and ongoing participation from children and young people because they will have had input into what services and infrastructure needs to be delivered and where.

“

Where they have a voice, choice, and agency to participate comfortably and confidently they will be much more likely to reap the physical and mental health rewards that involvement in regular sport and physical activities offers them.”



Key Findings



1,570

children and young people aged 9 to 18 years participated in the Commissioner's Sport Survey undertaken between April and June 2021.

Of the young people who responded:

22%

came from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds

13%

identified as part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

4%

are living with a disability

5%

have carer responsibilities; and

2%

identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

The majority of respondents were **secondary school students (94%)**, while the remaining were **primary school students (5%)**, **TAFE students (1%)**; or **university students (1%)**.

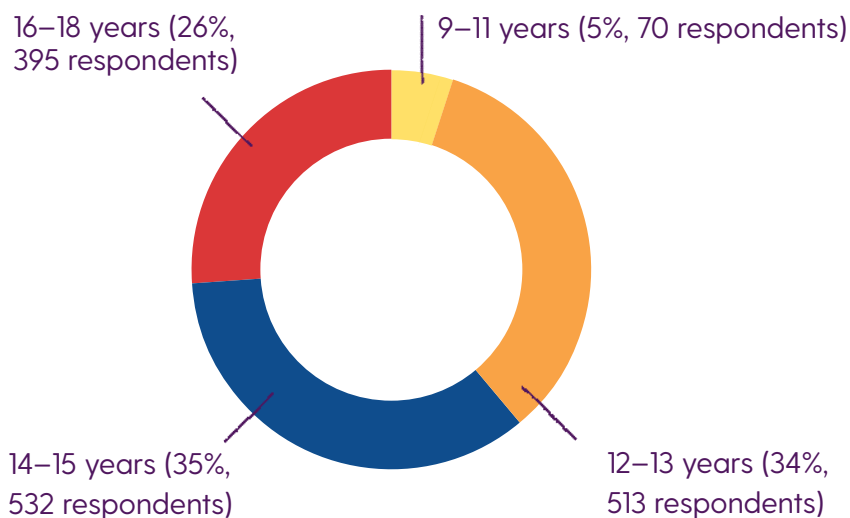


Region

Just over three quarters of respondents reported living in metropolitan Adelaide while 16% lived in regional South Australia with a further 2% from remote areas of the State. The remaining respondents described living between metropolitan Adelaide and regional towns due to their family arrangements or study situation.

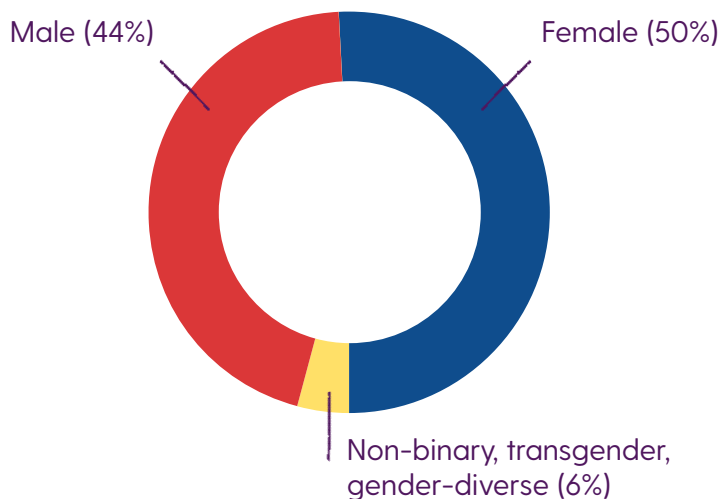
Age groups

Young people aged 12 to 15 years were the highest represented age group, making up more than two thirds of total respondents. Those aged 16 to 18 years made up one quarter (26%) of respondents while the remaining respondents were 9 to 11 years old.



Gender

A slightly higher proportion of young females participated in the survey (50% female compared to 44% male). It is interesting to note that this gender split is more equal than in previous CCYP surveys, where it is typically closer to 70% female respondents and 30% male respondents. A smaller group of respondents (6%) identified as non-binary, transgender or gender diverse.



Key Messages

Perceptions of Sport

- There is a belief among children and young people that you need to be 'good' at sport to enjoy it. This can be a significant barrier to participation, particularly for older young people and can be exacerbated by a culture in some community clubs and school sports programs that tends to focus primarily on recruiting and supporting 'the best' players.
- There is a significant divide in perceptions and experiences between those children who are 'sporty' and those who are 'not sporty', thereby highlighting the need for a variety of responses that cater to young people's diverse needs, interests and expectations.
- The behaviour of adults – including coaches, parents, and teachers – and their peers has a significant impact on children and young people's perceptions and experiences of sport.

Getting Involved

- Many children and young people value playing sport to learn new skills, make friends, be part of a community, feel physically and mentally healthy, and escape from other 'stresses', including school work and family responsibilities.
- The most important factors for children and young people when deciding whether to play sport or not include how **fun**, **inclusive** and **positive** sport is.

Participation

- Children and young people want sport to be more inclusive for all, with children to feel known, valued and heard no matter where they live, what age they are, and regardless of appearance, size, cultural background, gender identity or sexuality.
- Having access to reliable and affordable transport, facilities and infrastructure in their local community, or at school, significantly influences children's and young people's ability to participate in sport.
- A lack of flexibility and expectations regarding time commitment can lead young people to feel they are expected to 'drop everything' (or at least make significant sacrifices in school, family, social or working lives) to commit to regular sport or physical activities.

Reasons to Leave

- Girls and young women, LGBTQIA+ young people, young people experiencing poverty, young people with disability and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, face unique barriers that affect their enjoyment and participation in sport and physical activities.
- The need to navigate a highly competitive environment, handle bullying and wear uncomfortable or impractical uniforms, can contribute to young people dropping out of sport and physical activities.
- Children and young people find it difficult to enjoy sport when they feel 'forced' or 'pressured' into it. They value choice and opportunities to have a say, be heard, and to try a variety of sports.



Recommendations

All children and young people should have the opportunity to develop and experience the educational, social, emotional, and physical benefits of sport.

1

The Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing work with sports associations and clubs to develop a Charter for Children in relation to their right to play sport in safe, healthy, and developmentally appropriate environments, supported by adults who treat them with respect and who actively address discrimination and barriers to their participation.

2

Sports Associations and clubs examine how they actively drive and implement principles of participation and non-discrimination in their governance, programming, and culture, to ensure that children from diverse backgrounds and ethnic and religious minorities, those with illness and disability, and diverse body types, non-competitive children, LGBTQIA+ children and those with caring/work responsibilities, can play sport.



3

Sports Associations and clubs review coaches' training and ensure that all club officials receive up to date skills-based instruction on how to create safe environments, increase opportunities for all abilities to participate, understand gender and racial discrimination, develop rapport, and the social and emotional development of children.

4

Sports Associations, charitable, organisations, schools and health agencies work collaboratively to identify sector wide initiatives to address the cost barriers to participation, including uniform recycling, non-branded uniforms, travel vouchers, extended fee relief schemes, community investment in low-cost play, and sports-based activities in line with young people's interests.

The best things about sport

- Having fun with friends and meeting new people.
- Being part of a team and a community and belonging.
- Feeling energised, fit, strong and free from stress.
- Healthy competition and learning how to win and lose.
- Building strong values and developing 'life skills'.



When reflecting on the ‘best things’ about sport, children and young people focused on:

- how sport made them feel physically and mentally
- the people, places, culture and ‘sense of community’ that made playing sport meaningful and ‘fun’; and
- the skills, values, and lessons they learnt as individuals and as part of a team, from both coaches and peers during training and matches.

Sense of belonging and social benefits

The ‘sense of community’ and belonging surrounding sport, and the power of sport to ‘bring people together’ was commonly described as one of the best things about playing sport. This included getting to know new people in different year levels at school, or through sport outside of school, making new friends with diverse backgrounds but with similar interests and passions, and having opportunities to ‘give back to the community’.

“Everyone can find something they enjoy and learn new skills whilst making friends. There’s something for everyone, and if you don’t want to play you can still be involved in a really supportive community as an umpire or coach.” – 14 year old, female, regional SA

Children and young people described feeling safe, welcomed, supported and ‘part of a tight knit group’ in certain sports environments where the culture and atmosphere is inclusive and positive. These young people talked about how ‘anyone can do sport’ and that in some sports, there’s a place for ‘everyone to be involved’, whether as a player, coach, umpire, or in some other capacity.



Whilst some young people focused on their experience playing sport as an individual, many young people felt that ‘being part of a team’ was one of the best things about playing sport. The team culture and ‘camaraderie’, ‘mateship’ and ‘sportsmanship’, were all important factors driving young people’s enjoyment of sport. Some described their ‘persistence’ with sport as coming down to ‘the work you put in for your teammates’.

“The fact that people who identify as first-generation individuals (I am an African-diaspora) can come together to share an experience that is not only fun, but brings us closer together.”

– 17 year old, female, metropolitan SA

“Sport enables you to have fun, socialise, meet new people, help out/volunteer, give back to your community, engage in things that make you happy and get exercise. I love sport and its atmosphere, as it makes me feel at home, safe, and welcomed/supported.” – 18 year old, female, regional SA



The social aspects of sport were important to all respondents regardless of gender. Boys were more likely to mention this in terms of ‘making friends’ and hanging out with mates, while girls focused on teamwork and relationships that made up the ‘community’ around sport.

