Strong Girls

A handbook for teachers, coaches and parents

by Lucy Rist
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The Strong Girls handbook

A guide to implementing a sport & adventure program that creates girls strong on the inside and on the outside!

Strong Girls is a sport and outdoor adventure program that aims to empower and promote physical and emotional well-being in teenage girls. This Program offers sport to girls in an entirely new way, breaking the norms and stereotypes which have dominated school and club sports for so long. Simply put, Strong Girls supports girls in growing from their experience of sport, doing so in diverse ways with lifelong benefits.

Through the vehicle of sport, it is possible to build girls who are strong on the inside—mentally and emotionally—and strong on the outside—physically and energetically. It is possible to help girls discover more about who they are, and what they want in their own lives. The Program is designed to create these opportunities and nurture this development.

Through the Program girls are supported in developing the skills and agency to go after their goals, and be agents of change in their society. Not only does this Program encourage girls to be more active: the skills that they learn through sport and physical activity translate into all other areas of their lives. This handbook explains the philosophy behind Strong Girls, and supports teachers, coaches, youth leaders, and parents in a step-by-step process towards implementing the Strong Girls Program in their own school, sports club or organisation. This handbook includes a full year of programming, complete with detailed lesson plans, guidance and resources to fully support you on your own Strong Girls journey.
I dreaded sports lessons as a girl because of how sport was taught at the schools I attended. At junior school I was one of those always picked last when teams were chosen. I felt self-conscious about moving and coordinating my body, and about my training clothes. With no real experience of team sports or athletics before joining school I felt very lost and alone. The teachers focused only on the girls who were good at whatever sport we were practicing; and with no genuine encouragement or support in learning, I just gave up assuming that sport was not for me.

During one school term we played field hockey, and a new friend paired up with me. We practiced drills together. She was really good at hockey, and she guided and encouraged me. We laughed and had great fun, and I even made progress—our different abilities weren’t an issue. That single positive experience stands out in my mind all these years later: I am certain that with a different orientation to teaching sport, the fun and belonging which I experienced in that one practice could have been the norm rather than the exception.

Once I started university, the friends I made encouraged me to try rowing. Later came running, rock-climbing, mountain biking, then weightlifting, sea kayaking and others. I found activities that I enjoyed and was good at. As an adult, sport and being active is an important part of my life. I have spent time coaching girls as well as running leadership training for women working as coaches, and have seen how the same norms and values that limited my childhood experience are still present.

I was lucky to get a second chance in discovering sport, but I clearly recognise all that I missed out on as a girl. Many young women do not get that second chance. I wasted a great deal of energy feeling ashamed and inadequate in my own body, doubting my physical abilities and being afraid to join in and try things which looked fun and exciting.

I believe that all girls can enjoy using their bodies, moving, exercising, sharing with their friends, testing their limits, but most importantly having fun and gaining new experiences. I am convinced that any sport can be made fun for girls. The only reason many girls still don’t enjoy sport is because of how we offer it to them and the messages they have received about what sport is, and who they are as girls. It is time that this changed!

I wrote this handbook because I want to transform how we teach sport to girls. I want all girls to know their value and to believe in themselves. Through my own Strong Girls journey, I have discovered a different understanding of what sport is about, and a different way of teaching girls. This new understanding is offered to others in this book.
This new way supports a powerful process of empowerment. Physical activity and using the body is fun, an adventure, and a natural part of life for all girls. It should not be a source of anxiety, fear or shame, particularly in their earliest formative experiences. School sport is often their first real exposure to organised sport, and this is where their first views about themselves in relation to sport and physical activity are formed. For many, this is not a positive experience, and for some it’s emotionally painful and traumatic. In any of these situations, the limits and beliefs that form can impact girls throughout their adult lives, steering behaviours and choices with consequences for both physical and mental wellbeing.

The Strong Girls Project, from which this book has emerged, was a three-year collaboration with schools in Sweden to test a new approach to teaching school sport for girls. Jenny Lidqvist and I wrote the funding application for this project together in 2015, drawing on our own experiences of sport as girls, and of coaching girls as adults. When our application was granted, we set about experimenting with teaching sports lessons differently, focusing on fun, a safe space, and on supporting growth from new experiences. We also prioritised the girls getting access to a variety of women as coaches and role models. We experimented with using sport as a way to support the girls in challenging topics such as bullying, body image issues or learning how to navigate their feelings. We developed ways to build skills in communication and relationships. We tested the potential of sport done differently to support girls’ development socially and in society. We explored how we could use sport to build capacities in the girls which would transfer over to support the life skills that we saw many so urgently needed.

Jenny did much of the week-to-week meeting with the girls, dealing with everything from stolen running shoes and delayed school buses to arguments between friends and negotiations with parents. I focused on our theoretical framework and translating theory into practical tools, exploring how to integrate the latest ideas from psychology and personal development into sport in the most practical ways. I am extremely grateful for this journey with Jenny, and the amazing experience of teamwork the project gave us. It is from that partnership that our Strong Girls vision came to life.

Acknowledgements

Transforming all of the lessons learned from implementing the Strong Girls Project, as well as what I have seen in sport and society into this handbook was made possible through the collaboration of a diverse collection of talented people. People who care deeply about supporting girls’ empowerment and development, and their equal access to opportunities in sport. Nicole Kieler Fegley joined the journey when I first started to write, helping me to create a clear and supportive structure. Her experience with Integral Theory was invaluable in developing a reflection process that will support teachers and coaches in setting up their own Strong Girls courses. Towards the end she was a needed source of motivation and support when I felt overwhelmed by the task of bringing it all together. She reminded me of the “why” behind this book, and the need to get this material out in the world and support others wanting to empower girls through sport. Thjis Keessenberg provided great design, and Mali Sagmoen added to that with some beautiful and colourful illustrations. Harry van der Velde helped with diagrams to illustrate core concepts. Doug Breitbart and Tammy Lea Meyer supported with editing; Tammy weavin back and forth between sections to ensure the reader gets the clearest guidance in their own process. Joakim Blomquist provided inspiration around the challenges of supporting human development, as well as sharing his parallel creative journey of working to help others.

I want to acknowledge all of the enthusiastic teachers and the women who acted as role models and coaches to groups of girls in Umeå during the Strong Girls Project. Many put in large amounts of time and energy in testing our ideas and experimenting with us. Finally, thank you for the generous financial support we received from the Swedish Inheritance Fund, in funding the original Strong Girls Project which is the foundation and inspiration for this book.

We have an opportunity to think much more intentionally about what physical and emotional experiences we are creating for girls during their sports lessons, as well as what we want them to learn about themselves, others and society. My hope is that this handbook will guide and assist teachers, coaches and parents who want to make this important shift. We will have a much more empowered and active next generation of girls as a result.

Lucy Rist
The Strong Girls Project
What is Strong Girls?

A new way of offering school sport to girls

Schools are an important place for fostering the healthy development of girls, especially considering that they spend more than 30 hours there each week. It is during school that girls can be supported in developing into healthy, active members of society — but it’s also where social norms are seen, understood, and reinforced. Schools play a crucial role in either dismantling or maintaining the norms that maintain gender inequalities, sexism, sexual harassment and bullying. School sport in particular is a powerful influence, but this potential for the demonstration of compassion, fairness and equality goes largely unrecognised at present. Sport is historically very stereotyped and unequal, and is still one of the slowest sectors of society to shift. And because sport is fundamentally about our physicality and our bodies, it makes it the perfect arena for schools to work very actively with the empowerment and healthy development of girls, and the dismantling of gender norms.

Strong Girls is a sport and outdoor adventure program that supports the empowerment of teenage girls. By offering an entirely new experience of sport and physical activity that can be implemented within a school or sports club structure, Strong Girls supports girls in exploring new physical activities while also gaining new skills and tools in other areas of their development. Girls complete a Strong Girls course not only with new physical skills and a greater interest in being active and taking part in sport, but they also gain new emotional and relational skills. They gain new competencies in setting goals, reflecting on their opinions, overcoming fears, communicating, maintaining boundaries and other lifelong skills. In addition to all the benefits that regular sport and physical activity can support, Strong Girls walk away from this Program with a better sense of who they are, and of how to use their innate strengths in all areas of life.

Strong Girls provides your school or sports club with a new way of offering sport to girls. Simultaneously, it also offers you the chance to boost other areas of their development with positive impacts on their wellbeing and learning. The Program is constructed as a “plug and play” system to facilitate the easiest possible integration into existing timetables and national course plans for those working in schools. For those working in sports clubs, or with other youth organisations, this structure also allows for an easy integration into training schedules or other planned activities such as summer camps.
The Strong Girls Program is structured around 10 Objectives, each Objective deals with a key area of life skill development. These Objectives set the backbone for your course. They also all interconnect, ensuring that all the pieces of the girls’ learning are integrated, and build on each other as they move through their Strong Girls course. Each Objective is also valid in and of itself, so should you choose to work at a smaller scale with just one or two of the Objectives, this will still lead to meaningful learning and development. With Strong Girls, you can offer girls the opportunity to:

1. Learn to set their own Goals and to create the conditions for reaching those goals
2. Learn to challenge Negative thinking and achieve more positive self-talk
3. Formulate and Express their own ideas, opinions and values
4. Recognise, explore and build on their existing Strengths
5. Develop Compassion, team spirit and the ability to coach and support others
6. Explore Body signals related to positive and negative feelings, and develop tools to handle difficult emotions
7. Learn how to Problem solve, to deal with conflict and to acknowledge the perspectives of others
8. Find the Balance between achievement and having fun in sport and life
9. Reflect on the norms, values and ideals in society and how that relates to their own agency in Society
10. Learn new Physical skills, and experience new sports and activities

Where did this idea come from?

This handbook emerges from a three-year project which developed and tested an entirely new approach to school sport for girls between 13-16 years old. The contents of the handbook summarises the lessons learnt during this project, all packaged and structured in a step-by-step process ready for others wanting to implement the Strong Girls Program, or support girls in their development through sport and physical activity.

Inspiration for the original project came from two women reflecting on their own experiences of sport as young girls; and sharing a strongly held vision of a more positive and innovative sports experience for all girls of school age. This vision included the opportunity for all girls to benefit from the experiences that participating in sport and physical activity can offer—not just the opportunity to discover a sport that they love, but to develop a healthy connection with their bodies, greater self-confidence and self-awareness, as well as the skills for supportive relationships with team mates and other girls. Sport can be a fantastic tool for personal development. The Strong Girls Project explored how to use that potential most effectively and in the process developed an entirely new school sports experience for girls.

The framework behind the Strong Girls Program incorporates progressive ideas from the fields of psychology, coaching and human development. More information about the theoretical basis of Strong Girls can be found in Chapter 6. While this will be interesting reading for some, this extra material is not essential in order to set up a Strong Girls course with great success in your own school or sports club.

Why is Strong Girls unique?

Strong Girls addresses two needs for girls. First, the need for more positive sport experience in or after school. Secondly the need to learn important tools and skills to support them in dealing with life, school and relationships. The Strong Girls Program focuses on having fun while tackling new experiences and learning through reflection on these experiences. The opportunity to develop skills, such as those in focus in this Program, gives girls the chance to become brave and powerful young women who understand their own strengths and abilities and make their own decisions.

This Program is not focused on performance, or being “good” at physical activities, although it certainly helps build new physical skills, and with those, more confidence and enthusiasm for sport in general.

Sport offers huge potential for girls development, yet very few schools or sport curricula fully embrace this opportunity. Many still deal with the subject narrowly, in terms of physical health and the development of purely physical skills. School sport is the perfect place to introduce more focus on emotional and social skills. A school based program makes it possible to reach all girls, including those who may come from families without a sport background or culture. In addition, daily or regular contact with the girls offers the chance to build a level of trust that cannot be offered with one off interventions or many after school activities.

Most sport is taught or coached by men. A key part of the Strong Girls Program is providing access to sporting women as role models. Girls need women as role models to show them that sport is just as much a natural place for women as it is for men; and that the opportunities available to them are much greater and wider than they may be aware. Access to younger role models is particularly important, as is contact with diverse types of women, not just the professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate professional athletes they may see on television or social media. Women of all ages, body types, backgrounds and identities, all with passionate
Strong Girls uses the opportunities provided by sport and physical activity to support girls in their emotional, physical, social and societal development. You might ask: why use sport when this can be taught in a classroom?

Sport offers an embodied practice and therefore serves as a fantastic opportunity for experiential learning. For many important life skills, learning is best supported by the chance to experience something new directly. It’s valuable to experience, to experiment and to reflect. With Strong Girls the girls can practice feeling and reflecting on their experiences; in a sense learning to use their own internal feedback, in addition to listening or reading about these topics.

The Strong Girls Program recognises that classroom-based lessons on complex, abstract subjects in personal development are also relevant and important, but that this needs to be complemented with actual practical experience for teenagers. Hands-on, minds-open, learning by doing makes it easier for girls to absorb what can be quite complex and new information, and makes it easier for that information to be remembered and applied to other contexts in the girls’ lives.

During sport, we develop a closer connection to our bodies. This teaches us to become aware of our feelings and emotions, which are all experienced in the body. In turn we learn more about who we are and what we want for our own life. Without this connection and awareness of feelings and their bodily signals, it is much harder for someone to know what they want or don’t want. This is much like going through life without a well-functioning compass. Strong Girls supports girls in developing this kind of emotional intelligence and self-awareness, all through the integration of sport with well-designed reflection and discussions.

Strong Girls the girls can practice feeling and reflecting on how we can use sport to teach other key life skills as a result of taking part in Strong Girls. These girls have been educated in a more holistic way. It is about fun, self-discovery and a much wider range of both physical and emotional experiences. It is about reflecting on how we can use sport to teach other key life skills and capacities. Programs such as this represent the future of all sport lessons in schools; many innovative educators are talking more and more about this transition. Using the Strong Girls Program will help prepare your school or sports club for the future, giving you a head start in this process.

What the girls say

What teachers say

Three schools were involved in testing and evaluating the Program since the start of the Project. Here is some of what the teachers had to say about their experience, and what they have observed in the girls taking part:

"For immigrant girls our course has been very important! The girls are so happy to try new things and are always talking about what they have done. Because these activities are part of school they are accepted by parents, otherwise they would not get the chance to try. For Swedish girls it’s been more about them trying more diversity in sport and widening their view about what sport can be." 
Teacher, Ersängsskolan 2018

"I would say to other schools that this is a great investment, the girls’ self-awareness and self-confidence have benefited as well as their school results, they take more space for themselves, they feel better and that’s fantastic!"
Head teacher, Linnéaskolan 2018
Girls growing up today face many challenges. While this handbook focuses on unrealised potential in girls and highlights some great possibilities, it’s important to be aware of precisely why this Program is so urgently needed. Having a really solid understanding of the challenges that girls are currently facing aids any teacher or coach in supporting girls more fully in setting up and implementing a Strong Girls course.

Every girl is born with unlimited potential. With increased educational opportunities and recognition that their voices count, girls and young women have more opportunity than ever to be innovators and change leaders, contributing to building a safe and sustainable world. Yet girls and young women still face many obstacles to realising their potential. For many girls today, their drive and motivation can be accompanied by relentless self-criticism and an acute fear of failure or of not being enough.

Though girls and young women have never been more “successful” in school, research shows that many are really struggling in life. Girls growing up in today’s society lack many of the skills needed to truly navigate in their own lives, make choices for themselves, and build healthy relationships with others. Many are anxious and overwhelmed, feeling that no matter how hard they try, they will never be smart enough, successful enough, pretty enough, thin enough, popular enough, or for some perhaps, sporty enough. Connected to these challenges is the rapidly expanding world of media and technology. This includes reality television and celebrity culture, which continue to reinforce gender stereotypes as well as unrealistic portrayals of what it means to have a happy and successful life.

Girls and our future

Girls are naturally lively, adventurous, empathetic, and diverse. They can have a huge amount of courage and drive to create change in their communities and society, as illustrated by young women such as Malala Yousafzai, Emma González, Greta Thunberg or Amika George. However, in our current society these traits often get quashed by the pressures and messages that girls receive about who they are expected to be, and how they are expected to look and behave. Many of the norms in society currently limit the development of teenage girls, rather than supporting it. At the same time as discovering who they are as individuals, girls feel immense pressure to fit in with others and to meet the expectations of friends, family and society. Some of these expectations are a natural part of maturing. Others are unhealthy standards that result from a society that continues to place far too much focus on how girls and women look and their amenability to others—and less on their intrinsic value, power and authority.

The momentum for positive change in society is now growing. By building more awareness in girls of how our society currently functions, of where these expectations come from, and in what form they often manifest, Strong Girls supports girls in gaining freedom from these expectations, allowing them to create a future that they articulate for themselves.

Becoming aware of how society can limit you, or require you to conform can be of great practical
Many girls and young women monitor their weight closely, and spend a lot of time thinking about their body size and shape and how much they eat. As girls grow up they get the message that only one type of body is acceptable and if they don’t measure up closely to that ideal they will be judged as being less worthy. This pressure contributes to eating disorders, mental health challenges, and disengagement from life, as well as to self-harm and other negative health behaviours.

Developing a healthy connection to the body through sport and physical activity can support girls in understanding that their value is not linked to their appearance or conformity to others’ ideals. It can support the perspective that their body is something to be cared for and enjoyed for all the experiences that it can offer, and that a healthy body can provide great support and resilience throughout life.

It is important to talk more openly and honestly to girls about “fat talk”—the negative comments they make about their own body, about how much they’ve eaten or exercised, or such comments about others’ bodies. This critical talking is a kind of ritual self-hatred that girls begin practicing early. Many of them learn it from adult women, for example hearing their own mothers express discontent either overtly or covertly with their own body or appearance.

By supporting girls in a process of learning to appreciate the uniqueness of their body for what it is, what it can do, and the guidance and information it offers, rather than just how it looks, girls receive new and powerful messages about their bodies. When such messages are reinforced by diverse women role models, as well as by their peers, a powerful message is sent to counter the prevailing culture, with benefits and effects for all those at school, or all involved with the clubs’ activities.

Girls and sport

Girls often need extra support to engage with sport, and maintain sport and physical activity as part of their daily lives. This is not because they are inherently less enthusiastic or interested, but because society’s sports culture does not cater very well to their specific needs in school sport, in after school or weekend activities in sports clubs, in the media, or in mainstream media events. Even in Sweden sport is still very traditional, dominated by masculine norms, values and preferences.

Certain styles of coaching and teaching, together with a focus on competition and performance, put many girls off taking part in sport. Girls are often more attracted by the opportunity to perform activities and the chance to have fun and try new things with their friends. When this focus on fun and shared experience is ignored, many girls only experience the pressure to achieve and perform, and their enjoyment declines. As a result, many girls drop out of sport between the ages of 12 to 16, particularly from team sports.

“We cannot solve a crisis without treating it as a crisis... if solutions within the system are so impossible to find, then... we should change the system itself.” — Greta Thunberg

While some young activists are emerging and inspiring others, these girls are more disenfraged from society and from current political, economic, social and environmental challenges than ever before. Society needs them to be full participants, creating and shaping their own futures in business, art, research, and sport if the world is to transition to a more positive future.

Girls and health

Increases in the rates of mental illness and anxiety in teenagers are alarming; and far greater increases are being seen in girls than in boys. Statistics show that rates of psychological and somatic disorders, such as headaches, depression and sleep problems are increasing, and that growing numbers of girls are being prescribed antidepressants and having long breaks away from school.

Research from 2017 and 2018 shows that self-reported psychosomatic disorders have increased steeply among teenagers since 2013. For girls, the proportion of multiple psychosomatic disorders has increased from 25 to 41 percent, these values are the highest levels since monitoring began in Sweden in 1985. In parallel, between 1991 and 2014, the sales of antidepressants increased dramatically for girls aged 15 to 19. While serious psychological health problems may require medication, research shows that many other approaches to common mental and somatic disorders are as effective, if not more.

Exercise in particular has been shown to have great benefit both for managing stress and anxiety in those who are otherwise healthy, as well as in supporting those with less severe depression on their path to recovery. In addition, stronger and more supportive relationships, greater self-awareness and emotional intelligence and the ability to ask friends and family for help are valuable skills to counter some of the socially contributing factors in cases of depression.

Currently there is very little focus on preventative measures when it comes to psychological and emotional health among teenage girls. With friends as they are, it should be a top priority for schools, those who work with girls and parents to equip girls with the tools and skills that they need to take care of their own mental health, before and as they move into their teenage years. Such an approach would allow them to navigate the challenges that they meet along the way, and can serve to prevent problems from becoming more severe.

By supporting girls in developing greater self-awareness and emotional intelligence and providing simple tools for managing stress and anxiety, it is possible to start to work more preventatively with the health of girls. Girls of young women. If girls can find physical activities that they find fun and rewarding, without the pressure to achieve or be driven by the motivation they look a certain way, then they are further strengthened in staying happy and healthy as they face the inevitable challenges of growing up.

“Girls are typically offered only a very limited selection of sports or physical activities by their schools, or within sports clubs and after school activities. Without the chance to try a more diverse selection of sports, and different ways of being physical and active, many girls don’t find something they really enjoy and conclude that sport is just not for them. The consequence is that many teenage girls miss out, not just on sport itself, but more importantly on the opportunities it offers to develop other life skills such as leadership and goal setting. Further, when this opportunity is missed, the lifetime consequences can be dramatic—many leave and never return.”

When speaking with women about their experiences of sport at school, how it has influenced their level of physical activity as an adult, and their feeling of belonging in sport, many will tell a similar story. It is not uncommon that women who did not have a good experience of sport as girls generally end up being less physically active and having harsh judgements around their abilities. Some of these women may later join group training classes and gym sessions with a focus on losing or maintaining weight, rather than physical activity for the fun of it, and for the social connection and shared experiences with others.

Sports events can be intimidating and physically threatening for young girls and even grown women. The frequently macho culture at many
mainstream sports events, combined with objectification of women which is often part of the event culture, offers a far from supportive environment for girls. While such events can be a “rite of passage” for some boys, they can represent a very real safety concern for girls. Unless supported or encouraged by a parent, attending a sports match or event is, in general, still a rare opportunity or choice for host girls. The very nature of live sports spectatorialism means that girls are often totally excluded from this part of sport culture.

“Follow your dreams. If you have a goal, and you want to achieve it, then work very hard and do everything you can to get there, and one day it will come true.”
— Lindsey Vonn

All girls deserve the chance to try the full range of sport available, and to discover a sport or activity that they really enjoy. They deserve to have the best opportunity to build that connection while they are young and have it with them as a normal part of their life as they grow up. They deserve the right to enjoy sport as a spectator or consumer of sport media, feeling as much a part of that community and culture as a boy or a man.

Currently girls are not getting these opportunities, and in many cases are still given, directly or indirectly, the strong message that they don’t belong. While this may seem depressing, this reality represents a huge opportunity. It is not that girls don’t want to participate in sport, watch sport or try new things, they just need sport offered to them in a better way: in a way that suits their needs and preferences. That is exactly what the Strong Girls Program provides!

**Girls and relationships**

Many girls lack real experiences of supportive friendships; yet their relationships are one of the most important, if not the most important part of their lives during their teenage years. It’s a sad truth, but many women are not good at supporting other women—and this often starts in adolescence. There are arguments over the potential biological or cultural reasons for this pattern, but regardless of where it comes from, it can be worked on, and that work should start early!

For some girls, the experience of a supportive girls-only environment such as the one that can be created within the Strong Girls Program might be quite different from what they experience overall. Being supported as a group and given new skills and awarenesses in this area something that they can take with them into their adult lives personally and professionally.

A girl who has sport as part of her life often learns to build and maintain relationships through involvement in her team or sports club, including working together towards a challenge and learning how to support others, even in the face of personal differences. She learns to recognise other girls for their unique roles and talents, even when challenges in relationships arise. She will be more likely to be trusting and supportive of other women as an adult, having had these experiences.

Potentially, she may also be more likely to act as an advocate for girls’ and women’s rights, and to speak out on behalf of others for a more inclusive and progressive society.

These social skills and capabilities bring joy to life through the connection they facilitate and influence long-term health every bit as powerfully as adequate sleep, exercise, or a good diet. Those with satisfying relationships with family, friends, and their community are happier, have fewer health problems, and live longer.

For some, the skills to create these relationships develop naturally. For others, being guided and having the chance to learn can be a great support basis for a successful life. Girls can pass on to both girls and boys.

Sport and physical activities provide more frequent opportunities for conversations about some challenging and rather typical girl behaviours including “mean” jokes etc. “No offense I was just kidding,” bullying, and other forms of passive aggression. In addition to the opportunity for discussion that the context of a Strong Girls course creates, it can also work to prevent these behaviours through creating group agreements or “team rules” at the start of a course, with specific exercises to build trust and community. The fact that trust between individuals is built through repeated interaction has been well researched and validated. The Strong Girls Program is built on this understanding and focuses on supporting small and simple trust enhancing behaviour patterns between the girls, that will grow and blossom over time.

**Girls and emotions**

Emotions, or what are more commonly known as feelings, drive all of our learning, decision-making, creativity, relationships, and health. Emotional intelligence and self-awareness are key ingredients for building healthy and supportive relationships with others. Similarly, they are key skills for navigating life and for living with a sense of fulfillment and well-being. Research clearly shows that emotional intelligence predicts well over 50% of the variation in later “success” across relationships, health and quality of life. Research also shows that young people with high emotional intelligence earn higher grades, stay in school longer, and make healthier choices for themselves.

““I’ve never scored a goal in my life without getting a pass from someone else.”
— Abby Wambach

Girls have a lot to gain by being encouraged to have greater awareness of their inner world, including developing a practice of self-reflection. The experience of being asked to identify and express what they think and feel is powerful. Learning to consider, and be appropriately open to the thoughts and feelings of others is also needed. In general, the emotional lives of adolescents are often considered to be a bit out of control, and girls can be judged as being less capable of processing or understanding their emotions and inner life, as well as that of their friends and the world around them.

This sometimes dismissive, even if well meaning, style of describing teenage girls is a significant obstacle. At this point in their development, girls are naturally finding their identities by rebelling, questioning and trying new things. Judgement from others, including the adult world, encourages girls from paying attention to and honouring their own emotional intelligence. This time in their lives is a great opportunity to offer them exciting choices that are healthier for them, providing a close community of other girls with whom they can be supported in exploring their rapidly developing emotional diversity.

Children and teenagers can all be taught and encouraged to identify and communicate their feelings. In a trusted environment, emotions are talked about openly, most will speak freely about their feelings, and are quick to have compassion and empathy for their peers. They support and teach girls when they themselves lack these skills or awarenesses. Parents, will struggle to teach girls when they themselves lack these skills or awarenesses.

Emotional intelligence is in fact easily learned and developed. Part of what is needed in schools and in sport is to equip more teachers and coaches with the tools and techniques that they need to be able to teach girls and boys. Strong Girls directly provides these tools and techniques, and the process of establishing a course is structured to engage teachers and coaches in a process of developing greater self-awareness and reflection abilities, skills that can be brought to their teaching and coaching practices.
Planning ahead

The original Strong Girls Project was implemented within a school setting working with girls aged 13-16 years old. The Program presented here can also easily be used by those training and supporting girls within a sports club, or can be integrated into other youth programs or activities. In fact, this material can be adapted and used by anyone with an interest in improving the way that sport is offered to girls; or by anyone with an interest in using sport as a tool to support girls’ development. The Program is also easily adapted for younger or older girls by adjusting the language, and scaling the activities and reflection tasks appropriately.

This chapter gives step by step instructions for planning your own Strong Girls course including time-tabling that provides the backbone for a full school year. The Program as planned and presented here includes 30 core lessons, together with 3 introduction sessions, and 2 ending sessions, giving a total of 35 lessons. Typically these are once a week, 90-minute long sessions.

The 30 core lessons cover the 10 Objectives of the Program, with 3 lessons for each Objective. If you are working within a sports club or other youth organisation you can adapt this format to the frequency and duration of the girls’ training. Alternatively, specific Objectives can be used in a more “stand alone” manner, for example in a sport or adventure camp or an afterschool program, or even just to spice up an existing sports program at school, or training sessions in a sports club. How the Program can be adapted for different circumstances is explored in Chapter 5.

Once you are familiar with the Programs’ modular structure and how the pieces fit together, it will become clear how easy it is to adapt Strong Girls to your own particular context and goals. Follow the handbook step-by-step, and it will guide you in setting up your very own Strong Girls course to meet your exact needs!

While this Program offers lots of flexibility, there are some basic requirements for being able to implement Strong Girls successfully:

- You will need at least one teacher, coach or youth leader passionate about the goals of this Program. This needs to be someone who can allocate time and energy to planning, organising and running a Strong Girls course, including sourcing and arranging sports and activities for the girls.
- You must be able to schedule 60–120 minute sessions with the girls at regular intervals.
- You will need a small amount of financial resources to cover a few excursions with the girls. More information on securing financial and other types of support for your course is given in Chapter 5.
How to use this handbook

In implementing a Strong Girls Program or using the material in this handbook, you are embarking on a journey yourself. You will be encouraged to reflect back to your own experiences of sport at school, as well as to think about your own journey up to now in terms of your emotional life, your work and relationships, and the norms and structures present in our society today and how they influence you.

This is an opportunity for gaining new insights into yourself and will encourage a new perspective on what sport can teach. This perspective will stay with you and inform how you teach or support everyone you meet, not just the girls. This self-reflection doesn’t require large amounts of extra time or effort, just the willingness to stay open and curious about yourself and your beliefs and trust in the process. The focus on reflection intentionally puts you in a process of development and learning, much like the girls that you teach. Essentially you can use the Program to develop yourself, and the course, of girls that you teach. With self-reflection, supported by the handbook. Ongoing reflection throughout your course is an important part of making sure that you are matching the course to the girls that you are supporting, and keeping track of the lessons you are learning on your journey, along with any new ideas or insights of value for the future.

You should aim to engage other like-minded teachers or coaches, so that you can discuss the ideas in the Program material and share the process. If you can find a partner or small team, you can do the reflection exercises together, discuss what came up for everyone, giving you more material to work with. In school for example, the girls will certainly benefit from the support of other teachers whom they interact with during other subjects and lessons; it is helpful to have other trusted adults who know what they are doing and exploring in their Strong Girls lessons.

While all you need is contained in this handbook, your own ideas and creativity will provide valuable input into your own Strong Girls course. The original Strong Girls Project was very much a learning journey, testing new things, asking for feedback from all of those involved, with lots of reflection and revision along the way. In following the framework that emerged from that project, namely this handbook, there will still be challenges to navigate, and new insights to be incorporated on your own journey. Any program such as this one needs to be a dynamic process in order to be the best fit for your school, club or the different groups of girls that you will want to support. Society and our education systems are rapidly changing. Taking this learning perspective as you reflect on your Strong Girls course will help in creating a course which evolves rather than becoming something that is rigid and inflexible.