Male and female respondents were equally likely to mention leadership skills and opportunities. While both boys and girls described the mental and emotional as well as physical benefits of sport, boys were more likely to talk about being ‘strong’, ‘fighting’ and releasing ‘anger’. Young women also commented on the way sport allowed them to ‘be aggressive’ in ways that wouldn’t necessarily be accepted in other parts of their lives.

“Being able to be aggressive without hurting people, being part of a tight knit group, developing skills.” – 14 year old, female, regional SA

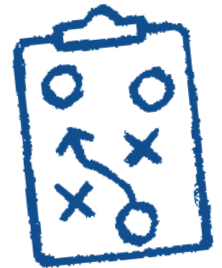
Some of the comments young people made about the ‘best things’ were qualified with statements acknowledging that positive experiences were ‘not always the case’, while others struggled to mention any positive aspects of sport and were unsure how to respond.

“Communicating in teams with other people, as long as they aren’t mean and put down other players.” – 15 year old, male, metropolitan SA

“It can be fun when you are working with people who are friendly and help you to learn if you are a beginner, but it can be intimidating when there are people more skilled than you.”
– 15 year old, female, metropolitan SA

Skill development

Trusting one another and treating each other with respect were important aspects of the communication and team-building skills young people reported developing through their participation in sport. In addition to developing technical and physical skills, respondents described how sport also strengthened their social, emotional and ‘life’ skills. This included gaining responsibilities and skills in time management and leadership, as well as improving critical and creative thinking skills, such as problem-solving and strategic thinking about ‘which game plan will be best’.



“You get to meet new people as well as make new friends. It allows you to learn important things, like teamwork, hard work, communication and a healthy lifestyle.” – 13 year old, male, metropolitan SA

Physical and mental benefits

Children and young people were aware of the benefits playing sport has for their body, particularly for their physical development over the short and long term. They described how sport helped them develop muscles and get stronger, as well as to keep ‘healthy and in shape’.

Beyond the ‘physical side’ of sport, many children and young people also focused on the benefits sport has for their minds. They appreciate how sport ‘also works for your brain’ as an important outlet for ‘freeing emotions’, ‘clearing your mind’, ‘losing yourself’, ‘relaxing’ and ‘relieving stress’. It was common for respondents to describe sport as a ‘break’ or ‘escape’ from other parts of their life, including stress at home, school, or work.

“The feeling you get when you are done. Zoning out, not thinking about crap all the time.” – 17 year old, male, metropolitan SA

Children and young people described how sport makes them feel motivated, energised, and more awake. Some highlighted the endorphins, adrenalin, and ‘the rush’ you feel when you’re playing sport, while others described ‘the feeling after’. Responses highlighted the power of sport in influencing the way children feel about themselves – their body and mind and their lives more generally – including how it can increase confidence, focus, and happiness, as well as ‘your ability to connect with yourself’, ‘express yourself (without using words)’ and feel ‘you have worth’.



Some young people tied these feelings of worth to how much they could challenge or push themselves, beat their goals, or test what they had learnt during training. Many also felt proud of their dedication and valued their commitment to routine as well as to the sense of belonging they experienced through their regular participation. Young people described how sport ‘doesn’t feel like exercise when it’s a hobby that you find rewarding’.

“Being able to win and be in a team to work together and get fitness up and get outside and have fun and feel free and real.”
– 12 year old, male, regional SA

Young people described feeling as though ‘your hard work has paid off’, and that ‘you’ve accomplished something and enjoyed feeling the glory of winning’. Being good at sport or achieving goals were also important, with some describing the ‘excitement of doing something right’ and ‘striving for your best to compete and achieve at the highest level’ or ‘the thought that you can go pro’.

“I love the people and I love the feeling. I love the strategy and being able to intercept the ball or kick a goal.”
– 13 year old, female, metropolitan SA

Competition and choice

Many children and young people said they enjoyed ‘performing under pressure’ and a healthy amount of competition, whether

against other schools in formal competitions, or ‘against friends’ in casual competitions. Learning to cope with winning or losing and responding to feedback and learning from mistakes were also mentioned as positives.

While ‘winning’ was the best thing for some respondents, being able to play a sport ‘just for fun with friends’ rather than ‘to win’ was also very important to many children and young people. Some young people thought the best thing about sport was playing casually and having a laugh outside of formal competitions, or playing in a ‘social’ setting rather than in a ‘serious competition’. They described moments of having a kick of the footy and then ‘getting a schnitty (schnitzel)’ with their friends as being among their favourite ways to play sport.

Having a variety of sports to choose from and being free to make their own decisions based on their own interests, without being pressured or forced into doing anything ‘sporty’, was also of great importance to children and young people.

For many young people, sport is a good balance to study, work, technology, and other parts of life; a good way to ‘get outside’ in the sun or in nature rather than ‘be stuck in a classroom’. While some respondents described specific actions or aspects of a particular sport – from throwing things to cardio, running, contact sport, team sports, to sweating and fighting – others listed ‘half time oranges’ and ‘drink breaks’ as the best things about sport.

“ Love the way it makes me feel physically, keeps me healthy and gets me focussed for school.” – 16 year old, female, metropolitan SA

While ‘having fun’ was mentioned by all young people regardless of gender, this was more common among boys than girls. Male respondents too were also more likely than girls to mention ‘winning’ and enjoying the competitive aspects of sport. They described the rush of adrenalin, getting outside, running around, and feeling free more frequently than young women.



The worst things about sport

- Not being or feeling ‘good enough’ to enjoy sport when it’s too competitive and there’s pressure to ‘be the best’.
- Difficulty balancing sport with schoolwork and other commitments.
- ‘Cliques’ and sometimes ‘toxic’ culture of clubs.
- Gender stereotypes, discrimination and gender inequality.
- Cost of playing sport and difficulty getting to and from sport.



Almost all children and young people could identify at least one thing that negatively impacted on their enjoyment and participation in sport at school, in a club setting, or in the broader community. While some respondents focused on skills, injuries, winning, or losing, it was far more common for children and young people to focus on the environment and culture of various sports. These factors included people's behaviour and emotions, as well as the significant expectations there are in terms of time, energy, money, and transport that came with playing a particular sport.

Young men and young women were equally likely to focus on the time commitment, issues with transport and the impact of parent's behaviour as the worst things about sport. Girls were more likely than boys to mention the 'competitiveness' of sport as the worst thing about it, while the worst things for boys focused more on 'losing' or 'letting the team down'.

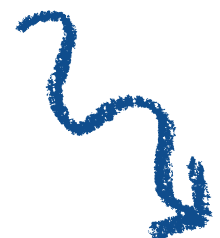
While all children and young people expressed frustration at the 'negative energy' around some sports, girls focused more on 'not feeling good enough' when other people are 'watching and judging', while boys were more concerned by others who 'talk trash', 'boast' or 'talk themselves up'. Boys were also more likely than girls to describe pressure around sport as being 'motivating'.

Need to be good at sport

The significant disparities in reports of positive or negative experiences appeared to also reflect levels of skill and commitment. There was a real sense that you needed to be 'good' at sport to enjoy it, with many young people describing how the worst thing about sport is the 'rejection of those that aren't as good as others'.

“It's mandatory and you can't choose. It's unfair against people who are physically weak or unfit. People care far too much about if people are good at sport and act badly towards people who aren't good with sports (like me).”

– 13 year old, female, metropolitan SA



Common responses included feeling like ‘the weak link’, ‘not believing you’re worthy enough’ to play or be there, comparing yourself to others, and feeling embarrassed ‘when you suck at it’. Other children and young people described a fear of ‘failure’, making mistakes, letting the team down, or ‘having a bad game’, and the disappointment in their performance or themselves when they or their friends ‘don’t improve’ or ‘don’t reach their goals’.

While a small number of young people reported putting these high expectations on themselves, it was more common for respondents to mention the impact that other people – particularly coaches, parents, and teammates – had on their self-confidence. For example, some young people described feeling ashamed when ‘people get angry at others for not being good’ and ‘if toxic people are around’, while others expressed frustration that there seems to be ‘genetic requirements for success’.



“Often it’s very much “if you’re not good at the sport, don’t bother playing”. It can get too competitive sometimes, while I enjoy competition, I don’t enjoy when others put each other down for not being on the same level for example. If you look unfit, often you are not seen as capable of playing the sport and people won’t want to play with you. The uniforms in some sports are quite inconvenient, like netball dresses, they’re so short! For what reason??? I think uniforms need to be diversified a bit more to accommodate everyone and make everyone feel comfortable.”
– 17 year old, female, regional SA

“Sometimes the culture is toxic and there’s a lot of peer pressure and pressure from adults and coaches. The environment changes as you get older. The cost is expensive. There’s discrimination.” – 16 year old, female, metropolitan SA

Only the best

Young people described how these experiences were often exacerbated by a sporting culture that only rewards ‘being the best’ rather than celebrating and encouraging participation and gradual improvement. Some respondents were of the view that

the worst thing about sport is ‘what matters’ or ‘what counts’ in certain sporting environments with ‘certain values’ being rewarded and ‘being nice’ not one of them.

They talked about ‘hotboxing of talent’ and the ‘glorification’ of certain players who have ‘obvious talent’ by coaches and officials, while other players are ‘benched’, ‘subbed’, ‘left out’ and ‘left behind’. Many young people described how ‘unfair’ selection processes and how ‘placing’ systems and hierarchy symbolise this culture, thereby impacting on young people’s commitment and trust in sport.



“Some issues with selection not being based off skill or training performance, off popularity/game results. Also sometimes sport culture can be rude. You can either be nice and not have fun or an arsehole and have fun.” – 17 year old, male, metropolitan SA

“There’s always people that think that they are better than anyone and coaches kids can always do what they want.” – 11 year old, male, regional SA

Too competitive

While the ‘competitive spirit’ is what can make sport fun for many children and young people, they said it is difficult to stay involved when this competitiveness goes too far. ‘Elitist attitudes’, a ‘winning at all costs mentality’ and ‘breakneck competitiveness’ – along with ‘politics’, ‘bitchiness’, ‘overtraining’ and ‘drama’ – can create a ‘toxic environment and lots of unnecessary competition’. This can make some children and young people feel unsafe and anxious, ‘create tears in friendships’ and ‘turn people away’ from sport due to a ‘fear of not fitting in’. Some young people noted that this level of pressure and competition is not necessarily unique to sport, but actually reflects many aspects of their lives ‘off the court’.

“The competitive spirit can be a great thing, but when clubs purposely drop high achieving teams into lower divs to ensure they win, it can become a problem.” – 16 year old, female, metropolitan SA

“The overly competitive side that gets so bad to a point that risking your own or your partner’s safety or confidence is apparent. Or that the underdogs are never acknowledged. I believe the ‘placing’ system of the sport should involve more diverse rewards like ‘Most-improved’ etc. As this supports a more positive development and mindset. It also avoids severe exclusion.” – 17 year old, female, regional SA

The high intensity and high pressure of playing sport with people who ‘don’t see the fun side of sport’ is particularly discouraging for ‘less sporty’ or ‘non-competitive’ people. They described bad sportsmanship, aggression, and challenges when people are ‘unwilling to cooperate with other team members’, or when playing with people who are ‘rude’ or ‘cheaters’. Others talked about how some sports can sometimes promote ‘unhealthy mentalities on what it means to be “healthy”’, including attitudes related to food and diets, sleep, and body size.

“Competition and bad sportsmanship that makes others feel bad. Why can’t someone monitor a sport and stop allowing this to happen.” – 13 year old, male, metropolitan SA

“When a parent/guardian puts a lot of pressure on a child to be the absolute best and never stuff up. When it gets to the point of everything always being a competition even off the court.” – 13 year old, female, metropolitan SA

Bullying and discrimination



Children and young people reported diverse experiences of bullying and discrimination in sporting environments, ranging from subtle exclusion to overt harassment. Some respondents described a ‘cliquey’ culture in some sporting communities which can ‘ruin the social side of sport’ and ‘leave people out’, particularly if they are ‘new’ or ‘different’. Others talked about not getting many chances to play, being ‘subbed’ or ‘benched’, or put in a position that ‘you don’t play well in and it can determine your spot’ in a particular team or division.

- “ People often judge people like me (as I am an African-diaspora) as well as have preconceived ideas of what I play like and often discriminate against me in order to make me feel ‘othered’.”
– 17 year old, female, metropolitan SA

Other young people focussed on more explicit bullying, bigotry and ‘hate speech’, often based on race, cultural background, gender, age, physical size and ability or skills (‘if you don’t shoot a goal or something’). This included being yelled at, put down or ‘looked down on’, shamed, ‘othered’ or laughed at.

The use of the word ‘toxic’ was common among those who described the ‘culture’ of sport as the worst thing about it. They described toxic ‘clubs, players and coaches’, along with toxic communities, toxic competitiveness, and a toxic mentality. Some young people described a ‘default “Jock” culture’ of toxic masculinity, particularly in traditionally ‘male’ sports and during the teenage years, where sport can ‘bring out the worst in people’.

- “ Playing it or not understanding it while playing. Or playing with a super competitive-bordering-on-physically-or-mentally-bullying-you team.” – 15 year old, female, metropolitan SA

Sexism and stereotypes

The gendered nature of sport was another common ‘worst thing’ with both boys and girls as well as with gender-diverse respondents who noted a ‘divide’ between ‘male’ and ‘female’ sports. There was ‘gender discrimination’, ‘gender imbalance’ and ‘gender inequalities’. Some young women described that ‘girls are often not as noticed when playing sport’ and that it can be ‘quite harsh being a female in certain sports’, particularly those ‘not meant for your gender’.

- “ Being sexualised and ridiculed for playing a sport that isn’t usually meant for your gender.” – 14 year old, female, regional SA

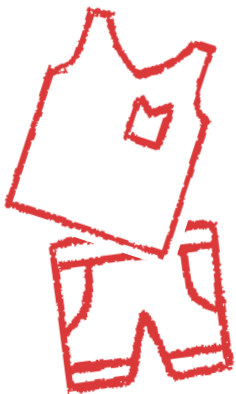


“The sexism – the fact that girls have to wear dresses and skirts that are tiny is drongo and unacceptable.” – 17 year old, female, regional SA

Girls described experiences of being discouraged, a ‘lack of opportunities’ and instances of ‘being abused’, undermined, ridiculed and subject to ‘sexist comments’. Regardless of gender, many respondents were affected by gender stereotypes that ‘males are sportier or more athletic’ while girls are ‘weak’ and ‘shouldn’t be muscly’. Others noted the exclusion of gender-diverse people from being able to play sport when they wanted to.

“Transgender boys have to use binders and you can’t exercise while wearing. Sport makes it harder to be your preferred gender.” – 16 year old, transgender boy, regional SA

“Getting injured, excessive trainings and the divide between men’s and women’s sport – such as the stereotype that males are sportier or more athletic.” – 17 year old, female, metropolitan SA



The style and colour as well as the cost of sports uniforms were described as the worst thing about sport, particularly for young women, non-binary young people, and ‘plus size people’. They described how sleeveless uniforms, the short length of shorts and dresses (particularly netball dresses), and the white or light colours of uniforms ‘sexualised them’ and made them feel uncomfortable and anxious, affecting how they played and ‘not good for people on periods’.

“Split gendered sports with different understandings of ability, I understand genetically males and females are different so in some ways, it makes sense. However with an example like lacrosse the split gendered system entirely changes the game between the two genders for legitimately no reason. I personally would love to be able to participate in the men’s lacrosse game style, however, I can’t because as a biological female I’m automatically too weak apparently.” – 15 year old, non-binary, metropolitan SA

Age barriers

While the competitiveness of sport impacts children's enjoyment and engagement with sport 'from a young age', many young people stressed that it is particularly hard to join a sport once you get older. They raised concerns about the 'difficulty at the higher levels' and a real pressure 'to advance with age' and 'be the best', with reduced opportunities to 'just play for fun', particularly as you navigate puberty and transition to high school.

“It can be harder to join sports as you get older, as others your age who play them are likely much more competent than you. It can feel like you're being judged or that you're failing if you don't play at the same level as others your age do.” – 17 year old, male, metropolitan SA

Pressures of commitment

Many children and young people described how sport is a significant commitment that can become 'too much', particularly in the early teenage years. They described the time, money and 'physical and emotional energy' it takes to commit to sport, with 'strict' inconvenient and inconsistent schedules that make it difficult to balance sleep, school work, and casual employment with family responsibilities and other social or extracurricular activities. Sport is not always flexible, with children expected to attend training and games weekly or more frequently, and often early in the mornings or later in the evenings, including not being able to skip trainings even when injured or 'when ill or tired'.

“Coaches thinking sport is the only thing in life and not school things.” – 16 year old, male, regional SA

“It asks a lot from you. Especially as you get older. The homework piles up and you don't have time for commitments such as sport. Also fitness is not that enjoyable, haha.” – 13 year old, female, metropolitan SA

Transport and its costs



Other young people focused on the inaccessibility of sport in terms of cost and transport, with the worst thing about sport that ‘some people can’t afford it’. They described the cost of sport beyond the fees – including the costs of uniform, equipment, and transport. ‘Not being able to get there’ or a lack of facilities close to home, and ‘having to drive to places far away from you’ were among children and young people’s top concerns about transport.

Children and young people’s ability to safely navigate transport depends on whether they have enough time to get to trainings and matches, have a parent willing and able to take them, or have access to public transport and the freedom and funds to navigate public transport safely and independently.

Poor adult behaviour

Children and young people highlighted the significant impact adults have on their enjoyment of sport from a young age – particularly the behaviour of parents, but also of coaches and teachers. They described how some parents can yell, complain, be ‘aggressive and overcompetitive’, get ‘too into it’, be ‘disrespecting of umpires’ and push their kids ‘too far’ by making comments on performance or by ‘forcing certain sports’ on their children based on their own sporting interests and preferences rather than those of their child.

Often, significant pressure can come from people – parents, coaches or peers – who have good intentions but who ‘don’t always see how tough they are’, nor the influence they’re having on a young person’s feelings, views and interest in participating.

“*Negative role models (people like parents and coaches trying to help and thinking they’re helping but being overly negative and over valuing athletic achievement).*” – 13 year old, female, metropolitan SA

“*Parents who get their kids into things they shouldn’t be in because they are “involved” and then creating less opportunities for the people who are more deserving.*” – 13 year old, female, metropolitan SA

Risk of injury

Young people raised concerns about the perceived risk of injury, as well as their own experiences of being injured while playing sport. They described their parent's concerns as well as their own worries about the 'physical side' of sport, ranging from sore muscles and stitches to 'being concussed' or breaking bones.