The Strong Girls framework

Strong Girls is based on a framework made up of four perspectives and a skills development process, both are described in detail below. By combining these different perspectives with specific skills development, you are supported to work in a repetitive journey, Objective-by-Objective, throughout the Program. This is supportive of the girls in their learning and for you as a leader. In your preparation and implementa- tion of the Program, this framework is always present; it supports your planning and helps you develop questions and generate discussions with the girls.

The Four Perspectives

The four perspectives - inside, outside, me, other - relate to what focus the girls will be supported in taking when learning about and reflecting on their experience of activities in their course, see Figure 2. When a focus is on inside they are encouraged to be aware of what is going on in their “inside” - what they are feeling, and what emotions and thoughts are present. These are things that no one else can know unless they decide to share this information.

With a focus on their outside, they are reflecting on their behaviour, their physical body and how it interacts with the world, including reflecting on how they act, what they do, and what they communicate to others. This is also about how their body moves while playing a sport or doing an activity. For example, coordination, speed of movement, and other physical capacities and skills come in here. These things are visible to another, and are something that someone can provide feedback on or even measure.

The inside and outside may not match. For example, one of the girls could be feeling very insecure on the inside but with their behaviour they perhaps try to communicate confidence or dis-interest, which is on the outside. Understanding the difference between the inside and outside, observing how aligned they are, and the reasons for why that may be so are all illuminated by using the Strong Girls framework.

Me and other are more straightforward. The girls could focus on their own “inside” or “outside,” or they might be curious about another’s “inside”. This might look like asking, “What might that person be feeling or thinking right now?” Or they might observe and interpret another persons “outside”; observing how another person moves in order to provide feedback, to help a peer in practicing and learning a new skill, or noticing body language which suggests that someone is feeling scared or excited.

This is to say that as a Strong Girl Leader you will have similar learning outcomes to the girls, which are integrated throughout the Program. For each Objective you’ll have your own personal process of understanding the material through reflection questions as you go along. You’ll also have an opportunity to reflect on how things unfold after each lesson so that you can apply your own changes and ideas to the next cohort of girls that you teach. Originally you can use the Program to develop yourself, and the course, each time you deliver it!

Strong Girls is specific and contains a lot of new ideas and approaches to teaching sport; and yet, therefore, is more of a process than a rigorous structure. Therefore it is a relatively simple program to implement. Aside from reading through this handbook and familiarising yourself with the Strong Girls framework, the main preparation work involves scheduling your overall course and then the selection and planning of sufficient sports and activities for all 10 Objectives. This typically needs to be done well in advance of starting with the girls, given that you are planning for available sports facilities and equipment that might be needed. For the remainder of the lesson-by-lesson planning, you will be supported by this handbook as you go.

Each Objective is covered in a block of 3 lessons. After your initial course planning, you will need to do some preparation every 3 weeks, prior to beginning a new Objective. This preparation will include:

- Reading the background material to that Objective
- Completing the personal reflection exercise
- Any final practical preparations for the sport or activities involved

These three tasks prepare you for each Objective ahead of time. The reflection exercises give you a lot more clarity and are valuable inspiration for interacting with and supporting the girls. This reflection component is included, as it adds a powerful point of connection with the girls. Girls in particular gain huge benefit from hearing the stories and learning of others, as well as seeing vulnerability and trust modeled for them. These qualities can only be conveyed authentically, so the openness and curiosity you bring to your own process will be mirrored in the relationships you build with the girls.

At the end of each Objective, you do a short reflection, supported by the handbook. Ongoing reflection throughout your course is an important part of making sure that you are matching the course to the girls that you are supporting, and keeping track of the lessons you are learning on your journey, along with any new ideas or insights of value for the future.

You should aim to engage other like-minded teachers or coaches, so that you can discuss the ideas in the Program material and share the process. If you can find a partner or small team, you can do the reflection exercises together, discuss what came up for everyone, giving you more material to work with. In school for example, the girls will certainly benefit from the support of other teachers whom they interact with during

“I always felt that no matter what I was doing, what I was going through, good day, bad day, on the basketball court that was my place.” — Sheryl Swoopes

This is the say that as a Strong Girl Leader you will have similar learning outcomes to the girls’
The core motivation for implementing Strong Girls is to support girls in becoming strong on the inside and strong on the outside! The whole Program keeps pointing back to this pairing, and encouraging the girls to reflect on what is happening in the inside and their corresponding choice of behaviours or actions on the outside.

We all have these two parts to us—what goes on inside of us, our emotional life with all our thoughts, feelings, worries, dreams and beliefs about who we are and what we are capable of. Then we have the outside—what is shared with others by talking or what is visible to others through our actions. This is about how we behave and interact with the world and other people. It is an incredibly valuable life skill to be able to take these two perspectives and get to know your inner landscape while you are still young. It can be life changing to be able to understand how to relate or engage with others.

The benefits of teaching this kind of emotional intelligence and skill with self-awareness to children and teenagers is now finally being acknowledged, and many educators are looking for more innovative, effective approaches to doing this work. These skills are not necessarily hard to learn, they have just been largely neglected by our society and educational system until now. Strong Girls provides a great way to correct that gap!

The other two perspectives – me and other - aim to raise the girls’ awareness of their interpersonal experiences, and the role and influence of society on their lives. This supports things like empathy and compassion, as well as being able to take others’ perspectives; to learn from the thoughts and feelings of others and to set one’s own boundaries and not take on responsibility for others’ emotions. It also allows girls to better understand how to deal with conflicts and behaviours within groups like peer pressure and bullying. In addition it supports girls in seeing how they can be influenced by society’s norms and structures, and to determine for themselves how to relate or engage with those.

Figure 3: The Strong Girls skills development process.

These four perspectives play a key role throughout the handbook. They guide your preparation for each Objective as well as structuring the girls’ learning. Below is an example that you will come across repeatedly throughout the handbook that will pose reflection questions and source examples from your own experience, specifically from these four perspectives. This example will help you to get more familiar with the four perspectives, so take some time here to pause and reflect on the questions.

As described earlier, you will regularly be sharing some of your reflections with the girls. This is an important chance to reinforce this valuable way of looking at a situation from different perspectives. Be sure to look at your planned sharings with this goal in mind. Does it bring in elements of inside, outside, me, other? If not, see if you can identify the missing perspectives, and fill out the example or experience that you want to share. Here is a personal reflection and sharing that would cover all four perspectives:

“When I was a girl I always felt very self conscious playing ball sports. I had this strong fear (inside) of dropping the ball or missing the catch, and so I never tried to get better—just avoided those practices (outside). I would stand out on the field with my stomach churning and throat narrowing.

If someone spoke to me I couldn’t really answer or smile or laugh at any joke because I was so preoccupied with just surviving the experience.

I think quite a few of my classmates felt the same way but some did seem much more confident in trying (inside other). I wondered what was different about them and me. Part of my fear was that I often heard from the boys that girls weren’t good at throwing balls (outside other). I internalised this idea and believed it to be the truth, at that age I just never thought to question it (inside).

Now I look back and feel sad for that girl, all of that suffering was so unnecessary. Then I thought of all of you and wondered how could I support you to not internalise similar messages but to always give yourself the chance to try and to be able to learn and have fun.”

The skills development process

The Strong Girls skills development process is a sequence designed to support life-long learning in an experiential way. This sequence is Learn, Experience, Reflect, and Practice, illustrated in Figure 3. The girls learn something new, gaining some new information or insight, and then are given the opportunity to experience that knowledge or information directly, either by...
trying a new sport, or by interacting with each other through discussion or other activities. They are encouraged and supported to reflect on what they have learned and experienced, gaining further new insights from that process. Through additions of new opportunities and experiences, they get the chance to practice these same skills in similar and later in quite different contexts, reinforcing and strengthening the new skills and awareness.

More typically a process of “Learn and Practice”. For example a teacher explains a new idea conceptually and then the girls are assumed to know how to do it. The information itself was given in concept form only, and not as an experience in diverse contexts. Learning is usually also not supported by active reflection.

Being given new knowledge is not the best way to learn. Knowledge or information needs to be experienced, so that the girls fully understand and integrate it. Deeper understanding and embodiment can emerge for the girls when combined with the opportunity for reflection on what has been learned and experienced, with the chance to practice in different contexts.

Research has clearly demonstrated the power of reflection for enhancing learning and this is even more the case in the context of supporting skills such as self-awareness. Deliberate reflection helps the girls to gain fresh insights into a new area of knowledge or skill, and enables them to build on their prior knowledge, ideas, and experiences more effectively.

Strong Girls emphasises reflection as it supports better understanding and a greater likelihood of actual application of what has been learned in similar and different contexts than the learning situation. A good example of this is transferring a skill from school life to life at home. Reflection also supports problem solving, critical thinking, and differentiation between thought, context and situation. Reflection helps the girls examine their feelings and responses, and is also a great contributor to enhanced self-awareness. Furthermore, when these new skills are then practiced and applied to other areas of life, they can be sustained and enhanced throughout the girls’ lives. Given the emphasis placed on reflection, the girls should all have a Strong Girls journal to use for this purpose, both in class and for homework assignments, called “Girls Discover”.

The Program Objectives

The Program focuses on 10 Objectives which are taught using the Strong Girls framework and applied to a range of different sports and activities. Each Objective builds upon the preceding such that the girls get a growing set of capacities as they move through the Program, making important connections between skills and reinforcing ideas. The Program Objectives are:

1. Learn to set their own goals and to create the conditions for reaching those goals
2. Learn to challenge negative thinking and achieve more positive self-talk
3. Formulate and express their own ideas, opinions, and values
4. Recognise, explore, and build on their existing strengths
5. Develop compassion, team spirit and the ability to coach and support others
6. Explore body signals related to positive and negative feelings, and develop tools to handle difficult emotions
7. Learn how to problem solve, to deal with conflict and to acknowledge the perspectives of others
8. Find the balance between achievement and having fun in sport and life
9. Reflect on the norms, values and ideals in society and how that relates to their own agency in society
10. Learn new physical skills, and experience new sports and activities

Choosing sports and activities

Strong Girls not only changes how sport is offered to girls, but also changes what we offer girls and generate some excitement. Acroyoga for example can be a better choice than regular yoga, or a focus on more unusual posses like handstands can get the girls’ attention. More energetic dances, copying the “moves” of more well known artists and finding creative and fun approaches are the way to go. Girls of this age love to have fun!

Of course many of these activities might be outside of the range of facilities and equipment to which some schools may have access; but creativity can go a very long way. Partnerships with local sports clubs, teams and professionals, as well as gyms and other organisations, are a really great way to make these more exciting activities possible. Society is now much more aware of the need to offer girls something better in terms of sport and physical education. Many sports clubs are very keen to reach out to girls and women. You will be surprised at how many people and organisations will go out of their way to help you when they hear you are trying to offer to girls!

It is also valuable to give the girls the opportunity to co-create their course. What sports or activities would they love to have the chance to try out? Be sure to leave some openings in your planning for their participation. The Final Objective of the Program specifically invites creating these opportunities for the girls, so investing in planning ahead is time well spent.

Putting the pieces together

In practice, implementing the Strong Girls Program involves bringing these two pieces together:

• The Strong Girls framework: the 4 perspectives and the skills development process
• 10 (or more) different sports & activities

In leading the girls through their course you will start with three introductory sessions where focus is on laying a foundation of self-awareness and a supportive group environment. You will then move through the 10 Objectives, each with at least one new sport or activity, using the Strong Girls framework to structure your own preparation and the girls’ learning.

The activities that you select will provide the context for the girls’ learning. This is supported with the girls having short preparation reading before starting each new Objective, and their homework assignments, called “Girls Discover” between lessons. The preparation reading comes in pre-formatted sheets provided at the back of the book in the supporting material so that you can easily photocopy and distribute to the girls. These are also available online for download if you wish to distribute digitally.

Many such sports also provide opportunities to reflect on norms and structures in sport and society, which is a core goal of the Program. Outdoor and adventure sports are an important area to focus on. These activities are much less frequently offered to girls, particularly girls from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, yet they offer huge rewards in terms of challenging the girl’s own perceptions about what they are capable of or might enjoy.

Dance and Yoga are great alternatives to traditional team sports or athletics, but require some thoughtful reflection to appeal to teenage girls and generate some excitement. Acroyoga for example can be a better choice than regular yoga, or a focus on more unusual poses like handstands can get the girls’ attention. More energetic dances, copying the “moves” of more well known artists and finding creative and fun approaches are the way to go. Girls of this age love to have fun!

“...I’ve started to believe in myself more. That instead of saying I do not dare I say: I can handle it! I learnt that when we did rock climbing”

— Strong Girl participant
The discovery tasks are short assignments that you will read out loud and clarify with the girls at the end of each session. You can have them write the task down in their journal, and use social media or a group message service as a reminder if you choose. If you anticipate that it may be hard to get the girls to read their preparation sheet in advance of starting each new Objective, you may need to be prepared to read it out to them, or to find other creative ways to get the material across.

“The best thing about Strong Girls was to try something new! I’ve always wanted to play ice hockey and I got the chance so I’m happy!”
— Strong Girl participant

There is a course graduation at the end where the girls celebrate all that they have learned. At this point you also review your lessons learned and evaluate the progress of all of your hard work during your course.

Focusing in now on the Objectives more specifically. As previously mentioned, after your preparation for starting each new Objective, you are set for the next three lessons. Objectives 9 and 10 are slightly different, and need some extra consideration at the start of your course. You might want to start the related conversations with the girls midway through your course, depending on how you choose to approach it.

In terms of content for the girls, below is the typical structure. The first lesson of each Objective includes:

1. A brief introduction to the Objective, including sharing from your leader reflection exercise and what you learned or what inspired you that you want to pass on to the girls. Follow that with checking in with the girls on their preparation reading and answering any questions.

2. Class discussion, often including exercises in their journal.

3. A shorter activity focused on fun & skills development that serves as an introduction to the sport that comes in the following two weeks or which reinforces specific learning outcomes for the Objective.

4. The girls complete a short reflection exercise in their journal and get a “discovery” task as homework to complete before the next session.

The second and third lessons for each Objective:

1. Start with a brief recap and sharing from the girls’ homework. Engage them in the activity.

2. Include a reflection pause halfway and/or at the end to bring the girls’ attention back to the focus of the lesson. Often, the girls will briefly discuss their prior expectations of the sport and how their experience has confirmed or shifted that expectation.

3. The girls get their “discovery” task as homework to complete before the next session, or reading in preparation for the next Objective.

Then it is time for a new Objective, and one or more new activities, and the same pattern repeats! This regular cadence gives structure to your planning; and is also something the girls quickly get used to, and can follow so they know what they are doing and why. The girls are getting new information or insights, having a new experience, and reflecting on themselves and that experience in lessons 1 & 2. Then they practice what they learned in lessons 2 & 3, including applying what they have learnt to the rest of their lives outside of sport though their discovery tasks.

Figure 4. Putting your Strong Girls course together. The Strong Girls framework is applied to a selection of different sports and activities to teach the Programs 10 Objectives.
Now it’s time to get started with planning and preparing for your own Strong Girls course! Even for those with plenty of time before the school term starts, we recommend that you aim for something simple just to get going. Then you can develop things further as time and resources allow.

Remember, everything doesn’t have to happen right away. Strong Girls is a process of exploring how sport can best be offered to girls at your particular school or sports club. For those reading this book mid-term but still keen to do something, you can try out a few lesson plans as a start, and see how it works for you. Use this as an opportunity to experiment and learn for the following year.

Step-by-step overview

**Step 1**
Read through the entire handbook, in particular getting clear on the Strong Girls framework, the learning process, and the 10 Objectives.