Some young people described an 'injury lifestyle' where they feel pressure from coaches and others to 'push through pain', often resulting in further or greater injury. They described 'mental' as well as physical injury and missing out on sport or other important parts of life due to injury, sometimes due to not having opportunities to 'warm up'. While responses focused mainly on people getting injured, a few children and young people expressed negative feelings about sports that could injure animals.



- “*Injury. Tackling and being rough is fun but when you break a bone or dislocate something that sucks.*” – 13 year old, male, metropolitan SA
- “*The injury lifestyle, to push through pain and that can result in further and greater injury.*” – 13 year old, female, metropolitan SA
- “*Sport can take up a lot of time from your social life and also the injury's can be some of the worst pain possible and can take a while to recover from them.*” – 14 year old, female, regional SA
- “*The injuries and influence upon a growing body. Sometime certain sporting communities aren't the most inclusive.*” – 13 year old, female, metropolitan SA
- “*People can become very competitive and other players may get hurt because of these actions. Also sometimes people get excluded when going into groups because they may not be the best player for that game.*” – 13 year old, female, metropolitan SA

More opportunities

Some young people were disappointed that the mainstream definition of sport can be 'narrow' and 'not inclusive'. They advocated for a broader definition of sport that captured and celebrated a range of interests and physical activity beyond 'traditional' or 'popular' sports, including dance, parkour, judo, fishing, climbing, mountain biking, martial arts, and ultimate frisbee. They wanted more support for less-celebrated sports like lacrosse, badminton and hockey, which are 'forgotten' or 'not funded' compared to the most popular sports like football, netball and soccer.



“Do sports that are inclusive of everyone, gender, weight-class, skill level because what I find people my age hate the most is doing sports you aren't good at/doing sports with people who are already good at the sport and leaves you no opportunity to improve.” – 13 year old, gender-fluid, regional SA

More inclusive

Others highlighted that sport can be particularly difficult for children with both physical and intellectual disabilities, or with chronic illnesses such as asthma and diabetes. They explained that facilities are often built with an expectation that has been set without disability or illness in mind, fuelling a common perception that sport is 'for' able-bodied and neurotypical people. Respondents living with disability described how sports like swimming were part of their therapy, making it difficult to enjoy sport for fun in other contexts.

Lack of choice

Some responses were specific to sport at school, including the way it is offered in the curriculum and how it is graded. For many children and young people, the worst thing about sport at school was being 'forced to take part' or 'pressured' into something they did not enjoy, rather than being able to choose which sport to play based on their interests.

Some reported that this lack of choice is made worse by the 'fact that sports aren't graded fairly at school', and that teachers can be 'very biased' and 'always have favourites'. Others described sport being 'high intensity' at school or having no other option than to play club sport if their 'schools don't have much, if any sport'.

“*School sport sucks, sport sucks when it isn't fun and you are forced to participate. Sport sucks when people aren't encouraging and the only thing important is winning.*”

– 16 year old, female, metropolitan SA

The importance of friends again became clear in responses about the 'worst things', which often included 'not knowing people' or being in 'a different team to friends'. Some children and young people reported how tiring and draining sport can be, including how it affects concentration and mood when you lose. Other 'worst things' included losing interest in sports, 'falling out of love for the game' and how hard it can be to learn the rules of different sports, play in certain weather or play well when 'people are watching'. Others described getting bored where you 'aren't doing anything for extended periods of time', when you don't like the sport you play, or when you play the same teams 'over and over again'.

“*When there is a ball hogger in your team... When you don't have any friends... When you don't like the sport.*”

– 13 year old, female, regional SA

What makes it difficult for children and young people to get involved and stay involved in sport?

- Limited opportunities to ‘play for fun’ or to start playing as you get older.
- Pressure to balance sport with other priorities, responsibilities or interests at school, home, work or socially.
- Bullying and exclusion based on skills and ability, age, size, gender, sexuality, race, or cultural background.
- Pressure from coaches, parents, or peers and a lack of encouragement or positive role models.
- Significant costs including transport, clothing, and equipment costs.



Children and young people reported how some of the ‘worst things’ about sport can become significant barriers to not only getting involved in sport in the first instance, but also to staying involved – particularly as they transition from primary school to high school.

Differing skill levels

The most common barrier to continued participation in sport was the ‘massive division’ based on skills, where there are not enough opportunities for players with ‘less skill’ while only ‘the best handful of players’ continue playing. When the level of competition is high and sporting clubs, coaches or organisations ‘expect prior experience’, it can be embarrassing when you don’t see immediate improvement, results or success.



“If they think they are good they would want to continue but if they get people saying their bad then their gonna think, oh well, I’m not good, so I should just give up.” – 13 year old, male, metropolitan SA

“Becoming too much about winning and not fun I think stops a lot of older kids from staying involved in sports, especially when it becomes too competitive and involves lots of training, and sometimes even a certain diet, as well as the risk of developing life long injuries.” – 15 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

Many young people described how both school sport and club sport become ‘really hard for people that aren’t doing it for competition’. The elitism of clubs, which are often ‘looking for talent rather than participation’, leaves many children and young people feeling as though they must ‘do well or drop the sport’. They reported no longer ‘viewing sport as something fun’, particularly once trainings, let alone matches, become ‘too serious and not so fun’.

Body image

A ‘lack of body positivity’ or pressure to adhere to a strict diet or lifestyle can add to this discomfort, particularly as young people navigate the physical, emotional and social changes associated

with puberty. Many children and young people reported either feeling or explicitly being told that they are either 'too small', 'too fat' or the 'wrong height'.

“ When we are younger, being involved in sport is usually quite simple, as we often do it in school (PE lessons) and I think this encourages us to build a positive relationship with sport. However, as we get older, and school PE lessons stop, only the ones who were fortunate enough to play in club sports continue to develop their skills. At an older age like high school, it is very difficult for us to try new sports because by that time, everyone else in that sport is already so experienced and skilled and you can't play on the same level as them. I found this particularly true for myself. I do have a love for sport, however, I can't really join clubs now because at this age they expect us to be so experienced when I'm not. Beginner's clubs are few and far.”
– 17 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

Lack of beginner options for teenagers

There was a real sense that it's difficult if you get into a sport 'too late' or as a teenager and that this is because if you 'don't start when you're younger', there are limited opportunities when 'everyone else' knows each other and knows how to play. Although some respondents recognised that 'this may not be true', the perception of needing to start sport young appears to be deeply ingrained and was often raised as a significant barrier to getting and staying involved.

While some young people described the benefits of having played for a long time, others described how starting young 'can ruin it for some people', particularly when their parents 'made them play'. Others described how a significant gap in expectations between younger and older sports makes for an abrupt transition between junior sport and senior sport.

“ I became the oldest and the only female. So I left because it just wasn't enjoyable anymore and the same can go for sports.”
– 14 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

“Pressure to do well or drop the sport (eg from disagreeing family, misogynistic or fatphobic people).” – 17 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

Time commitments

Young people said it becomes increasingly difficult for children and young people to commit to sport without sacrificing other important parts of their lives. As they navigate many conflicting commitments in terms of school, employment, family responsibilities, friendships, and romantic relationships, young people reported that many clubs have an ‘unrealistic expectation that you will drop everything’ to participate in sport.



“You hit an age with many conflicting commitments; school, part time job, being social, girlfriends. Also, if you’re not the best some clubs no longer want you.” – 17 year old, male, metropolitan Adelaide

“If I had to be honest, I would say a few reasons; firstly sometimes students prefer to focus on grades instead of sport, and with all the work we sometimes get it’s hard to maintain balance between good grades, sport, and other responsibilities. Lastly some students find it shameful to play if they are not good at sport or not in good shape.” – 13 year old, male, metropolitan Adelaide

School expectations

Meeting these expectations is particularly difficult without some impact on education, with many young people describing being put in a position where they have to choose between ‘good grades’ or playing sport. Some young people felt that their schools did not make an effort to accommodate their participation in sport outside of school nor recognise the benefits of sport in helping their concentration and academic results. Instead, they described feeling punished for playing sport, including getting ‘detentions for not completing work due to sport’, which reinforced the perceived choice between sport or school.

- “Other life commitments make it tricky. Even though I quit tennis in year 8 (after playing for 7 years) when my workload was still light, I can’t imagine still playing now into year 11 and 12. The social side makes it tricky too. As you move up in divisions without your mates, you can lose motivation to keep playing.”
– 17 year old, female, regional SA
- “The amount of pressure from school to complete all the work. School work became a higher priority because I would get detentions for not completing the work because I was at sport.”
– 16 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide
- “Some sports are at similar times. Gets to around year 7/8 and I feel like some people who haven’t tried a sport before are too scared to try because they would play with others who have experience. It is expensive for families e.g. uniforms, fees etc.”
– 17 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

An increasing amount of homework was consistently raised as a barrier to staying involved in sport at school and outside of school. Teenagers also spoke about how it is hard to ‘join a club full of strangers’ and it gets harder to stay involved in sport during high school when your friends start to drop out. Plus there’s issues such as peer pressure, ‘who you hang out with’ and ‘social status’ or ‘whether sport’s cool’ or ‘popular’ that become more important. While they want to participate with their friends so that they don’t feel like an outsider and are not judged, participation can depend on the ‘type of friends’ you have, including how active they are.



- “Friends aren’t involved, lose interest due to coaches, environment, or loss of connection with team mates.” – 16 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide
- “Young people are put under so much pressure (especially when it comes to yr 10, 11 & 12) with exams and stuff, that they’re encouraged to focus on school work instead. A lot of young people also then get jobs etc and they just don’t have time anymore.” – 15 year old, female, regional SA

“ Because they are influenced by the people around them. They might like hockey, but the ‘popular’ kids might like dance, and they will apply to dance.” – 12 year old, female, regional SA

Conflicting priorities

Although the friendships and social aspects of sport are among the best things about sport, children and young people also described how sport can conflict with other social commitments. Some young people talked about how they just want to ‘hang out’ with friends, and that this ‘hanging out’ can often include exercise even if they are not playing formal sport.

“ School and friends. I want to hang out with my friends, and when I hang out with my friends I usually get exercise. Having friends and getting good grades will help you more in life than sport. When you get older you can go running and such, but I’d rather live my life than, yeah.” – 13 year old, female, regional SA



Bullying and exclusion

Experiences of being bullied and excluded in sporting environments have a significant impact on children and young people’s participation in sport. They described how being put down or bullied based on their skills, gender, sexuality, body size or appearance, race and cultural background affects their wellbeing, safety, and ultimately participation in sport.

“ It’s hard for young people if they get bullied by saying like ‘oh you suck’ because then they don’t want to play. Personally, as a female, I found it hard to handle what the boys would say about a girl playing a ‘non feminine’ sport like soccer, because the boys would say like ‘oh go back to netball’ etc. So that’s why I think girls don’t get enough support in playing ‘non-feminine’ sports. Also though, boys should be able to play ‘female’ sports more effectively like netball etc. There should be more teams for boys wanting to play netball.” – 13 year old, female, metro SA

Diversity and inclusion

Many children and young people highlighted that bullying in sports disproportionately impacts girls and young women, LGBTQIA+ people, people from culturally diverse backgrounds and people with disabilities. Culturally and linguistically diverse children and young people described finding it difficult to want to get involved or stay involved in sport due to assumptions based on their cultural background, as well as more overt racism and discrimination.

“*Toxic environment aggressive netball mums, toxic masculinity, lack of facilities, homophobia.*” – 15 year old, female, regional SA

Children and young people described how school sport and club sport do not consistently ‘facilitate a space for people living with disabilities’. Children who reported living with physical disability described how challenging it was to get involved in sport when their only experiences of sporting environments had been in the context of therapy. Bullying based on ability more generally included ‘nasty’ comments about how you ‘suck’ or ‘can’t play’ and ‘teammates who always get angry at mistakes’, with older people often excluding ‘younger ones’, taller people excluding shorter people, boys excluding girls.

“*Some of us are born with physical problems and getting into sports is a challenge. I, for one, swam to fix my hips and now I hate the idea of swimming professionally. I suppose it depends.*” – 16 year old, female, metropolitan SA

“*Because I have EDS my parents don’t want me to do after school sport and sometimes even P.E. ☹️*” – 10 year old, female, metropolitan SA

Gender stereotypes and inequality

Gender had a significant impact on whether children and young people play or keep playing sport. Gender stereotypes and sexism not only shape children and young people’s experiences in sport but also their aspirations and the kinds of opportunities and choices available to them from a young age.

Both male and female respondents expressed frustration that most sports are grouped into either ‘male’ sports or ‘female’ sports, and that it is difficult to make choices that challenge this gender binary without being judged or bullied.

While some young people welcomed the increasing opportunities for girls in what have traditionally been ‘boy’ sports, girls and young women reported being undermined and disrespected by boys who questioned their ability and belonging in these male dominated sporting environments. Many girls described sports uniforms as ‘sexist’ and ‘demeaning’, and particularly uncomfortable while they’re on their period. Other menstruation-related barriers impacting their participation in sport related to period pain and limited access to period products when they were needed.



“Uniforms are often short & white/lightly coloured. Not good for people on periods. Quite a toxic environment both for women, trans people and +size people. Personally, I’m quite anxious about playing against other people.” – 17 year old, female, metropolitan SA

Gendered assumptions about children and young people’s bodies, strength and ability, as well as assumptions about their sexuality came up often, with many girls and young women reporting that they pulled out of sport ‘in fear of looking too muscly’. What young people described as ‘toxic masculinity’ was damaging for respondents of all gender identities, with some young boys reported not feeling ‘strong’ or ‘masculine’ enough to fit in.

“I don’t think it’s difficult to get involved in sport because it’s heavily introduced to us through school. However it’s hard to stay involved, as girls pull out in fear of looking too muscly.” – 16 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

Some young people described how ‘queer kids get called out in sport’, with many young people having either observed or experienced homophobic or transphobic bullying in sporting environments. Trans and gender diverse young people reported facing unique barriers, ranging from not fitting in to being actively

excluded from both 'male' and 'female' sports, along with the sheer discomfort of wearing binders for long periods of time, particularly while sweating.

Club culture

While a culture of bullying was a common reason for what pushed some young people out of sport, other young people described being overtly excluded or 'kicked out' by their club. This was sometimes linked back to what they described as 'unfair' selection processes that favour skills and achievement over other qualities and dedication. These young people reported feeling as though they were not getting as much out of it as they were putting in.

“Getting placed in an unjustly low team after being involved for years, injury, school/work commitments or clashes.”
– 18 year old, female, metropolitan SA

“There are so many politics involved in sporting especially clubs, which make people (like me) start resenting the club and sometimes sport as they feel it's unfair and neglectful environment. For example, you get better treatment if you and your family know people in charge and people in the top team get better treatment.” – 16 year old, female, metropolitan SA

The significant divide between children and young people's experiences of sport based on their reported skill level and enjoyment was again evident in responses about barriers to participation in sport. Some young people, most of whom described themselves as sporty, expressed a view that it is not difficult for young people to get involved or stay involved in sport. Their explanations as to why other children wouldn't want to keep playing sport included that they aren't good enough ('they don't like that some people are better') or that 'they're losers'.



Others said that those who don't play sport might lack motivation and determination, so 'just need their parent to push them'.

“*If they make friends or not, if they are good or not, if they have distractions, price, time constraints.*” – 16 year old, non-binary, metropolitan Adelaide

“*A lack of encouragement – wanting to do other things – wanting to focus on schooling – a lack of access, opportunities – being part of a minority group – unable to afford to participate/afford equipment.*” – 17 year old, female, metropolitan SA

Parental support

Children and young people highlighted that their full participation in sport depended on their parent's availability, willingness, and capacity to support them financially and practically in terms of time, energy, and support with transport. While this became less of an issue as young people get older and gain independence, young people across age groups noted the pressure facing their parents in terms of working hours, their own commitments and interests made it hard. Some young people noted the particular challenges that single parents have or having separated parents and living between different houses that are different distances from school or sports training or match venues.

“*Not being able to be independent – being reliant on a parent or older sibling for transport, needing money for fees etc.*” – 17 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

Parental attitudes are also a significant influence on young people's participation. Some young people described having 'overly restrictive' parents, or parents who were worried about sports being dangerous. Others described their parents as 'too heavily involved' and 'making it more competitive than the sport has to be', which negatively impacts their participation.

Adult behaviour

Poor behaviour among adults – including parents, coaches and teachers – also has a significant impact on young people's participation in sport, with some young people describing the bullying, 'getting sworn at' and 'too much pressure' from coaches and parents as a factor in their decision to stop playing sport.



They also described how poor behaviour among adults can exacerbate, or at least excuse poor behaviour among young people. Particularly when adults failed to intervene when they observed children or young people being bullied. In contrast, they said that having positive adult and peer role models or 'having people they can relate to' and who support and encourage them 'no matter their skills' was one of the most important things that made them want to stay in sport. In the absence of these things, children and young people described 'feeling like giving up' and being more likely to leave sport.

“Encouragement is a big issue... If parents aren't active or encouraging it makes it very hard for kids to get involved, as parents are role models towards their kids. Playing sports they perhaps don't like leads to lack of enthusiasm, therefore don't try and aren't getting much out of it. Being rude and offensive to team members or opposition leads to people not wanting to hang out with them, and therefore they distant themselves off from the team.” – 15 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

“The pressure coaches give and the constant “I'm not good enough”, “I'm not skinny enough”, “I'm not fast enough”, etc. Many people do not want that kind of pressure or to feel those things about themselves.” – 12 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

Costs

Children and young people said that sport is expensive and that the costs increase as you get older, including costs of uniforms and training gear, registration, and transport, as well as contributions toward fundraisers for club or school sport facilities;

all barriers to their ongoing participation. Some young people said their families could not afford sport, while older young people with some level of financial independence described struggling to balance the costs of sport with other living costs.

“It is expensive, and my mum is a full-time single parent and couldn’t afford it for a long time.” – 13 year old, female, regional SA

“Coming from Port Lincoln, metropolitan sport is very, very, expensive, and I am finding it hard to find a balance between these costs and costs which go towards living.” – 18 year old, female, regional SA

“In the present day, it is mostly money that stops parents allowing their kids to play club sports. Equipment can also be an issue because of the storage space it needs.” – 14 year old, male, regional SA

“For me, it was time constraints. It was the increasing costs as my age increased, and the lack of confidence in my body that made me drop a lot of sports.” – 16 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide



Transport

In addition to the challenges of uniforms and registration fees, children and young people raised other barriers that included accessing and navigating transport. Concerns around how they would be ‘getting to and from sport’ included:

- the availability of public transport;
- not being trusted to safely navigate public transport, or lacking the freedom and independence to do so;
- poorly thought-out public transport routes; and
- difficulty combining transport methods, including not being able to take your bike onto a bus, or needing to pay extra to take your bike onto a train.