**Step 2**
Browse the lesson plans to get a good feel for all the material available.

**Step 3**
Identify at least 10 diverse sports or activities that you feel will match the overall aim of the Program and the resources you have available, referring to the suggestions under each Objective. You will also find a master list in the supporting course material. Give lots of time to this stage. You might not use all of them, but brainstorm all opportunities possible to include more diverse activities for the girls.

Contact local sports clubs and associations, and ask for practical support with coaches, equipment, and venues as needed. You don’t need every single activity to be super exciting and new; but you do need to use your creativity to put together a course that will keep girls in this age group interested and engaged. Ask for help from other teachers or parents if needed. More suggestions for securing help with your course are given in Chapter 5.

**Step 4**
Start to plan and schedule your course week-by-week according to the school’s calendar. Three introductory lessons and two end lessons are ideal, but you can adjust this to suit the number of weeks or total lessons you have available if needed. You may want to include some excursions to try activities that cannot be done at school, or to go and watch sports matches.

If your schedule with the girls is more limited in duration, then you might choose to focus just on one or two Objectives, either keeping to the blocks of 3 lessons, or picking out one lesson per Objective. The possibilities are varied, so find what works for you, your schedule and your group.

**Step 5**
Consider class size. Small group sizes of up to 10-12 participants are optimal. This helps the girls to form good connections with other group members and with you as their leader or coach. Reflect if you want to keep age groups separate. The original project tested mixed-age groups.
with some success, but such groups can be quite a bit more demanding in terms of creating a safe space for the younger girls present.

**Step 6**
Start to match the activities you have available to the Objectives. These can be preliminary choices and can be adjusted later on. For each Objective, suggestions are given for the most appropriate types of activities and those which have been found to best support the aim of that particular Objective.

Pay special attention to Objectives 9 and 10, which have a different focus and format, and adjust your plan as needed to accommodate those. Objective 9 gives the girls the chance to engage in a social activism mini-project. Objective 10 gives the girls the chance to try any additional sports and activities they are curious about, and supports them in the process of securing these opportunities.

**Step 7**
Enlist the support or help of other teachers, coaches, board members or other support people, and have them give their feedback on how your plans are developing. Find out how they can support or help further. For example, do any of them have connections at local sports clubs or know professional sports women who can come in and teach the girls for a few lessons?

**Step 8**
It’s time to announce your course and recruit your girls! Make sure you communicate what the girls can gain from this course, as well as what commitment will be expected of them. Give extra thought here to the types of girls who are harder to reach but perhaps for whom the course would be of greatest value, including less physically active girls, girls with foreign backgrounds, girls with anxiety, or other personal struggles that teachers or coaches may be aware of.

The goal is to try and reach the girls who need Strong Girls the most, rather than girls who already have a sport interest. It is likely that you will receive more applications than the number of spaces available, so you may need a selection process, one which is clear and transparent for all the girls who express interest.

**Step 9**
As you plan and implement your Strong Girls course, you will be guided through your own reflection process. For each Objective there is a Leader theory sheet to read and a Leader reflection exercise to do in advance as preparation. If you follow the process, you can plan about a week ahead of the start of each new Objective.

The reading will take 30 minutes or so, and most of the reflection exercises, once you know the questions, can be pondered on the drive to work or while making your coffee in the morning. The power of these reflections should not be underestimated in your role as a Strong Girls leader, and in supporting you with the kind of authentic sharing that builds trust and connection with the girls.

**Step 10**
At the end of the course it is time for an evaluation and some final reflection, both by the girls, by yourself, and any other adults involved. Investing in identifying what worked well and what offers potential for improvement, with adjustments for the following year is a valuable process while the experience is still fresh. This feedback is also valuable for the Strong Girls Project for further developing the Program and further materials to support teachers and coaches in setting up their own courses.

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<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Objective #</th>
<th>Sports and activities</th>
<th>Notes/Actions</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>August</td>
<td>Introduction: Self-awareness</td>
<td>Lesson 1</td>
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<td>September</td>
<td>1: Goals</td>
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<td>October</td>
<td>2: Self talk</td>
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<td>November</td>
<td>3: Ideas, values</td>
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<td>December</td>
<td>4: Strengths &amp; boundaries</td>
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<td>Jan</td>
<td>5: Compassion &amp; team spirit</td>
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<td>Feb</td>
<td>6: Feelings emotions</td>
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<td>March</td>
<td>7: Challenge &amp; conflict</td>
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<td>April</td>
<td>8: Balance</td>
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<td>May</td>
<td>9: Norms</td>
<td>Lesson 1</td>
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<td>Lesson 3</td>
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<td>June</td>
<td>10: Sport</td>
<td>Lesson 1</td>
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<td>Lesson 3</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Evaluation</td>
<td>Activity</td>
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Figure 5. This template can be used in steps 3–6 as you start to draft out the form of your course and how things might look. Take notes of where you might want to include an excursion or perhaps a guest speaker, or where you might want to give the girls advance information on the opportunities that come with Objectives 9 and 10.
Introduction

Self-awareness

Leader Preparation

Self-awareness is the key for any process of development or learning. Developing and implementing your own Strong Girls course is certainly a learning journey for you: the teacher, coach, parent, or aspiring new leader.

Throughout the handbook you will have already seen, and will continue to meet many new methods and approaches. There may also be many new ideas in relation to personal development and self knowledge: this will be a learning journey for you as much as for the girls. As a leader preparing and implementing your own course, you will also come to know yourself in new ways. You will be challenged to meet a new level of personal authenticity and development so that you can share your insights and model new skills for the girls. As outlined earlier in the handbook, the strong focus on reflection allows you to prepare in such a way that you can relate directly to what the girls will be learning in each Objective.

The course introduction is where you will set expectations for the girls for what will be required from them during the course, and what they stand to gain from putting in their full effort! You’ll give them all the necessary practical information, with their homework expectations, including the reading before starting a new Objective, and the discovery tasks after every lesson. You’ll spend some time giving an overview of the scheduling, including where they will have opportunities to influence how their course unfolds through the sport and activities they choose. Keep in mind the flexibility you have with Objective 10, where there is space in the schedule designed specifically to expand on the activities they want the chance to try.

Alongside the practical organising in terms of choosing and scheduling activities, you will be laying the groundwork for the personal development elements of the Program. In these first three lessons, you will be introducing them to the idea of emotional self-awareness, feelings and practices of self-reflection. Reflection in particular is a key part of the Strong Girls framework, so it is important that the girls understand that reflecting on their own thoughts, feelings, ideas and experiences are going to be regular activities during the course. Even more important is that they understand why they are reflecting regularly: because it helps them to understand themselves more fully, as well as life in general, so they can make better choices and get the most from life. Specifically, reflection supports the development of emotional skills, and brings awareness of limiting beliefs or fixed ideas. Once these emotional reactions, beliefs or ideas are seen and recognised, it is then possible to make a conscious choice to adjust them.

Reflection is about questioning, in a positive way, what you do and why you do it. From there, you can decide if there may be a better way of doing things in the future, or if there is a new way of thinking that could be more useful for
you. Reflection is a key part of self-awareness, and an important part of any learning process. Self-reflection can seem difficult at first. For teenage girls it can be embarrassing or confusing, and some struggle to find the right words. However, in a safe and supportive environment and with consistent practice, it becomes easier and easier. The results of doing this work will make a huge difference to the girls’ empowerment, in their course, and in their lives. If you have journals to distribute, you’ll want to do that in Lesson 1, so they can use them to note down all of their reflections and homework throughout the course.

You’ll introduce the Strong Girls perspectives over the first three lessons: inside, outside, me, other. The perspectives of inside and outside in particular are often new to many of us. Society in general tends to place more focus on the outside, on what people do, how they behave and how they look, and much less on the inner emotional life and experience of a person.

For many people, exploring their inner experience, or their feelings, emotions and beliefs, can feel like a scary prospect. In general, things which are unfamiliar can be intimidating, but learning that this young girl fills a very important gap in the girls’ education. Having a clear understanding of what your inside world functions, and learning to understand the messages that your emotions give you, plays a huge part in emotional development and maturity. For example, feeling safe with the uncomfortable feelings that come up when something difficult in life occurs, and being able to support yourself through those times, is a fundamental life skill. Learning how to recognise feelings, understanding what they are and how normal they are, is key.

Emotional intelligence is a lifelong learning process for everyone. It is also a process that can be started at any age, and made much more intentional. Adults have often learned to vary the degrees about their emotions by simply changing them, and witnessing their effects over the years. Most have learned what they know through trial and error rather than being taught, which makes the process longer and less effective. For many, the result can be struggles with stress, depression, anxiety or addictions throughout adult life. Many of these problems have roots in a person not having the emotional skills and tools to manage the common ups and downs of life, and navigate through them. This is not surprising, given that so few adults were ever specifically taught or supported in this kind of learning, either at school or at home. This is now changing, with many schools recognising the importance of working specifically with emotional intelligence and techniques such as mindfulness and yoga. Emotional intelligence is something that can be easily taught, and the best way of doing that is through an experiential process. Sport is therefore the perfect medium!

"Don’t compromise yourself. You’re all you’ve got." — Janis Joplin

Girls experience a huge amount of diversity in their emotions as teenagers. This is a very natural and healthy part of their development. However the ability to differentiate between emotions can be less developed at this age, with many emotions experienced simultaneously. As adults this changes, and emotions are more differentiated. This is valuable to know if you are working with or supporting teenage girls.

Girls often judge the feelings that they are experiencing. Common examples are judging that they are “bad” when they feel angry, or “weak” or “boring” when they feel scared. This often leads to experiences of shame or guilt for normal inner experiences. They can feel stuck in despair when feeling a certain emotion, not being aware that feelings and emotions always come and go, and that this present difficulty will always pass. Knowing that sadness over something does pass, and that there is useful information for them in what they feel, particularly when those feelings are uncomfortable, greatly reduces this despair and gives a greater feeling of safety, curiosity, and trust in life.

It is also important to encourage the girls to think about feelings in terms of those that are “easy” rather than “good”, and those which are “challenging” or “difficult” rather than “bad”. This can lessen the tendency to judge the experience. Be mindful that you don’t avoid discussing the more challenging feelings with them; those such as shame, fear, jealousy — which is a type of fear, and anger. Talking about these kinds of feelings together is one of the most powerful learning opportunities in the Program.

Throughout the Strong Girls Program there is a focus on the girls learning about their “inside”, integrating this concept into everyday use. This helps girls develop their literacy around the inner experience. While developing this kind of language, familiarity, and understanding, they are able to better manage and take guidance from their emotions. They can better relate to their peers, and pick up on social cues. The awareness that everyone has an inside also brings in the perspective of “other”, and along with it the ability to empathise, see the perspectives of different people, and be compassionate towards others.

An important insight: inside and outside don’t always match, and knowing this is incredibly valuable. For example, it is useful for a girl to understand that when a friend reacts with defensiveness or aggressiveness, it may be because she feels scared and is trying to hide her fear from others. These inside and outside perspectives will feed into the development of team rules. This gives the girls the chance to create and agree upon rules and norms for how they will behave with each other.

How this translates over the next 3 lessons:

Lesson 1: Girls give input into the design of their own course.

Lesson 2: Girls collectively develop a set of team rules and reflect on what makes for a safe and fun group for them.

Lesson 3: Girls learn new language and ways of thinking: exploring the ideas of inside and outside, and inner experience.

Learning outcomes

1. Girls have a better understanding of what they will be doing in the course and why.
2. Girls understand the expectations of their participation.
3. Girls feel included and invested in this experience.
4. Girls feel a sense of safety in the group and with you as their leader.
5. Girls understand what it means to reflect, and develop practices for reflection.
6. Girls have a simple understanding of the “four perspectives”: inside, outside, me, other.
7. Girls have more understanding of what they are feeling, how it affects what they do, and how others are feeling.

Suggested sports & activities:

The introduction for the course should focus on fun and easy new experiences. Team building games can be really useful, or something like trampolining. The more fun and lively the opportunities the girls have while getting to know each other, the better.

There is more theory in the introduction lessons compared to most of the other Objectives, so short activities that are easy to set up and start are a good choice. Try slack-lining, archery or arm wrestling: these are great as they will more likely be new experiences, and fit well in a shorter time frame. It’s good to avoid competitive team sport activities for the introduction lessons, as that may trigger previous negative sport experiences. Most importantly, pick activities that are fun!
Leader reflection exercise:

Reflect on the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside me</th>
<th>How well do you know your feelings? How comfortable are you with them?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outside me</td>
<td>Do you know how your feelings influence your behaviour?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside other</td>
<td>How comfortable are you in hearing other people’s feelings? How about others’ fear or sadness?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside other</td>
<td>How acceptable is it in [your] society to express feelings? How do you think this affects people? (consider social media, friendships, family groups, work &amp; colleagues etc)</td>
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</table>

Note down some of your reflections here.

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From all that you have written down, pick out something that you have learned that you would like to share with the girls about your own experiences with feelings and emotions. Remember to incorporate all four perspectives in your sharing. How does what you have learned about yourself enabled you to better support the girls?

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Lesson 1

Introduction

1. Have the girls do a quick round of introductions: their name, where they are from, their class or school (if applicable), introduce yourself, and share any reflections about the course overall and why you believe it is so important. Draw on your leader reflection exercise and what inspired you. Check in with them about doing their reading, and answer any initial questions. Now is a good time to hand out the girls’ journals, and if you have them, other Strong Girls team items like stickers or T-shirts.

2. Have a short discussion about their expectations around their Strong Girls course. Ask them to share what they are most excited about and/or what they are most worried about. As a similar thing. Give them more information on what their course is all about: trying new things, challenging themselves, having fun together, learning new life skills, supporting others, and being supported. Respond to any concerns or excitement that arise.

3. Get input from them on sports or activities they want to try, and things they would like to learn if you can accommodate in your planning. For example, if you have the resources for one group excursion, where is it that they would like to go?

4. Outline what is expected of them in taking part in the course. Reinforce how they can make the most of this opportunity by trying new things and giving the activities their best shot. Not only will they be testing new sports, but they will be learning about new concepts that they might never have encountered otherwise. You are here to support them, and together you’ll be setting up the conditions so that they will also be able to support one another. In particular, you’ll want to go over anything with scheduling that may need to be organised early, with an eye to the whole course. Be sure to mention that they will receive reading as preparation before each new Objective, and that they will have follow up "Discovery" tasks, as homework between lessons.

5. Have fun! One suggestion is to have them take their introductions a bit further. Example: What’s one thing about me that not a lot of people know? You can also play a game, having the girls do a spontaneous signature move that they love. Give them examples, a simple snap of the fingers and head bob, a big kick or dance move, a cartwheel or anything that gets them up, engaged, and laughing.

Girls’ Discovery:

1. Think about or research any sport that you might like to try. Talk to friends and family about what physical activities or excursions would be really exciting and fun. Come back next week with one or more extra suggestions! Note these in your Strong Girls journal.

2. Consider the following questions, and take some notes in your journal: How do you often behave in a new group? What makes you feel safe and supported in a group? What do you need to be brave and try new things?

Leader Lesson Reflection:

1. What worked well in this lesson?

2. What worked less well? What didn’t work? “This lesson would have been even better if I…”

3. What observations did you make of the girls that you want to take with you to the next lesson?
Lesson 2
Introduction

1. Do something fun, for example a totally new activity, or some team games that you are familiar with. Duck duck goose, a spin on musical chairs, or partner exercises like pass the orange with your neck, or human wheelbarrow races would work well here.

2. Give the girls a brief recap from last lesson. Have a short discussion about their fears about being in new groups, and what came up as a result of their homework reflection:
   a. How do you often behave in a new group?
   b. What are the things that make you feel safe and supported in a group?
   c. What do you need around you to be brave and try new things?