Access to transport that is not reliant upon the availability and resources of their parents is critical to young people. It can be a factor in determining whether children and young people can participate in sport on their own terms. A lack of transport options is often compounded by a lack of facilities, requiring further distances to be travelled and thus making children and young people's dependency on parental transport even more essential. Indeed, living close to sports venues was key to some young people being able to participate, with some going so far as to say they simply 'wouldn't be playing sport' if they weren't living as close to the club.

“The way some young people don't have as much freedom or are not trusted enough to be able to use public transport to get to different venues.” – 13 year old, female, regional SA

Not everyone is into sport

Some young people described a lack of interest in sport, highlighting that 'not all people are sporty', that sport is 'not the be all and end all', and that 'it doesn't help that some parents force their kids' to play sport. Others described a loss of interest in sport as people get older, with sport no longer a priority when they 'have better things to do' or 'more fun things that they believe are available to them'.

“To consistently play sports, you have to love sports. Not everyone shares the same feelings towards sports.” – 16 year old, male, regional SA

The 'likeability of the sport' is also important to wanting to stay involved with some children and young people noting that it can be hard to 'find the right sport for them'. Respondents provided a range of reasons for this barrier, including the impact stereotypes in certain sports has, as well as a lack of information about available opportunities. A lack of facilities in the places where they live and a lack of organised competitions suitable to their age or ability were also reported.

Other factors that young people said turn them away from sport included the risk of injuries and rules being too hard or complicated. Others said young people might only enjoy training but find matches stressful, while others said you might not play 'if you don't like training'. A smaller number of young people described how things outside of sport, like drugs, technology and social media or 'unhealthy food', can affect their interest in participating in sport.

“Performance anxiety – a busy schedule – being on time (organisational skills) – need parents to take you – weather policies (can be dangerous) – contact sports – injuries – recurring injuries.” – 17 year old, metropolitan Adelaide

“Time issues, both in travel (especially for younger people) and studying (more for secondary students). We often feel put on the spot, some young people have their sports picked out for them and don't enjoy it, which often means they give up on sport entirely in the end. Additionally, girls' uniforms are often sexist and make girls uncomfortable (short skirts for netball is a sexist and even demeaning choice).” – 16 year old, metropolitan Adelaide



Gender differences

Girls and young women were more likely than boys and young men to talk about body image and body confidence as a barrier to their participation in sport. While some male respondents mentioned stereotypes about 'sporty' or athletic bodies, they were more likely to mention bodies in the context of fears about injury and its impact over the longer term on 'bodies (that are) still developing'.

While challenges related to time commitment were common among all young people regardless of gender, girls were more likely to mention balancing sport with school, whereas boys were more likely to talk about other interests and priorities, or games. In terms of barriers related to the social side of sport, female respondents were more likely to be affected by 'not having friends' around, while male respondents talked about challenges versing teams 'older than you'.

What would help more children and young people play sport?

- Do more to ensure sporting environments are fun and inclusive for everyone, no matter a child's or young person's ability, skill level, cultural background, size and appearance, gender identity, sexuality, or capacity to commit.
- More flexible scheduling and expectations and understanding young people's lives at home, school, work and socially.
- Reduce or in some cases remove the costs of participation in sport.
- Engage with young people directly by listening to what they say motivates them and what turns them away from sport, and be willing to adapt expectations, policies or practice accordingly.
- Ensure a variety of opportunities are made available at school and in the community for a range of ages and skill levels, including true 'beginners' or those who just want to play 'for fun' with friends.



Regardless of age and level of involvement in sport, almost all children and young people identified changes they believed would help more young people get into and stay involved in sport at school and in the community. Their suggestions address cultural issues as well as logistical and financial barriers.

“ When I was younger... I felt like a sport was ‘owned’ by a certain type of person (eg. Footy was for the sporty boys who always made crude jokes, and netball was for the really thin, beautiful girls with long hair). This stopped me from participating in other sports and forming negative attitudes toward them. Maybe doing more sports in schools, where there isn’t pressure to play with people you don’t feel comfortable with (allowed to play with friends and not be separated). If this had of happened when I was younger, I feel like I would enjoy sport a lot more.”
– 17 year old, female, regional SA

Financial support

Many young people report that they would have stayed involved in sport for longer and enjoyed sport a lot more if greater financial support had been made available to their family to cover the costs of signing up, uniforms, equipment and transport to and from training and games. Their suggestions include providing support directly to families or via grants to smaller clubs, more flexible payment plans, scholarships, subsidised fees, and expansion of the sports voucher program ‘to all school students’.

“ Extend the sports vouchers for primary school students to all school students. There are many sports that I really enjoyed and would’ve stuck with but couldn’t because the classes were too expensive.” – 16 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

Providing free ‘come and try’ sessions, trials and letting children ‘play for a game or two’ before paying, are considered important for children and young people. These opportunities enable them



to experience and understand what they are committing to before their family pays significant amounts of money and are 'locked in' for a whole season.

Young people also want to reduce the disparity in costs between sports, which they described as inconsistent and 'unfair'. Some respondents were passionate about increasing funding for lesser-known sports and for public facilities, as well as ensuring there is equal funding for boys' and girls' teams.

“*Make it at a flexible time and if someone can't afford to play any sport maybe low the cost or help them.*” – 13 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

“*Create more programs that are either free or cheap, that aren't about the skills or games, but about having fun and trying something new.*” – 15 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

Ensuring sport is 'more fun' was one of the top things children and young people say would help more children and young people start playing and keep playing sport. Although 'fun' means different things to different young people, common suggestions to make sport more fun included:

- providing more opportunities for sport to be 'less of a competition'
- providing more choices and greater flexibility; and
- offering more proactive responses that challenge stereotypes or bullying, and which instead promote respect, kindness and equality.

Opportunities for casual participation



While some young people enjoy the competitive side of sport, a significant number of children and young people seek more opportunities to participate in sport casually, or as beginners, without the pressure to 'be the best' or 'play at the top level', and without the 'commitment of playing in a club'. Their suggestions to address the 'only play to win mentality' included offering more 'beginner-friendly' leagues and opportunities, regardless of age, and particularly when young people reach high school age.

Support for ‘beginners’ of all ages

Young people want more encouragement from a young age to gradually ease them into a sport rather than expect them to ‘excel straight away’. Some respondents suggested providing ‘beginner skills’ programs to prepare children for particular sports, highlighting that such support for beginners is not consistently available or advertised in a way that gets noticed by them.

“ Find a way to involve more ‘beginner’ people who are new to a particular sport. Encourage people to try a NEW sport. Basically, remove the pressure of starting a new sport and have clubs for more casual play – or ones where you can sign up your friendship group to play games against other groups. Also, make it cheap/free! Public access to courts would be nice.”
– 17 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

“ Have (affordable) clinics that provide beginner skills for their sport, so then when children want to participate in sport, they have some kind of knowledge.” – 16 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

Matched skill levels

Matching age groups and skill levels so that ‘everyone is in the same boat’ and ‘gets the same opportunities’ was also important, regardless of reported skill level. While less sporty and less confident children and young people reported feeling uncomfortable and disheartened when playing with people who are ‘much better’, or who ‘play at state or national level’, the sportier and more confident children and young people equally described feeling impatient and resentful of less sporty people who ‘let the team down’.



“ Make sure everyone is involved and if there are kids that have been there for years and the new kids come in, split it up and have both of them doing something different, so the kids that have been there for years don’t have to be bored from going over stuff they have already done.” – 14 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

- “ Letting people play at a low level without a bunch of younger kids with them if they are older. Because having lots of younger kids playing with older kids makes the older kids feel like they don't belong there.” – 12 year old, female, regional SA
- “ Making matches based on age and experience and making sure that nobody gets excluded.” – 13 year old, male, metropolitan Adelaide
- “ Make the environment free and recreational (if someone wants to join, they can. Be average at the sport instead of excelling at it at first).” – 16 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

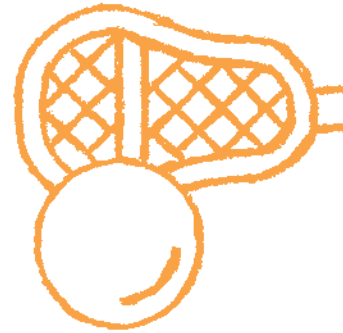
School changes needed

Young people identified changes at school that would encourage participation in sport, including what teachers and school leaders could do to be more flexible, understanding, and supportive. They highlighted the importance of sport spaces and infrastructure that include ovals, gyms, and tennis or netball courts, as well as equipment for active play and sport. One respondent described ‘un-sporty schools’ as ‘un-sporty cause they don't have an oval’. For students attending schools with such infrastructure, it is important that these spaces remain open for students during recess and lunch. Similarly young people said that courts and infrastructure in the community could be left open so that more young people could access these facilities after school and on weekends.

- “ Offer more opportunities to help deal with missing school work. For example, a study session at a local library on the weekend to help students with work they missed due to extracurricular activities.” – 14 year old, male, metropolitan Adelaide
- “ As a teacher, set less homework so young ones can do sports and get a social environment. Be supportive for one's choice of sport. Encourage them to do it. Try telling them the pros of doing sport, not the cons.” – 15 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

Greater variety of sports on offer

Many young people wished their school, particularly their primary school, had offered a more diverse range of sports beyond the ‘common big ones’ (like netball and football). They also wanted schools to reduce homework or school commitments and ‘allow more time outside’ for students to ‘have fun and just be kids’. This included suggesting schools offer training or casual games at lunch time ‘to encourage younger students to play’.