3. Ask them: What kind of group do they want to create? Use a whiteboard and capture their thoughts and ideas:
   a. How do you like to be treated by others?
   b. What agreements should we make to create that feeling in our group?
   c. What do you need around you to be brave and try new things?

4. Either alone, or in small groups, generate drafts of some ideas for “team rules”. Use the questions above to support this process. This doesn’t need to be a long process—scale it to what they can manage at this stage. Have the girls write the suggested rules in their journals so they can reflect on them during the week.

Girls’ Discovery:
1. Reflect on the draft team rules your group came up with. How do you feel when you read them? Does anything feel missing for you? Write down your thoughts in your journal.
2. Reflect on these questions before next time, and jot down some thoughts in your journal:
   a. How do you behave when you feel happy?
   b. How do you behave when you feel scared?
   c. What do you think we should do if someone breaks a rule?
   d. How do you know what another person might be feeling?

Leader Lesson Reflection:
1. What worked well in this lesson?
2. What worked less well? What didn’t work? *This lesson would have been even better if I…?*
3. What observations did you make of the girls that you want to take with you to the next lesson?

Lesson 3
Introduction

1. Start with a brief reminder about their draft “team rules”, and check in with them on their homework. Discuss anything that came up for you or for them that felt like it was missing or was needed, and add it to the draft. Distribute the final rules after this lesson, being sure to have everyone agree on them. These rules can be treated as a “living document” that the girls can change if need be; it is a good idea to review the team rules from time to time throughout the course. If you have a dedicated Strong Girls space, post it up on the wall as a visible guide.

2. Open a discussion and do a brainstorm to name different feelings. The girls can first do this on their own in their journals, and then as a group with sharing, using the feelings list found in the supporting material if needed. Ask: Which ones have you experienced, and what were the circumstances? Are they “easy” or “difficult” feelings? Then:
   a. How do you behave when you feel happy?
   b. How do you behave when you feel scared?
   c. How do you know what another person might be feeling?

3. In small groups, explore the ideas of “inside” and “outside” in a simple exercise. One member of the team lies down on a large sheet of paper, and another draws around them to create an outline. The girls assign different things to the inside and outside of the figure. For example “I feel scared,” goes on the inside; “I react by avoiding the situation,” or “I speak up and say what I don’t like,” goes on the outside. You can refer to the photos of the Inside-Outside map in the supporting materials for more guidance.

4. Break with a fun game or activity that will help them recognize the feelings of others. Example: have them put on their best exaggerated “sad” faces with the group, and then their best exaggerated “happy” faces. Then have them put on a more realistic version of sad, and finally a more realistic version of happy.

Girls’ Discovery:
1. Ask yourself from time to time before our next lesson, “What am I feeling?” and see what you can learn about your inside. How does your inside influence what you do, and how you behave on the outside? Write your answers in your journal.
2. Test paying attention to others. Can you guess what they are feeling? If you feel brave, ask them, and see if you were right!
3. Come back with one thing to share next week.

Girls Discovery:
Leader end of introduction reflection:

This is your chance to capture ideas for the future, and integrate what you learned with the next group of girls. What worked really well over all three lessons? What would have been better? Do you feel like they had the experiences that you wanted them to? Were the activities the right ones to support what you wanted the girls to experience and learn? What might you try next time?

Introduction

Ideas and tips for integrating this Introduction throughout your course:

1. Look for regular opportunities to ask the girls how they feel, including using the language of easy and difficult feelings.

2. Ask how they think their feelings are affecting their behaviour in the moment, for example in new experiences that might be a bit scary or uncomfortable.

3. Remember the inside and outside aspects of experience in the context of what the girls are trying to do, for example, to kick a ball. Bring up the “map” whenever you find examples to illustrate the different perspectives.
Objective 1

Learn to set your own goals and create the conditions for reaching those goals

Goals are an important part of life, and yet the skills of healthy goal setting are rarely taught to girls. In considering goals, ask yourself: How do we know what we want in life? Who or what should we listen to? How do we go about achieving our goals and dealing with setbacks or disappointments?

Whether the girls call it a goal, a desire, an intention or something similar, this is really about self determination. This is about them learning to identify what they want and then moving towards creating it: and doing so, in spite of the opinions of others, messages from society or any other obstacles that may come along the way.

A girl needs to understand herself well enough in order to clearly identify what it is that she wants. This is no easy task when girls in today’s world are bombarded with messages from social media, peers, and family about what is expected of them. The images of how they should be in order to be considered successful and popular are everywhere. In this context, the experience of goals can become a source of anxiety, stress and pressure. It can mean living up to others expectations in order to receive love, confirmation and acceptance, rather than following their own needs and desires.

Getting in touch with their own inner compass for such choices is a life changing thing for many girls. This is a skill learned and refined over time. Girls in particular are not encouraged to follow their own individual longings. They are subject to much more input from family and peers, which limits their possible choices. Great examples for this are the messages that girls receive about which sports are more appropriate for them; many are discouraged from more “masculine” activities by friends and even by parents. While this guidance can be well meaning, it is important for all girls to be able to decide such things for themselves. This builds their self-confidence and agency now and for the rest of their lives.

A girl also needs the courage and strength to set goals for herself, to go after what she wants, and to believe that she can succeed. Self-confidence, an accurate self-image and healthy self-esteem are all developed in this process. Many girls are actually good at this in their studies at school, but need extra encouragement to apply the same skills and process to sport and other areas of their lives.

“Wt doesn’t matter what your background is and where you come from, if you have dreams and goals, that’s all that matters.”
— Serena Williams

Girls also need to learn to manage receiving feedback and experiencing failure. Many girls are scared to fail, and protect themselves from situations where they might be less than perfect or where the outcome is uncertain. An important part of the learning process around failure is to encourage the view that they are much more than their achievements, and any failures on their journey do not define them—and do not reflect how worthy they are.

The other key part here is learning that success comes with some failures along the way. A key goal in the Strong Girls Program is to create a supportive environment for experiences that include failure as an integral part of learning and growth. Sport is a great environment for this! During their course the girls will be put in situations involving certain outcomes and failure, yet this will take place while being supported by their peers, teacher, or coach, specifically, in order to strengthen these capacities. Failures fuel learning, which fuels success.
For any girl, going after what she wants involves actions and behaviours. Having a clear goal focuses a girl’s acquisition of knowledge on what she needs for the tasks ahead, and helps her to organize her time and resources so she can take action. Girls need to be able to move from thought to action, to evaluate progress, and to resolve problems along the way. Learning the difference between the re-evaluation of goals and giving up is a very important distinction to understand and reinforce.

An equally valuable skill for girls is to know how to ask others for support in their life goals. Along with this is learning the skills to support a friend or team member in their goals, even when they are different from their own. The interpersonal and empathetic skills of seeing how another might be relating to their own goal, especially if they are anxious or fearful, allows a girl to support her teammate or friend effectively. She can do this by offering practical help, or to offer ways to be more emotionally flexible around the goal, and thereby increase the chances of being successful. It’s also more fun with a friend.

Talking through some of these examples as they arise during the course gives the girls the opportunities they need to understand how these ideas apply in general life, as well as in any sport they might choose.

This is a good time to have the girls start thinking about Objective 9 and their own social activism mini project. You can plant a seed for them here: ask them to pay attention to anything that they notice that feels unfair to them, or needs to change in society, especially how it relates to sport. Invite them to write these ideas down in their journals, and share their ideas in the group discussions.

How this translates over the next 3 lessons:

Lesson 1: Girls each identify one inner goal and outer goal for the duration of their course.

Lesson 2: Girls experience working through a sports related mini-goal with peer support.

Lesson 3: Girls share two personally meaningful goals with a group.

Learning Outcomes:
1. Girls develop a better sense for what they desire in their life.
2. Girls are less influenced by goals imposed by society or others.
3. Girls understand the purpose and value of defining and stating goals.
4. Girls know better how to focus their efforts towards their goals.
5. Girls appreciate that goals can be flexible and change over time.
6. Girls see failures as valuable learning experiences that fuel success.
7. Girls are kinder to themselves around setbacks or failures.
8. Girls are better able to ask for support to achieve success with their goals.

Suggested sports & activities:
Choose a sport that involves goals for the first lesson in this Objective: football, basketball or floorball work well. You can stick to this activity for lessons 2 and 3 if another option isn’t available, but ideally you’ll shift to a sport that is a solo experience, has a high potential for rapid skill development, typically something no one has tried before, and where it is easy to see improved “performance” or skill in the activity.

Examples are activities such as Javelin, long jump, shooting, archery, weightlifting, or a visit to a golf driving range. Even throwing a ball, done in the right way, could work. If you use an activity that is more individual for Lessons 2 and 3, it means the girls can focus on themselves, which gives them the chance to experience setting and working towards a “mini-goal” from their own specific starting point.

Leader reflection exercise:

Reflect on the following questions:

Inside me
What is your goal in starting this Strong Girls course? How will you know or feel if you have been successful?
What do you do when you feel like you might not meet a goal? Do you give up, try harder, panic, ask for help?

Outside me

Outside other
How can you support others in their goals? For example, the girls in your Strong Girls course?
What is needed from other teachers and your school, or from those in your sports club in order to support you in achieving your goals with this course?

Note down some of your reflections here.

From all that you have written down, pick out something that you have learned that you would like to share with the girls about your own experiences with goals. Remember to incorporate all four perspectives in your sharing. How does what you have learned about yourself enable you to better support the girls?
Lesson one

Objective 1

1. Give the girls a brief introduction to the Objective, and share any reflections that you would like on the topic from your leader reflection exercise and what you learned, or what inspired you. Check in with them on their reading, and answer any questions. This may be a good time to plant seeds for their social activism mini-project in Objective 9.

2. Conduct a group discussion about what they want from their course in general. You might pose the question, “What are some of the reasons you took this course?” and capture their thoughts on a whiteboard. Then pose some individual questions to help them find their own specific inner and outer goal.
   a. What do you really want out of your Strong Girls time? (inside)
   b. How do you want to feel during Strong Girls? (inside)
   c. What do you want to learn or improve during the course? (outside)
   d. What will you need to do to reach that goal? (outside)
   e. What support from others would help you? (outside)

3. Give them time to sit and think, and write down new ideas in their journal about the two goals using the goal prompt sheets in the supporting materials if needed. Give them a few minutes to share what they came up with one or two other people.

4. Offer a fun goal-focused activity. Example: shooting football goals and having fun while doing it. You can allow them to have the ball as close as they want to the net, they could pretend to be famous football players, or they could be giving a commentary and cheering for each other—or any combination of the above.

Girl’s Discovery:

1. Between now and next week, talk to one person about your two goals: a friend, parent or sibling. Ask for their input and ideas, and note that down in your journal.
2. Come next week ready to share some of the feedback you received.

Leader Lesson Reflection:

1. What worked well in this lesson?
2. What worked less well? Or What didn’t work? Or “This lesson would have been even better if I...?”
3. What observations did you make of the girls that you want to take with you to the next lesson?

Lesson two

Objective 1

1. Give the girls a brief recap, and find out how they are doing with deciding on their goals. What feedback did they get on their ideas?

2. Introduce the new sport and give them a chance to have a first try.

3. Pause halfway through, and have a short reflection. Suggest some mini-goals for them to choose from for this new sport. It can be an inside or an outside aspect: I want to have more Fun, I want to feel less self conscious while throwing, I want to throw twice as far. Example: Now that you have tested this:
   a. What do you want to do differently for the rest of the lesson while practicing?
   b. What do you want to improve, change, or experience?

4. Go back to the activity and have the girls work on their mini-goal. Have them notice what happens when they do or don’t meet the goals they’ve set out (how they feel/what they do).

Girl’s Discovery:

1. Make a final decision on your inner and outer goals for the next lesson, and come ready to share your final choice with everyone.

Leader Lesson Reflection:

1. What worked well in this lesson?
2. What worked less well? Or What didn’t work? Or “This lesson would have been even better if I...?”
3. What observations did you make of the girls that you want to take with you to the next lesson?
Lesson three

Objective 1

1. Give the girls a brief recap of what they learned last week. Check in with the girls, making sure that they all will be ready to share their final choice of goals at the end of the lesson.

2. Get back to the activity for this Objective, remembering to focus on their own mini-goals.

3. Half way through, take a short pause, and ask if they feel they are meeting their mini-goal or not, and what they can do about it:
   a. Could I ask someone for help?
   b. Could I try and change what I am doing? Could I focus more?
   c. Could I revise my goal? Could I set a more realistic goal?

4. Give them the chance to put these changes into action. End the lesson with a chance for each girl to share their final goals for the year. Write these up on the whiteboard, and write up and distribute the list after the lesson so that everyone knows everyone else’s goals.

5. Give the girls their homework, including the reading assignment for Objective 2: “What story am I telling myself?”

Girl’s Discovery:

1. How do others’ goals affect how you feel about your own goals? Come ready with a thought to share next lesson.

2. Do your reading assignment in preparation for starting the next Objective “What story am I telling myself?”

Leader End of Objective Reflection:

This is your chance to capture ideas for the future, and integrate what you learned with the next group of girls. What worked really well over all three lessons? What would have been better? Do you feel like they had the experiences that you wanted them to? Were the activities the right ones to support what you wanted the girls to experience and learn? What might you try next time?

Objective 1 Ideas and tips for integrating this Objective throughout your course:

1. Check back in with each girl about her goals as the weeks progress. Notice moments to support each girl in working with their goals throughout the lessons. For example, if a girl’s goal is to be more daring and try new things, encourage her from that perspective throughout the course. Be sure to ask how she knows if she is making progress or not, if she thinks she needs to make any adjustments, or if she needs to ask for help. You can also encourage the girls to help and support each other, as they all have access to the list of what each girl wants to achieve.

2. Ask the girls what their intention or “goal” is in appropriate moments when they are doing an activity. Encourage reflection about the connection between their behaviour and their goal in that moment.

3. Strengthen the ideas learned here by working with mini-goals within lessons from other Objectives.
Objective 2

Learn to challenge negative thinking and achieve more positive self-talk

Everyone goes through life with a voice in their head; and while sometimes this can be encouraging, more often this voice is critical. This “self-talk” is the dialog that goes on silently in our heads, it’s part of the story running in the background going through the day. Often people are not very aware of these patterns, their impact, or more importantly, of their ability to change them.

These thoughts, this experience of self-talk, are private experiences. Other people don’t know what someone is telling themselves unless they decide to share it. Different people can also have quite different thoughts and self-talk about the same thing. How people “talk” to themselves affects how they feel, often very significantly; and consequently this affects people’s behaviour and actions. Over a lifetime, the results can be dramatic!

Learning to be self-aware, and consciously choosing this self-talk, is a key part of emotional intelligence. Using positive self-talk is a way that people can encourage themselves towards new challenges and goals. Many professional athletes use positive self-talk to keep themselves motivated, confident, and focused on their training and competitions, and what they want to achieve.

When confronted with something new, sometimes people expect bad things to happen and will feel anxious, scared, and reluctant to try. Self-talk is typically fearful and judgmental. This affects how well people are able to develop new skills and learn. For girls this is a big issue, particularly with sport and physical activity as they become teenagers. At this time the perception of “having to be good” and needing to perform well in sport in order to participate increases. Having to look good while doing so adds to the pressure. In general, girls can feel very exposed, as if everyone is noticing and judging them when trying something new.

Objective 2

Leader Preparation

Children and teenagers often are even less aware of what they are telling themselves than adults. It can take some time for them to learn to identify the specific thoughts and ideas that are causing them to feel fearful or anxious – in the case of girls, often it is the fear of failure, the fear of judgement, of being laughed at, or not being good enough that triggers and reinforces negative self-talk.

The focus of this Objective is to get the girls to notice their own self-talk, to look at it more critically, and to understand how to develop the skill of reframing and positive self-talk. Like building muscles in the gym, this is done with repetition and practice.

"Courage doesn’t mean you don’t get afraid. Courage means you don’t let fear stop you."
— Bethany Hamilton

If girls are well supported by their peers, teachers or coaches when challenging situations come up, they can be given a safe space to test this alternative way of thinking and “self-talking”. In this Objective, the girls are given the chance to specifically practice and develop this skill. When doubt or judgement creeps in, their Strong Girls experience teaches them that they can do something about it!

Another key piece is encouraging the girls to support each other in this process. The girls will learn to notice when a friend may be listening to a negative belief in their mind, and are encouraged to support them to instead talk to themselves in a way that helps them in feeling confident and capable, or at least being open to trying.
Specifically, the first step is to recognise the negative thoughts. However, sometimes recognising negativity can be tricky, especially if it’s something that you do out of habit. Learning to spot the patterns takes a little time and practice. It is helpful to notice that negative thoughts tend to be sweeping, all-or-nothing statements that jump to conclusions. There are certain words that are flags for negative self-talk. Suggest that the girls listen out for phrases like “I can’t,” “I never” or “I always.”

•  “I can’t score any goals!”
•  “I never have fun because I don’t play well!”
•  “I always look bad. I’m the slowest one!”

The girls can be encouraged to repeat alternative positive statements to themselves, anytime they are about to try something new or difficult. These positive statements can become great confidence-builders. For example, “I’m strong and a good teammate!”

How this translates over the next 3 lessons:

Lesson 1: Girls learn tools to identify their own negative self-talk.

Lesson 2: Girls practice reframing their self-talk and observe the positive impacts of doing so.

Lesson 3: Girls are supported in applying positive self-talk to their inner and outer course goals.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Girls can better recognise the negative voice in their head and how it affects their beliefs about themselves and their actions.
2. Girls develop a better relationship with this negative voice, recognising it as only one voice and not the whole of them.
3. Girls can better choose to develop and use a positive and encouraging voice.
4. Girls realise that by using this positive voice it sets them up to have more confidence, to feel better and to have more successful outcomes.
5. Girls are better able to observe negative self-talk, and to bring in positive thoughts to their inner and outer course goals.
6. Girls develop one of their reframing examples into a more general affirmation to use regularly.

Suggested sports & activities:

Choose activities which are solo experiences, and have some degree of feeling a physical risk or fear. These would be sports that are imagined as being “really hard” by the girls, and not something they would normally consider doing. The goal is to surprise them with what they can actually do when they put their mind to it!

Ideally the first lesson is something that will really push their limits, but which most of them will be able to accomplish with support and encouragement. After this first experience, you can follow with more challenging activities. Ice bathing is a really great choice, or an aerial assault course with slides or drops. Even jumping off a diving board at a swimming pool would be a good choice.

Rock climbing, weightlifting, powerlifting, or board breaking in martial arts are great suggestions for this part of the course. The focus here is on bringing up as much negative self-talk and having as many reframing opportunities as possible, rather than developing any particular skill in the sports chosen. Although if that happens as a side effect, great!

Leader reflection exercise:

Reflect on the following questions:

Inside me
- What kind of negative self-talk or limiting beliefs do you really struggle with?

Outside me
- How does this self-talk affect your behaviour and actions?

Inside other
- How have others successfully helped you to shift any negative self-talk in the past? How can you share this with the girls?

Outside other
- How does society’s norms and values influence your self-talk? For example, those you see in social media, TV, movies, advertisements?

Note down some of your reflections here.

From all that you have written down, pick out something that you have learned that you would like to share with the girls about your own experiences with self-talk. Remember to incorporate all four perspectives in your sharing. How does what you have learned about yourself enable you to better support the girls?
Lesson one
Objective 2

1. Give the girls a brief introduction to the Objective and share any reflections that you would like on the topic from your leader reflection exercise and what you learned or what inspired you. Check in with them on their reading, and answer any questions.

2. Discuss with the girls the idea of self-talk, and how to recognize it: starting with looking for words like can’t, never, always. A good way in here is to ask them for examples from their reflection from the end of the last Objective: How do others goals make you feel about your own goals?

3. Try the new activity. Talk about their perceptions, and ask them to watch out for negative self-talk. When they catch themselves, ask them to say something positive about themselves instead, and see what effect it has. Encourage them to share the negative voice. Treat this process like a game, supporting each other as much as possible to take up the challenge of catching that negative voice!

4. End with a short group reflection on the new activity. How did the activity differ from their expectations? How do they feel afterwards? Give them their homework.

Girl’s Discovery:
1. Between now and next week, watch where your negative self-talk shows up. When you notice it? Do your best to bring in a positive thought instead. Remember the give away words: “can’t”, “never”, “always”. Note your findings in your journal.

2. Come with an example next week of when you did this successfully.

Leader Lesson Reflection:
1. What worked well in this lesson?
2. What worked less well? Or What didn’t work? Or “This lesson would have been even better if I...?”
3. What observations did you make of the girls that you want to take with you to the next lesson?

Lesson Two
Objective 2

1. Review what the girls learned from last week, and ask for some examples from their homework where they were able to bring positive thoughts into their self-talk since the last lesson.

2. Focus on the activity of the day, and practice observing and reframing self-talk. Focus on examples of positive self-talk, building their “library” of examples they can use as they try the new activity.

3. Pause halfway through to give tips and reminders, and end with a reflection. Is it getting easier to notice their self-talk? What types of self-talk are most common? What reframing worked, and could be used as regular positive affirmations in multiple situations so they don’t have to think so much about how to be positive? For example, “I can do it.” “I’m good enough.” “I got this.” Have each girl leave with one general affirmation that she wants to use regularly. Make sure they write it in their journal so it is easy for them to find when they need it. You can also produce a full list and distribute after the lesson.

Girls’ Discovery:
1. Between now and next week, watch specifically where your negative self-talk shows up in your friendships or relationships, or any time you are interacting with other people. Try to bring in a positive voice or thought instead. Test out your new affirmation, and see if that helps. Reflect on how the activities in the course have gone for you in general, and write about any thoughts you may have in your journal.

2. Come back with one thing you want to share next week.

Leader Lesson Reflection:
1. What worked well in this lesson?
2. What worked less well? Or What didn’t work? Or “This lesson would have been even better if I...?”
3. What observations did you make of the girls you want to take with you to the next lesson?
Lesson three

Objective 2

1. Give the girls a short refresher from the last lesson. Ask the girls to turn to a partner and talk about their homework. Is it becoming easier to observe their negative self-talk and bring in positive thoughts? After a few minutes, open this up to group discussion. If the girls are struggling, you can reinforce for them that this is not particularly easy, especially as they have never done it before, and that it gets easier with practice.

2. Place full focus on the activity for the rest of the lesson.

3. At the end of the lesson have a short discussion about how they can apply what they are learning about positive self-talk to their inner and outer goals. Do they see any areas where they might be inhibiting their goals with negative self-talk, and how bringing more positivity could better help them achieve their goals? You may want to guide them through the steps—perhaps first to notice the negative voice, then to reframe it, including asking for help in reframing it if needed.

4. Give the girls their homework, including the reading assignment for Objective 3: “What is really important to me? How can I effectively express myself?”

Girls’ Discovery:

1. Practice observing your self-talk in relation to one of your Strong Girls goals, either inner or outer.

2. Come to next week’s lesson with an example to share.

3. Do your reading assignment in preparation for the next Objective: “What is really important to me? How can I effectively express myself?”

Leader End of Objective Reflection:

This is your chance to capture ideas for the future, and integrate what you learned with the next group of girls. What worked really well over all three lessons? What would have been better? Do you feel like they had the experiences that you wanted them to? Were the activities the right ones to support what you wanted the girls to experience and learn? What might you try next time?

Objective 2

Ideas and tips for integrating this Objective throughout your course:

1. Self-talk is going to come up in virtually every lesson, so you’ll have plenty of opportunities to keep this practice going! Talk them through the steps to work with negative self-talk: see the thought or judgement, and choose an alternative.

2. When you see reluctance to try something or put in their full effort, ask the girls what self-talk may be present. Ask them to reframe it, and give them some possible replacement statements as suggestions. Support them in testing out the effects that more positive self-talk can have on their experience.

3. Keep the connection to the inside and outside aspects of experience present in this. For example: “What’s going on right now Anna?”, is a great question as an invitation for the more inside aspects of her experience. “What thoughts are there?” And, if appropriate, “Do you want to believe those or make some new ones together?” Be sure that you do not use shaming language in this, noting that doing so is an easy trap to fall into! Negative self-talk is common for nearly everyone, it is big progress to become more aware of it, and choose alternatives.
Objective 3

Formulate and express your own ideas, opinions and values

Speaking up, expressing their full selves and living by their own values are challenging issues for many girls in today’s society. Girls who raise their voices, who ask for what they want, and who give their opinion risk being ostracized by peers and by adults who have grown up influenced by the norms in our society which say girls should be quiet and accommodating.

At the same time, there is a positive movement in society to encourage girls to take more space, and to be more confident. Thus, girls get the message to come forward, but they are still socialised to do so carefully and kindly. Women in our society are commonly and publicly “punished” for being direct, confident, and believing in themselves. The values underlying this behaviour are a part of a process of socialisation that starts early in life.

Complying with these social norms means that eventually such passiveness, being “quiet and accommodating”, becomes habitual. This looks like being indirect, apologetic, or hesitant when making a request in relationships with friends; and later in life at work or with partners. Research in the US has found that one-third of girls who did not want to be leaders said they feared being laughed at, making people mad at them, coming across as bossy, or not being liked by people if they took on a leadership role.

Girls continue to struggle to find and use their voices confidently. Girls weigh everything in these choices about whether to speak up: from emotional fallout, to appearing incompetent, to freezing up in the moment. The result is that instead of confidently and freely sharing their thoughts and ideas, they shy away from speaking, shrink back, and typically hope to get through the moment, or even the day, unnoticed.

It’s not enough for girls to simply have strong opinions. They need to know how to express them effectively, by being direct and assertive with others. This allows them to pursue their dreams, achieve their potential, and change their world for the better! This is what this Objective aims to build: encouraging the girls to identify and express their own ideas, opinions, and values in a safe space.

Values are the inner standards from which you receive the motivation to act; and by which you judge behaviour, your own and that of others. Your values signify what is important and worthwhile to you. Individuals have their own values based on many influences, including family, religion, peer groups, the wider culture and social background, as well as accumulated life experiences. Our values have a big influence on our lives and show up again and again in our behaviour. Therefore, knowing them well and having spent time reflecting on them is a valuable part of our development, and important in creating a happy and healthy life for ourselves.

Many girls do not have a clear answer when asked directly, “What is important to you in your life?” Part of this is their age, and being in the process of self-discovery; but often they look outside of themselves for answers, as that is exactly what society has taught them to do. The first step in shifting these patterns is learning to get in touch with their own values and opinions. For example, asking, “What is important to me?” or “What do I think about this issue?” rather than, “What does everyone else think is important?” or “What is the view that I should follow to fit in here?” or “How do other people want me to be?”

“I raise up my voice—not so I can shout, but so that those without a voice can be heard... We cannot succeed when half of us are held back.”

— Malala Yousafzai
The next step draws on that self knowledge to be able to share those values, opinions and desires with others confidently. Listening to the ideas and opinions of others, or respecting the values of others, especially when they are different, without ridiculing, dismissing or shaming another person is a very important lesson for teenage girls.

A key part to expressing your own ideas and following your own values in life is assertiveness. Girls should be encouraged to set boundaries, verbalise their needs with confidence, and say “no” without guilt or fear. Girls need guidance in unlearning some of the more passive and passive-aggressive communication styles that they may already have learned. To do this, this Objective also helps girls understand the differences between passive, aggressive, and assertive communication. They’ll have a chance to practice using these ways of expressing in different situations and directly experiencing the consequences.

Communication styles:

**Passive:** Difficulty making eye contact, slumped shoulders, struggles to project voice, agrees often, apologises frequently, says “I don’t know,” instead of sharing thoughts.

**Aggressive:** Uses body posturing and voice tone to gain power, interrupts frequently, uses sarcasm and put downs, appears insensitive, argues often.

**Assertive:** Makes eye contact, uses a calm and confident tone of voice, uses active listening skills, verbalises needs without feelings of guilt, listens to the needs of others, stands tall, shares thoughts and ideas in a confident voice.

How this translates over the next 3 lessons:

**Lesson 1:** Girls practice assertiveness in different situations.

**Lesson 2:** Girls practice formulating and expressing their ideas and opinions in a group.

**Lesson 3:** Girls identify their own life values and the values important to them in sport.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Girls can better identify their own ideas and opinions.
2. Girls become more comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions with others.
3. Girls become aware of the importance of speaking up and expressing themselves.
4. Girls can more clearly identify different communication styles: passive, aggressive and assertive, and understand the benefits of communicating assertively.
5. Girls become more confident using assertive communication styles.
6. Girls become more aware of societal norms around assertiveness and gender.
7. Girls develop a clearer understanding of their own values in their life as a whole, and for their participation in sport in particular.

Suggested sports & activities:

Any activity can be used for this Objective however some form of dance (hiphop, jazz, modern) or yoga (hatha/yin, vinyasa, acro yoga) with mixed styles can be a good option. There will likely be quite mixed opinions among the girls as to whether they find it fun or not. A more mainstream team sport could also be used, with silly rule changes that provoke different reactions or preferences.

You could also dedicate one lesson to a film or documentary that the girls can watch and have a discussion to share their opinions. The second lesson is recommended for this, but if you want to continue with your chosen sport that also works. Films with a strong message around equality in sport, about young inspiring girls, or issues of high importance in teenage girls’ lives, the environment, social issues or about girls in other parts of the world which are much less privileged are great topics. This can serve as preparation for Objective 9. The chosen film(s) can be short, leaving time for discussion of opinions.

Leader reflection exercise:

Reflect on the following questions:

**Inside me**

- How well do you know your own ideas, opinions and values?
- Can you freely share your ideas and opinions with others?
- Are you guided by your true values in your own life?

**Outside me**

- How open minded are you towards others differing ideas, opinions or values?
- How can you encourage others (the girls) to share their ideas and opinions with you? How can you support them in identifying their values and standing for those values assertively?

**Inside other**

- How well do you know the girls’ values and opinions?
- Can you freely share your ideas and opinions with the girls?
- Are you guided by your true values in your life?

**Outside other**

- How open minded are you towards girls differing ideas, opinions or values?
- How can you encourage the girls to share their ideas and opinions with you? How can you support them in identifying their values and standing for those values assertively?

Note down some of your reflections here.

From all that you have written down, pick out something that you have learned that you would like to share with the girls about your own experiences with knowing and expressing your opinions. Remember to incorporate all four perspectives in your sharing. How does what you have learned about yourself help you better support the girls?
Lesson one
Objective 3

1. Give the girls a brief introduction to the Objective and share any reflections that you would like on the topic from your leader reflection exercise, incorporating what you learned or what inspired you. Check in with them on how their reading went and answer any questions.

2. Have a discussion about passive, aggressive and assertive styles of communicating. Give the girls a few scenarios they might encounter at school, during sports, or out in their town or community. Get the girls to act out these different scenarios, repeating in the three different communication styles with special attention to voice, posture, and eye contact. Exaggerating some of the characteristics of these different styles is a great way to make this a fun game and still get the message across. You can also have the girls make requests of each other, for example to pass a ball, to put the ball on the table, or in a box. This is a simple way that demonstrates these three different ways of making a request and of responding to a request: saying yes, saying no, or engaging in some kind of bargaining or negotiation.