- “ Providing school programs for one full afternoon per week in all schools, where skilled coaches/teachers in specific sports can come in to up-skill young people in a variety of sports. This will enable them to experience a broad variety of sports prior to choosing their favourite ones to pursue at club level.” – 17 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide
- “ A greater range of sport in primary school. Not just netball and soccer, but other sports that aren’t as common, like hockey or lacrosse.” – 13 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide
- “ I don’t have enough time, and if homework was due in maybe two days instead of only having one night to do it, might make it easier to play multiple sports.” – 15 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide
- “ Most un-sporty schools are un-sporty because they don’t have an oval.” – 13 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

Sport as a school subject

Further, rather than sport being seen as conflicting with school, young people, particularly those of high school age, would like to see certain sports offered as subjects at school, and allow students to get credit for their participation. They would also like to see the benefits of sport for concentration and engagement at school being promoted. Some respondents said they wanted support to catch up on homework, either by extending due dates, or providing spaces and opportunities to get support with school work outside of school hours. Others wanted teachers to be more respectful of students who aren’t ‘sporty’.

- “For PE classes to be more inclusive and the teachers in PE to be more understanding of people who don’t like sport.” – 11 year old, female, regional SA
- “A lot of people don’t play sport because they don’t have time to, or they are scared of people judging them. If less homework is given out, or there are fewer school commitments, more children may play sport. The reassurance that the team and coach are kind, may also get more young people involved.” – 12 year old, female, regional SA
- “Making more sports available. Advertising it for older ages such as teenagers. Make clubs for beginners, because some people don’t start because they feel like they’re not good.” – 13 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

Changing selection practices

Changing the system of classifying teams and selecting players to make it ‘better’ and ‘fairer’ rather than selection being based on ‘popularity’ or skills alone, was another common suggestion. Many young people said they would be more involved if the focus was about having fun and trying something new as much as it is about ‘talent’. There was a real sense among respondents that more could be done to balance the competitive aspects of sport in a healthy way, because ‘7 year olds shouldn’t be stressing about sport’.



- “Have inclusive and pressure-free environments for people to just try things out without judgment, and with the understanding that having a high skill level or being the best isn’t necessarily the most important part.” – 17 year old, female, regional SA
- “A less competitive world, we are already pitched against each other in so many other areas, so a more relaxed environment would be much appreciated.” – 17 year old, female, regional SA

While some young people seek opportunities to play at an elite level, the majority of young people want sport to be more flexible. Indeed, one of the key reasons young people gave for why they stopped playing sport in their teenage years is that it can be ‘too serious’ and ‘become too stressful’.

Flexible commitment and participation

Children and young people want sport to ‘fit into their lifestyle’ better, and to not be so ‘time heavy’. One suggestion for how this might be achieved included being allowed to attend trainings even if they aren’t playing matches, or if they ‘can’t commit to the whole season for whatever reason’. Other suggestions included teaching young people ‘how to juggle school work and sports’, scheduling sport at times that are less strict and more suitable for young people with part time jobs, as well as limiting the number of early mornings or late nights. Others suggested sport can help to get kids ‘off technology’.

“Have more teams that are just for fun where it doesn’t matter if you go to all the training sessions or games – where you just go if you can. This way time constraints aren’t as much of an issue.”
– 16 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

“Make it seem more interesting. But also be flexible with things like trainings, as our bodies are growing and we do go to school five days a week along with homework, and sometimes we just need a break.” – 13 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

“Providing more options for social sports. Allowing kids to train even if they are not playing. Encouraging kids to participate in a sport they would like at a very young age. Making sure they are playing the sport they enjoy the most.” – 13 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

Ask children and young people for input

Responses emphasised the importance of talking directly to children and young people across different regions and communities at schools and in sporting clubs. They want adults to ‘ask them’, ‘listen to them’, ‘check up on them’ to ‘see what’s going on’ and to really ‘understand what motivates them’.

They also want adults to understand what might make it difficult for them to keep playing, and what would help to make a positive difference to their engagement and participation



over the short and long term. They want adults to respect and understand that young people's views and experiences are 'not the same for everyone'.

While listening and talking to children and young people was an important first step, they also want adults to act based on what they tell them, including 'inputting the feedback of those involved', 'fixing the problem' or at least 'reassuring them' that they are working to address their concerns.

“Encourage them and ask them why they don't want to participate. Then fix the problem or reassure them that it won't happen.” – 13 year old, male, metropolitan Adelaide

“Realise why they are inclined to play sport. You're not going to run fitness sessions and expect kids to voluntarily be there.” – 16 year old, male, metropolitan Adelaide

Freedom to choose their own sport



Having choices and the freedom to make their own decisions about which sports they play based on what they enjoy was also significant, with most young people saying they will turn away from a sport or 'give up' if they are forced or pressured to take part by parents, coaches, or teachers. They want to be asked 'what we like, instead of making us do stuff we don't', and there was a sense that adults should not 'have to convince kids to get into sport' but rather that they should 'want to do it on their own volition'.

“Provide an inclusive and friendly environment and do not pressure young people into sport. Many children will have negative experiences as they may have been pressured into sport by family or by compulsory school PE. For most, it puts them off sport.” – 16 year old, female, regional SA

“Truth is, I don't really know. I can't really speak on behalf of everyone else, but if you want someone to do something, don't push it too much. Sure, you can show them the benefits, but I've already memorised all that from school. So, I'd say make room for us to stay committed.” – 13 year old, female, regional SA

- “ Give them different options as in different sports. If they’re not great at one sport they can try another. Also, educate parents to let kids be kids, and not push or say negative comments about other players or coaches. Get parents involved in volunteering to run the sport.” – 13 year old, female, regional SA
- “ Do sports that are inclusive of everyone – gender, weight-class, skill level, because what I find people my age hate the most, is doing sports you aren’t good at, or doing sports with people who are already good at that sport leaving you no opportunity to improve.” – 13 year old, gender-fluid, regional SA

At the same time, however, some young people said sport should be mandatory, again highlighting the need for a range of strategies tailored to different needs, expectations and competing priorities. Common ideas to ensure sport ‘caters to everyone’s different needs and interests’ included more opportunities to try out different sports, creating more local teams, and providing better or more facilities. Young people reported that they want more social sport, more mixed sport, sports ‘that aren’t that hard’, and more district and SAPSASA sports.

More support for girls and LGBTQIA+ children and young people

More support and opportunities for girls and for LGBTQIA+ children and young people were viewed as particularly important, because ‘that’s the group of kids that drop out of sports’. Some of the key suggestions to achieve this included challenging gender stereotypes by ‘stressing the idea that it is not bad for girls to look more muscly’ or ‘promoting girls being strong’ and ‘boys playing alongside girls’. They also wanted to challenge the gendered divisions between sports, including having ‘more netball teams for boys’.

- “ Encourage more young girls to play because that’s the group of kids that drop out of sports.” – 17 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide
- “ Make more effort to create inclusive spaces where anyone can feel safe to join in – not just white, straight, able-bodied ‘sporty’ people.” – 16 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

“Something that is hard to change but gender inclusivity in certain sports like how basketball is a male dominated sport. But it would be so much better if it could be represented equally in society.” – 16 year old, metropolitan Adelaide

More female role models

Other ideas to improve girls' confidence in sport related to increasing the positive coverage of girls in sport in the media, as well as using female 'sports stars' as role models to motivate young girls to play a particular sport. Changing rules around uniforms to be more flexible and more comfortable for a range of body sizes and gender identities was also suggested as something that would make a significant difference.

Change female sports uniforms



While views differed across different sports, young people overwhelmingly want uniforms to be less tight and provide participants with more options. While some girls wanted to be allowed to wear shorts rather than just dresses or skirts, others wanted a dedicated 'girls uniform instead of having to wear the boys uniform'.

“Make the uniform better for all sizes – don't make the girls uniform so tight to a point where you can see every detail of their body!!! It makes people feel less confident and was a major reason so many girls quit sports like netball. Let them know its ok to play even if they aren't good, or aren't fit.”
– 17 year old, female, regional SA

“Encourage participation, particularly amongst girls. Rather than focussing on the competitive component, promote the social aspect to include those who don't necessarily identify as “sporty” and allow more friendship teams within school sports to encourage and entice more kids to get involved.” – 17 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

Inclusion

Children and young people want sport to be more inclusive of cultural diversity and gender diversity, as well as diversity of socioeconomic backgrounds, and skill levels. They want sporting environments to be kinder, more ‘gentle’, ‘fun’ and safe, ‘without stereotypes’ and where all children feel like they belong, feel wanted, included and involved, supported and encouraged.

This includes ensuring sport is ‘more available to disadvantaged backgrounds,’ and more accommodation being made for young people with anxiety, experiencing ‘body image’ or ‘fitness level issues’. Young women in particular want to see stronger messaging to promote positive body images, including that ‘size doesn’t matter’ and it ‘doesn’t matter if you’re too tall or short’.

Some respondents suggested ‘getting them better at sport, so that they want to play the sport more’, again implying that sport is most fun when you’re good at it. Others wanted to see less favouritism towards the ‘naturally talented players’ and more encouragement and inclusion of ‘people that are not good’.