   Key aspects of assertive communication to include in this “game” as things for the girls to think about:
   - Knowing your boundaries and enforcing them
   - Verbalising your needs or requests with confidence
   - Saying “no” without guilt or fear

3. Focus the rest of the lesson on introducing the new sport or activity for this Objective.

4. End with a short group reflection on the new activity. How did the activity differ from their expectations? How do they feel afterwards? Give the girls their homework.

   Girls’ Discovery:
   1. Look out for examples of passive, aggressive and assertive ways of communicating in others around you. Note down a few examples in your journal.
   2. Test using your new assertive communication skills in two different situations and come ready to share something you observed or learned next lesson.

Leader Lesson Reflection
1. What worked well in this lesson?
2. What worked less well? Or What didn’t work? Or “This lesson would have been even better if I…?”
3. What observations did you make of the girls that you want to take with you to the next lesson?

Lesson two
Objective 3

1. Review what you covered in last week’s lesson, and ask for some examples from the girls’ homework.

2. Have a short discussion on why it is sometimes hard to be assertive and ask for what we want. Use this as a bridge into talking about sharing our opinions in a group, and why group situations can be scary. This gives you an opening into talking with the girls about being influenced by peer pressure and knowing the difference between taking on others’ opinions and knowing their own. Support the girls in exploring whether they look inside at their own thoughts, or more outside at what others are saying or doing when they decide on their ideas or opinions.

3. Watch your chosen film and have an accompanying discussion. How do the girls feel about the film? What messages did they agree or disagree with? Are they motivated to act in some way because of what they have watched? What have they learned from this Film that they feel is important to tell others? Encourage all to express their views on what they have seen. Look for opportunities to get the girls thinking about topics for their social activism mini-project in Objective 9.

4. End with asking why they think it is important that we all learn to say what we think and feel.

   Girls’ Discovery:
   1. Between now and next week, practice sharing your opinions on different things, and see how far you can push your own limits! Note down examples in your journal.

   Leader Lesson Reflection:
   1. What worked well in this lesson?
   2. What worked less well? Or What didn’t work? Or “This lesson would have been even better if I…?”
   3. What observations did you make of the girls that you want to take with you to the next lesson?
Lesson three

**Objective 3**

1. Offer a brief recap from last week and ask the girls to share some of their homework examples.

2. Discuss the idea of values—the things in life that are most important to the girls. Use the “My values” sheet in the supporting material to get started. Have the girls identify their top five values and write them in their journal.

3. Have the girls assign weight to their 5 most important values in a colouring exercise using the example of “What is most important to me” in the supporting material for inspiration. They can then put this in their journal to refer back to during the course as needed.

4. Focus the rest of the lesson on the sport or activity.

5. At the end of the lesson, pause for a group reflection on the most important values in doing sport in general. Perhaps the activity they just experienced is a useful reference point to get them started. Was it fun? Was it challenging? Were all able to join in? Was there potential to develop? To close, remind them about their reading in advance of starting Objective 4: “What are my greatest strengths?”

**Leader of Objective Reflection:**

This is your chance to capture ideas for the future, and integrate what you learned with the next group of girls. What worked really well over all three lessons? What would have been better? Do you feel like they had the experiences that you wanted them to? Were the activities the right ones to support what you wanted the girls to experience and learn? What might you try next time?

**Girls’ Discovery:**

1. Look at your values picture again before the next lesson. Does it still feel good or would you like to change anything? Write your thoughts on this in your journal.

2. Keep practicing your assertive communication at home and with friends.

3. Do your reading assignment before we begin next week’s Objective: “What are my greatest strengths?”

**Objective 3**

**Ideas and tips for integrating this Objective throughout your course:**

1. To some extent your entire course will deal with this Objective, as you are constantly asking the girls what they think about different issues. Remember to ask and include everyone in the group, and encourage different opinions. Support them in further reflecting on why they don’t confidently offer their opinion in certain cases. Maybe they don’t know, or maybe they don’t want to say—either way it is important for them to become aware of and reflect on this difference. You can also encourage more assertive ways of speaking with you and with each other in the safety of the group.

2. Referring back to their values in the context of sport is also an easy connection to make. Whether it is in an active lesson where they are participating, or whether they are going to watch a sports match, reflecting on their values can generate some interesting discussion. Are the values portrayed at a sports match similar to those identified in class, for example? If not, why not? What are the consequences?

3. Do all you can to make your lessons a place where the girls can speak up safely. When one of them asks for something she needs assertively, resolves a conflict gracefully, or shares her feelings, make sure all of these efforts are recognised, praised, and encouraged.
Objective 4

Recognise, explore and build on your existing strengths

People are all good at different things. They all have strengths or talents, and they also all have blind spots and things that they struggle with. Many girls focus a lot of attention on their challenges and on solving or correcting their “defects”, rather than appreciating their strengths. A large part of this comes from society’s input as to what is expected of them. Girls feel pressure to be good at everything they do; their grades in school, their friendships and popularity, their performance in sport, or in other hobbies—as well as their appearance.

Girls are also encouraged to be humble, not to take credit for what they are good at, or talk about their own skills and talents with real confidence. To do so can be met with criticisms of arrogance or bossiness. Some of the messages girls receive are very overt, and others are rather subtle and often overlooked. This is in part because many adults themselves are unaware of the norms that they conform to and perpetuate. Girls themselves keep these norms going, sometimes punishing another girl for confidently talking about herself or her abilities.

This Objective is all about self-acceptance and self-awareness, and learning to appreciate people just as they are. It is important to note that self confidence is more frequently mentioned when talking about girls’ empowerment, but self-acceptance is foundational to both self confidence and self esteem. Self-acceptance includes:

1. The awareness and realistic assessment of one’s own strengths and weaknesses.
2. Feelings of satisfaction with one’s self, despite any weaknesses, and regardless of past behaviours, choices or failures.

Self-acceptance is essentially a person’s satisfaction or happiness with themselves just as they are. It is the foundation for good mental health. It has been shown to correlate with decreased fears of failure and greater independence and autonomy in life. Self-acceptance supports the ability to work towards goals, and make changes and course corrections in life. This Objective connects strongly with Objectives 1 and 2 on goals and self-talk; look for opportunities to tie in how they are related throughout the lessons.

The ability for girls to function effectively in society and in their working life depends on a certain strength of presence, a comfort in taking their space, and knowing and asserting what works and what doesn’t work for them. Many girls and young women struggle to “take up space” or be assertive, and this can make certain leadership roles and positions more difficult for them. Setting boundaries, and knowing clearly when to say yes or no with confidence is a very important life skill that will be practiced in this Objective.

Some of these skills can be practiced using the body and voice as a tool. This Objective focuses on expressing self-acceptance and confidence using such practices. For example, the “power poses” and similar body and posture practices teach girls to act with power, status, and authority and to help them get more familiar with that way of being.

“I love to see a young girl go out and grab the world by the lapels. Life’s a bitch. You’ve got to go out and kick ass.”
— Maya Angelou

This Objective has a strong focus on boundaries. Boundaries define our comfort zones. If someone does something around you that you do not like, or find uncomfortable or disrespectful in some way, this can mean one of your boundaries has been crossed. Boundaries can be physical, emotional, sexual, or even spiritual in nature. Setting boundaries is a common area of weakness for many girls, because they are taught to be accommodating, polite, and that it is important to prioritise the needs of others. There is a big gap in education and support that many girls receive in this area: and this reality has far reaching implications. Setting boundaries and teaching girls that they don’t have to go along with uncomfortable situations or always accommodate others is incredibly important—even
**Learning Outcomes:**

**Lesson 1:** Girls explore and identify their own strengths and weaknesses.

**Lesson 2:** Girls experiment with power poses, and experience the feeling of saying a powerful “No!”.

**Lesson 3:** Girls learn about their own boundaries and learn tools for maintaining them.

**Leader reflection exercise:**

Reflect on the following questions:

1. **Inside me**
   - What are your own strengths and weaknesses?
   - How do you think this affects you?

2. **Outside me**
   - How do you behave when you have to do things you feel you are not good at while being seen by others?

3. **Inside other**
   - How can you support the girls in identifying and building on their strengths and navigating their weaknesses?

4. **Outside other**
   - What are society’s messages to girls about their innate strengths and weaknesses? How do you think this affects them?

Note down some of your reflections here.

From all that you have written down, pick out something that you have learned that you would like to share with the girls about your own experiences with self acceptance and the appreciation of your own strengths and weaknesses. Remember to incorporate all four perspectives in your sharing. How does what you have learned about yourself enable you to better support the girls?

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**Suggested sports & activities:**

This Objective has some great sporting parallels – strength and boundaries! You could choose to use strength focused sports such as weightlifting, powerlifting, or wrestling. Alternatively, you can choose one with boundaries as a clear element of the sport, for example cricket, basketball or netball. More easily arranged strength-related alternatives could also include handstands with an acroyoga style to make it more fun, or tyre flipping which is quite simple to do outdoors in good weather.

A strength based activity with one exercise isolated to the arms such as pull ups, with assistance from a rubber band as needed, and one for the legs such as air squats is a great example. The girls can learn what parts of their body are strongest, and where might have a goal to build more strength. This of course has parallels with other skills in life and may fit in with their course goals.

For the second lesson, you will be using some posture drills to practice certain empowering poses with the girls. With this in mind, choose an activity for lesson 3 that is supportive of learning about boundaries and strength.

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1. Girls need to learn that it is fully acceptable, and in fact healthy, to put their own needs before those of others.

2. Girls get better at setting boundaries as their confidence and self-awareness grows. Learning to set and test them makes it clearer what is ok and what isn’t. For this reason it is valuable for girls to reflect and to practice setting boundaries, and observe what happens. The first part of that process is knowing andvaluing their own needs, and paying attention to their own feelings of comfort or discomfort as boundary signals. The second part is putting that into practice, and learning that it’s ok to leave any situation when it is feeling uncomfortable. They are not obliged to be uncomfortable just to preserve another’s comfort or enjoyment. This is about teaching girls to act with their own agency, and to practice listening to their feelings.

3. Equally important is teaching girls to respect the boundaries of others. For girls, this is key in their friendships and relationships. They benefit greatly from learning that they may have different needs from their friends, and that nobody is wrong because of that. Everyone is different—sometimes our needs and wants just don’t line up. Everyone is entitled to their own feelings and needs. However it’s not okay to impose these feelings or needs on others, or expect people to change to fit your needs. Girls who have had the opportunity to learn these skills at an early age are much better able to nurture healthy and supportive friendships throughout their lives.

How this translates over the next 3 lessons:

**Lesson 1:** Girls explore and identify their own strengths and weaknesses.

**Lesson 2:** Girls experiment with power poses, and experience the feeling of saying a powerful “No!”.

**Lesson 3:** Girls learn about their own boundaries and learn tools for maintaining them.

1. Girls are more able to talk about their own strengths with confidence.
2. Girls are more able to feel satisfied with themselves.
3. Girls further develop their assertiveness, and are more able to take up space.
4. Girls are able to set and enforce boundaries.
5. Girls learn to put their own needs before the needs of others in situations that they find uncomfortable.
6. Girls have an embodied experience of their boundaries with specific body postures.
7. Girls learn the power of their bodies to communicate their boundaries.
8. Girls develop their respect for the feelings, needs and boundaries of others.
9. Girls reflect on what it means to be Strong!

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**Note:**

- Break up the activities into teams for more fun, or handstands with an acroyoga style to make it more fun, or tyre flipping which is quite simple to do outdoors in good weather.

- More easily arranged strength-related alternatives could also include handstands with an acroyoga style to make it more fun, or tyre flipping which is quite simple to do outdoors in good weather.

- A strength based activity with one exercise isolated to the arms such as pull ups, with assistance from a rubber band as needed, and one for the legs such as air squats is a great example. The girls can learn what parts of their body are strongest, and where might have a goal to build more strength. This of course has parallels with other skills in life and may fit in with their course goals.

- For the second lesson, you will be using some posture drills to practice certain empowering poses with the girls. With this in mind, choose an activity for lesson 3 that is supportive of learning about boundaries and strength.

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**Final notes:**

From all that you have written down, pick out something that you have learned that you would like to share with the girls about your own experiences with self acceptance and the appreciation of your own strengths and weaknesses. Remember to incorporate all four perspectives in your sharing. How does what you have learned about yourself enable you to better support the girls?
Lesson one

Objective 4

1. Give the girls a brief introduction to the Objective, and share any reflections that you have on the topic based on your leader reflection exercise. What did you learn? What inspired you? Check in with them on their reading, and answer any questions.

2. Have the girls write down their top 3 strengths in their journals. Include one inner strength and one outer strength, using the strengths prompt sheet in the supporting materials if needed. Do a brief round of the room, with each girl naming one thing she is really good at. Have them stand and say it out loud, really owning their strength! Next lesson will introduce the “power poses”, so you can start planting seeds for the experience of standing strong in their bodies here.

3. Focus the rest of the lesson on introducing the new sport or activity. Pause halfway through and have a short discussion and reflection on what they are good at in the context of this new activity. Ask: What are they not so good at? How does that feel? What meaning are they attaching to that? What is the self-talk that is present?

4. End with a short group reflection on the new activity. How did the activity differ from their expectations? How do they feel afterwards? Give the girls their homework.

Girls’ Discovery:

1. Between now and the next lesson, speak to two other people and ask them what they think are your unique strengths. Reflect on if you agree or not with their perspective, and take notes in your journal.

2. Come ready to share what you have learned in the next lesson.

Leader Lesson Reflection:

1. What worked well in this lesson?

2. What worked less well? Or What didn’t work? Or “This lesson would have been even better if I…?”

3. What observations did you make of the girls you want to take with you to the next lesson?

Lesson two

Objective 4

1. Review last week’s lesson, and ask for some examples from the girls’ homework. What did others consider to be their strengths? Were they surprised? Did they disagree with others’ opinions? Did they speak up if they disagreed?

2. The activity for this lesson is based on physical postures to experience the feeling of confidence and power in the body. The girls are going to practice and experiment with two physical poses - the confidence pose, and a “No!” pose. Use the “Power poses” instructions from the supporting material for guidance.

3. End with a reflection on situations where it’s difficult to say no. Good examples are going to the movies with friends, for instance, when you would have actually preferred to relax at home. Give examples of how to say no in these types of contexts. Try: “Thanks for asking, but I’ve decided to stay in tonight”. In these examples, make it clear that she can decide if or when it’s appropriate to offer an explanation for the “no”, to offer an apology, or to just say no.

4. Give the girls their homework, and have them do one more power pose or “No!” before they leave for the day!

Girls’ Discovery:

1. Practice the power pose before you do something this week, especially if you are feeling a bit nervous about it, and notice if it helps. Add your thoughts and reflections to your journal.

2. Practice the “No!” pose and say a confident “No!” to something this week. Make notes in your journal about how that feels and come prepared to share with the others next week.

Leader Lesson Reflection:

1. What worked well in this lesson?

2. What worked less well? Or What didn’t work? Or “This lesson would have been even better if I…?”

3. What observations did you make of the girls you want to take with you to the next lesson?
Lesson three
Objective 4

1. Give the girls a brief recap and ask about their discoveries from the last week. What did they say “No!” to? Did they use the power pose to help them during the week? If not, why not?

2. Have a short discussion about boundaries. Get the girls to start a list in their journals of things they would not tolerate from strangers and from friends. Talk about how and why these two lists might be different. Examples might be: teasing about a new haircut, someone taking their coat without asking, someone being late to meet them. Talk over how to take care of your own boundaries in some of these situations.