“ I think children and young people can be more supported by being able to feel included and by allowing change. Because often there are sports for only one gender. By involving many cultures and not discriminating and just making sure things are safe and people will enjoy it without having constant downsides.”
– 11 year old, female, regional SA

“ Be more accepting of diverse communities, motivate gender (not sex) provide inclusive options and promote inclusivity in all aspects of life.” – 15 year old, non-binary, metropolitan Adelaide

Get rid of bullying and discrimination

A key part of improving the culture and environments around sport was to ‘get on top of’ and ‘get rid of’ bullying and toxic, disrespectful, or rude behaviour. Young people said that club leaders, coaches, and officials, play a key role in this and should be equipped to ‘look for signs of disrespect and take action as soon as possible’, including intervening where people ‘hate, judge and bully’.



In addition to challenging sexist, homophobic, transphobic, or racist behaviour and stereotypes, young people said that actively promoting participation and celebrating diversity would make a significant positive difference to their participation in sport.

Provide better coaches and role models

Children and young people also focused on the importance of peer and adult role models who display positive behaviours and thereby foster a positive culture within teams and clubs. In particular young people said they want coaches who:

- treat everyone fairly, are professional, and who ‘aren’t biased’
- are supportive and enthusiastic and who ‘care for the kids and not only about winning’
- can relate to them, talk to them about how they are going, and show interest in their point of view
- promote children and young people’s confidence and sense of belonging
- are culturally diverse or who are respectful of cultural diversity
- are interested in the development of players, but also in creating a fun and positive environment
- know how to deal with conflict and ‘settle team disputes better’; and who
- praise children and young people for their achievements, providing positive and constructive feedback rather than ‘only calling out their mistakes’.

“Getting good coaches who know what they are doing [and who] can be personable with the team and who does not have bias’. Having beginner teams so people can start a sport knowing others are at the same level as them. Having a good team spirit. Activities to begin the sports season and have everyone get to know each other.” – 16 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide



“Coaches who children can come up to when they don't feel comfortable or are in pain and won't get yelled at or feel ashamed.” – 13 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

Some young people said they ‘need better coaches at school’, and coaches should also be someone who can teach them ‘in fun ways’ and ‘gently’, providing emotional support and motivation and who can help them recover from injuries and be able to ‘take their worries and turn them into ambition’.

Supportive parents

Respondents highlighted the significant influence that parents have on a child's participation in sport. While some young people wanted to see more support for parents to get involved through ‘more information’ or ‘more resources’, others were worried that some parents are ‘too involved’ with negative impacts on children's participation.



“Help make sure that parents aren't pressuring their children when they play, and really explain to them that its ok to go out and not like a sport but help them try their hardest before letting them quit.” – 13 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

“Coaches shouldn't be biased. They should equal to all their players and show the same amount of respect and encouragement to all. For example, don't award a select few at an end of season presentation. Give all players some credit, whether it be acknowledgement, a medal or a trophy.” – 13 year old, male, metropolitan Adelaide

Independent transport options

Children and young people also wanted ‘easier ways to get to and from training and matches’, including not needing a parent to transport them, particularly for children and young people whose families can't afford it. They suggested having schools or clubs provide ‘free, cheaper, or included’ transport, as well as making changes to schedules so that more sport can take place ‘during school hours. That way ‘parents do not have to drive you around’.



“The way I would've kept doing sports is if I had a way of getting there. It makes it very hard when your parents are busy and the games in a place you don't recognise.” – 13 year old, male, metropolitan Adelaide

More information and options

Respondents provided a range of ideas for increasing the quantity and quality of information that is available to children and young people about sport, including through advertising and sponsorships. In terms of content, they want advertising that is displayed ‘in an eye-catching way’, is ‘more fun than just “play football on Saturdays”’ and ‘shows the long-term benefits’ of playing sport. While some respondents suggested teaching kids about ‘the great players’, many young people highlighted that their friends and peers can be just as powerful in encouraging their participation without it being intimidating.

“[Use] advertisements with kids, as it is scary to start come into something new and be the only new kid... that's what stops kids from trying sports. So to have fellow peers talk about it, would make it less scary to join.” – 17 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

“Say to them, the more you do it, the better you will like it, and the happy and stronger you will get.” – 12 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

Young people suggested engaging young people both online and offline, via emails and posters at school assemblies, in PE lessons, and at recess and lunch times. They also suggested school excursions and special days, or special events to encourage young people to play, with prizes, scholarships and free food provided at trainings or sports meetings also mentioned as important incentives.

At the same time, however, some young people noted that ‘sport is talked about a lot in SA’ and there are ‘lots of opportunities’.

These respondents didn't necessarily view a lack of awareness as the key issue, and instead wanted to see adults turn their attention to where gaps might be between the opportunities being made available and what children and young people are saying they want.

Others wanted to broaden the definition of sport and see greater funding, recognition, and support given to 'non-traditional', 'non-mainstream' or 'more obscure' sports. This included other physical activities outside of formal sport, such as dancing, sailing, Scouts or Girl Guides.

“ Provide exposure to different sports at school and provide support. I play very 'abnormal' sports (volleyball, hockey, softball, and baseball) and would love to play badminton and squash through the year when I have spare time. I always find the sports I play are questioned, or others are taken by surprise, as they aren't the normal 'footy/netball'.” – 18 year old, female, regional SA

“ Include Scouts and Girl Guides within the sporting classification. Broaden the range of sports available to children. Support non-sporty children to get involved in active community groups like Scouts and Guides.” – 13 year old, male, metropolitan Adelaide

“ I love sport, but it's not for everyone, so you need to support non-mainstream activities such as Scouting, climbing, chess clubs etc... you need to help the youth find their tribe. If that's sport, great! But if it's not, don't abandon them.” – 17 year old, male, metropolitan Adelaide

“ Interschool sport competitions can be fun but [for] every sport I like, there is not enough other schools that compete, or enough students at my school who have the time, or who are interested to form a team. For example Ultimate Frisbee, Badminton and Mountain Biking.” – 13 year old, male, metropolitan Adelaide



Supporting young people's diverse roles and interests

Making sport 'more social' and 'getting friends involved', as well as 'teaming' young people up with people they know and 'peers they like', were also considered important ways to help more children get involved in sport. Young people highlighted the power of 'catch ups and get togethers', 'social fitness' and 'interactions and how bonding with coaches' can build 'positive team spirit and support'.

“There's a big responsibility when it comes to sport. At first, it can be something that is adored and loved, and that's why you start it. But then when the trainings become more intense and frequent there can be a large mental and physical toll on your body. Finding the right balance for you and your abilities is extremely important.” – 14 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide



Some young people reported that sport is 'not always about playing' and they highlighted the importance of including young people in sport 'in different ways'. This included supporting them as spectators, coaches, and umpires. A small number of respondents were worried that it is too difficult to change deeply ingrained sporting cultures, and felt that certain issues that bother them will continue to 'always be a factor' impacting their participation.

“I would like you to know that the atmosphere for young umpires is often very toxic. As a young umpire, sometimes I don't feel comfortable and I only keep at it out of spite.” – 13 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

Other respondents were of the view that you cannot 'make' all young people enjoy sport, either because this is not possible, or because this should not be the goal given that young people have diverse interests that may not include sport. Some respondents felt that children 'will start by themselves if they want to play' while others said whether or not someone enjoys sport is 'in their genes'.

They said that if some young people's passions lie elsewhere, it is important to still provide them with opportunities and support, but to ultimately respect their choices, and their other priorities and interests, which may include physical activity outside of formal sport.

“ Keep offering them opportunities and support. They can then decide if that's what they want to do. Sport isn't for everyone.”
– 13 year old, female, metropolitan Adelaide

“ Everybody should be able to do sport. It shouldn't be difficult for people to play sport. People should have or be given the right amount of money to play sport. Sport was just free and fun a long time ago. But over the years, sport has become expensive and more money making for companies. This shouldn't be the way to play sport. It should be much more affordable, or EVERYONE!” – 14 year old, male, metropolitan Adelaide



Conclusion

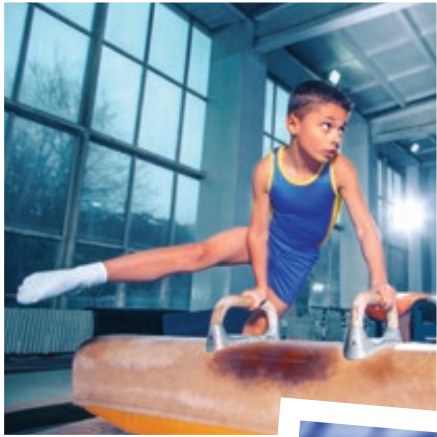
Although young South Australians are aware of the many benefits their participation in sport and physical activity offers them, there are a range of barriers to their participation. These need to be addressed and wherever possible removed if we are to achieve the greater long term commitment we are hoping to see, where sport and physical activity is built in to the lifestyles of children and young people so that it continues through to adulthood.

The responses provided by children and young people via this report provide many ideas on what decision makers and sports leaders in schools, sporting organisations and sporting clubs can do to encourage and support involvement by greater numbers of South Australian children and young people in sport and over longer periods of time.

If we are keen to communicate the message that sport and physical activity is of lifelong importance then we must begin by establishing rules of engagement that include children and young people's preferences, lived experiences, and concerns.

Making the changes suggested by children and young people throughout this report will will make a positive difference to their ongoing participation and enjoyment of sport, balanced as this must be, with all other aspects of their young lives.





Endnotes

- 1 UNICEF, 2018. Children's Rights in Sport Principles. Available at https://childinsport.jp/assets/downloads/Children's_Rights_in_Sport_Principles_English.pdf.
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