3. Focus on the sport and end with a short reflection about strength. What does it mean to be strong? What have they learned about strengths? Remind them about their reading in advance of starting Objective 5: “How do I create great relationships, support others and help create team spirit?”

Girls’ Discovery:

1. Practice observing if you take care of all of your boundaries. Look for things that make you feel a bit uncomfortable, but which you accept because you are worried about disappointing someone else, or feel you can’t say no. Write your reflections in your journal.

2. Do your reading assignment for the next Objective: “How do I create great relationships, support others, and help create team spirit?”

Leader end of Objective Reflection:
This is your chance to capture ideas for the future, and integrate what you learned with the next group of girls. What worked really well over all three lessons? What would have been better? Do you feel like they had the experiences that you wanted them to? Were the activities the right ones to support what you wanted the girls to experience and learn? What might you try next time?

Objective 4

Ideas and tips for integrating this Objective throughout your course:

1. Self-acceptance is a prerequisite for anyone making changes or working towards goals. It is built in part by stopping criticising and solving “defects”, and instead accepting ourselves just as we are, even the things we are not so good at. This Objective is very connected to earlier ones on goals and self-talk, so take the opportunity to make these connections and help the girls see the links between them in practice.

2. Be sure that you model this self-acceptance for the girls at every opportunity. Don’t say they are good at things when they are not; encourage acceptance of where they are and offer honest support for how to improve and move forward.

3. Continue to explicitly create an environment where they don’t need to be good at something to be valued and accepted.

4. When asking the girls their opinion on things you can also do classvotes using the “no!” pose and an equivalent “yes!” for a bit of fun and energy. You can also occasionally ask them if they are saying no to things in their lives, and how they are doing it.

5. Don’t tolerate girls putting other girls down. Should this happen at some point, instead of shaming those involved, use it as a moment to highlight the hurt experienced and to allow the girls who were involved to offer amends to those they hurt. Come back to the team rules and revise as needed.
Objective 5

Develop compassion, team spirit and the ability to coach & support others

This Objective is all about peer relationships, leadership, and interpersonal skills. Many girls are naturally compassionate and supportive of their friends and family. Others can deal with their own insecurities and fears by behaving in competitive or bullying ways to other girls. This Objective deals with both of these issues, practising compassion and peer support. This Objective openly explores some of the negative behaviours that come up in girls’ interactions. This serves as a means to move past them and build stronger and more healthy relationships.

Compassion can be seen as understanding the emotions of others. General social skills, like being able to build and take care of social connections and relationships, are key for girls in their personal friendships and social relationships. What the girls learn in this Objective will help them in developing their leadership skills and coaching abilities for now, and later on in life in their studies and work.

Compassion allows you to recognise others as human beings with feelings just like you. It helps foster a genuine desire to help, and to support another person who might be experiencing something difficult. These are the qualities that underlie love and care for others. Teaching girls to express this care and support in healthy ways sets them up to develop strong social relationships throughout their lives.

Compassion helps you understand how another may be feeling, while still keeping your own feelings distinct from that of the other person. Being compassionate towards your friend means being able to put yourself in their shoes, and see things from their perspective. It also means being able to regulate your own emotional response to their situation so that you don’t get lost in your experience.

In this latter part, being able to discern your own emotional experience from that of others, is where the skills and awareness can often be lacking. This is where many adults actually experience quite a bit of trouble, hence the importance of creating awareness about this for the girls.

For instance, some adults refrain from helping others who are in need, not because they are uncaring people, but because they may not have learned how to cope with their own emotional reaction to seeing and hearing about another person’s situation. They might experience this as being too scary or upsetting for them to get involved in, and so they keep their distance. Much of this is not conscious, but an automatic reaction that happens when someone has not developed these skills and awarenesses inside themselves. Girls might also respond—or rather not respond—similarly when they see someone being bullied or excluded by others at school or in their sports club.

“One’s life has value so long as one attributes value to the life of others, by means of love, friendship, indignation and compassion.”

— Simone De Beauvoir
situation. In this example, the “helpers” motivation is actually more about their own need to not feel discomfort, or to appear helpful, rather than being about the actual needs of their friend. A key skill in being a supportive friend or teammate is having self-awareness around these behavioural patterns.

Girls and women in particular often have challenges with this, as they are socialised from a young age to care for others ahead of their own needs. Often they are encouraged to take too much responsibility for another person’s emotions or life challenges. Girls often take the responsibility upon themselves to make sure that everyone feels good, and is ok, both at home and at school. This is a heavy burden to carry. These patterns have been identified as a key cause in many young women experiencing burnout and depression, because they have put so much energy into worrying about others that they have little energy left to care for themselves.

In this Objective the girls are going to be learning how to coach and support each other in peer-to-peer situations. Three behaviours are important in offering support and coaching to a peer:

1. **Keep the focus on the friend** - only sharing their own experiences to help the friend feel accepted and supported, rather than as a way to focus attention back on themselves, or what they might experience or be good at;

2. **Listening really well to what their partner is saying** they are experiencing, and reflecting this back to them. Offering alternatives rather than criticising their friends’ ideas;

3. **Honesty.** As peers, they shouldn’t hide what they don’t know or attempt to appear more competent than they really are. Rather, they can encourage the friend to get more help from you as the coach or teacher.

In practicing these three behaviours, girls learn their role as a peer coach: to understand and motivate, not to correct and advise.

**Team spirit** is a very special experience and one that all girls should have the chance to know! The best way to teach it is for teachers and coaches to try and model the behaviours which help to create it. As a teacher or coach you are a walking example of the characteristics that you want your group or team of girls to embody. Deal with everyone and every situation how you ideally would want your team of girls to engage with each other, and they will follow! By modelling vulnerability, trust, confidence and respect, you are encouraging them to do the same with you, and with each other.

How much girls enjoy their sports experiences is very strongly influenced by group dynamics and the sports environments that they take part in. The others in the group shape that experience, so if there is gossip and judgement in the group, a girl may never be able to do her best or really enjoy the activities available. In contrast, supportive teams and groups have a huge influence on behaviour, motivation and success, and once experienced, serve as a model for the groups people seek out. Join and contribute to for the rest of their lives.

Some teenage girls can behave in damaging ways in groups. Girls in a group can come together and pick on one girl (who is not present) who they have decided no longer made it into their circle for some reason. The group will talk about this girl’s actions and criticise her, gossip about her and either ostracise her completely or keep her in the group just so they can make fun of her. The girls in the “in crowd” engage in passive aggressive behaviour to establish and maintain a position of power over the girls who have been made to be “outsiders”.

This phenomena of “mean girl behaviour” and the damage it does to girls is well known. What has been talked about less is how this behaviour is bad for all of those involved, not just the excluded girls. This behaviour creates fear and insecurity in relationships, as every girl knows that tomorrow she may be the one to be excluded. Working actively with group dynamics and talking about these behaviours very openly helps the girls in the group establish norms where such behaviour cannot be hidden. This connects with the earlier work on team rules, so refer back to your course introduction for this Objective. This is a great time to do a group activity reassessing your team rules, and adding any new rules the girls feel can support them.

**Learning Outcomes:**

1. **Girls develop a better sense for the elements of good relationships with others.**

2. **Girls experience greater trust for each other, and their team.**

3. **Girls have a greater understanding of the importance of compassion.**

4. **Girls understand, can describe, and are less likely to take part in “mean girl” behaviours.**

5. **Girls appreciate the need to take care of their own emotions in order to experience good relationships.**

6. **Girls are more able to support their peers with challenges or failures.**

7. **Girls are better able to ask for the support they need when dealing with challenges.**

8. **Girls learn how to give and receive feedback with their peers.**

**Suggested sports/activities for this Objective:**

Choose something where the girls can work in pairs coaching each other for all three weeks. Focus on an activity that is likely to be new to all of them. This is preferred so that they all start from a similar skill level, and get the chance to develop skills and new confidence in this activity over a three week period. **Rock climbing,** either outdoors or indoors, is perfect for this Objective. They will all get the same tips and guidance at the start for how to use their feet and hands and body weight, and use the ropes and safety gear. They can then support each other in remembering these tips and pushing their limits as they practice in pairs.

**How this translates over the next 3 lessons:**

**Lesson 1:** Girls learn to name “mean girl” behaviour and share experiences of negative group dynamics, including exclusion and gossip.

**Lesson 2:** Girls experiment with their peer coaching skills.

**Lesson 3:** Girls give and receive peer feedback on their skills in taking on a coaching role.
Leader reflection exercise:
Reflect on the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside me</th>
<th>Outside me</th>
<th>Inside other</th>
<th>Outside other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where do you have some “inside” challenges in relationships that you are still working on, particularly when it comes to being in a group?</td>
<td>How do you behave with others when you feel insecure, or doubt yourself? Where do you see that you still have challenges in being compassionate with others?</td>
<td>How well can you see what different people in a group might need? Are you able to coach and support others in the way that they need, rather than the way that comes most easily to you?</td>
<td>Where does the feeling of belonging and safety in a group come from?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note down some of your reflections here.

From all that you have written down, pick out something that you have learned that you would like to share with the girls about your own experiences with peer relationships, groups, and with leadership. Remember to incorporate all four perspectives in your sharing. How does what you have learned about yourself enable you to better support the girls?

Lesson one
Objective 5

1. Give the girls a brief introduction to the Objective, and share any reflections that you have on the topic. Visit your leader reflection exercise, and what you learned. What inspired you that you wish to share? It may be useful to revisit the team rules in this lesson. Check in with them on their reading, and answer any questions they may have.

2. Have a discussion about interacting with others. Focus on compassion and bullying, as well as other ways of excluding others. Describe and name “mean girl behaviour” explicitly and see if they recognise this.
   a. Why are girls sometimes mean to each other?
   b. What can be done to support all girls in being compassionate with each other?
   c. What can we all try to do to create a great team spirit during our Strong Girls course?

3. Have the girls form in pairs and focus the rest of the lesson on introducing the new sport or activity.

4. End with a short group reflection on the new activity. How did the activity differ from their expectations? How do they feel afterwards? Give the girls their discovery task.

Girls’ Discovery:

1. Notice an example or incidence of “mean girl behaviour” at school or around friends during the next week, write about it in your journal. Come next week with something new you have noticed about this behaviour to share.

2. Try telling a friend who is not in your Strong Girls team what you have learned about “mean girl behaviour”, and see if they recognise the patterns. Make notes in your journal about anything that they shared that was interesting or surprised you.

Leader Lesson Reflection:

1. What worked well in this lesson?
2. What worked less well? Or What didn’t work? Or “This lesson would have been even better if I...?”
3. What observations did you make of the girls that you want to take with you to the next lesson?
Lesson two
Objective 5

1. Review last week’s lesson, and ask for some examples from the girls’ homework.

2. Have a short discussion about good peer-peer coaching and remind them of the 3 important behaviours described in their reading assignment for this Objective.

3. Have the girls form new pairs from the previous week and start the activity with them coaching each other. Give them tips and reminders as they go along based on the 3 behaviours. Partway through the activity, pause and act out a few short coaching examples that are relevant. Give them words to use to illustrate how the three behaviours look in action.

4. Have a short reflection at the end of the lesson, and invite the girls to share about how it feels to coach a peer. Give them their homework.

Girls’ Discovery:

1. Look for people who “coach” you in different ways or in different parts of your life, either peers or others who are older than you. Reflect on what you like or find useful in how they offer support to you. What about what you don’t like, or what you don’t find so helpful? Explore both perspectives in your journal.

2. Come back with an example of both to share next week—what do I find helpful? and what don’t I find helpful?

Leader Lesson Reflection:

1. What worked well in this lesson?
2. What worked less well? Or What didn’t work? Or “This lesson would have been even better if I...?”
3. What observations did you make of the girls that you want to take with you to the next lesson?

Lesson three
Objective 5

1. Give the girls a brief recap of what they’ve learned in this Objective and ask about their discoveries during the last week. Ask: what styles or ways do you find helpful or not helpful when being coached by another person?

2. Focus on the activity and on the girls practicing their new peer-to-peer coaching skills. They can go back to their original pairings if they wish, or change again to someone new. Either way, make sure they do the activity in a different pair combination than last week. This gives them more opportunity to give each other feedback on their improved style of coaching.

3. Prepare them for giving their partner feedback. Give them tips or a framework to use, for example:

   a. “I found it really useful when you said/did...” Be specific and focus on something your partner did or said just now, not something they did in the first lesson.

   b. “I found it useful because it helped me to...” Examples: push myself, feel safe, understand a different or better way of doing something, see that I was stuck, etc.

   c. “I found it less helpful when you said/did...” Again, be specific and focus on something immediate.

   d. “I found this less useful because...” Add the effect that it had on you or your feelings.

4. End with a short reflection about giving and receiving feedback, and what they have learned. Remind them about their reading to prepare for Objective 6: “What can I learn from my feelings?”, and give them their homework.

Girls’ Discovery:

1. Be aware of compassion and respect for others in the coming week. Notice yourself being compassionate towards others, and others being compassionate towards you. Note down the examples and any thoughts you may have in your journal.

2. Do your reading assignment, ready to start the next Objective: “What can I learn from my feelings?”

Leader end of Objective Reflection:

This is your chance to capture ideas for the future, and integrate what you learned with the next group of girls. What worked really well over all three lessons? What would have been better? Do you feel like they had the experiences that you wanted them to? Were the activities the right ones to support what you wanted the girls to experience and learn? What might you try next time?
Objective 5

Ideas and tips for integrating this Objective throughout your course:

1. Maintain a focus on the girls’ coaching and supporting each other during other Objectives. Remind the girls to focus on listening and supporting, rather than correcting, advising or talking about themselves. This is fantastic practice for building leadership skills.

2. Invest as much as you can in supporting their group dynamics, paying close attention to what is happening in the group, and dealing with any issues immediately when they come up. Focus on doing this in ways that all girls get the chance to learn from. Don’t let anything remain hidden.

3. Include team building experiences such as going and doing something fun and exciting together after school, if resources and time allows. Bowling, dancing or any other activity works well. Team T-shirts, stickers, and bags can all be used to create a feeling of belonging for the girls.

4. Continue to model trust, respect and compassion. The girls will learn the most from your example!

Objective 6

Explore body signals related to positive and negative feelings and tools to handle difficult emotions
The physical body is a valuable source of information when it comes to self-awareness and emotional intelligence. It helps people to understand how they feel and how to navigate those feelings and emotions that can be more challenging. Unfortunately, the importance of the body in developing this awareness is not yet very well recognised. Many focus on trying to understand feelings as thoughts in the head and mind, and forget about the huge amount of information to be gained by paying more attention to our bodies and our somatic experiences.

Think for example of how you feel when you are anxious or excited. It is a felt sensation in the body, isn’t it? That experience actually happens in your body, not in your head. You don’t think the feeling, you feel it! The mind does its part by interpreting the experience, coming up with a story about why you feel anxious or excited, but the body has a plan to deal with the feeling—most often how to make it go away as fast as possible.

Stop for a moment and feel what is going on in your body right now. Can you feel stress or tiredness for example, if you are reading this at the end of the day? Or perhaps it’s hard to feel much at all, and the thoughts in your head are very loud and dominating over the sensations in your body? Scientists have long known that all common emotions trigger sensations in our bodies, whether it’s butterflies in the stomach, signalling anxiety, the hot cheeks of shame, or the increased heart rate of excitement. New research also suggests that people all have the very same bodily sensations associated with our feelings, regardless of culture or language, precisely because this mind-body connection is biological. This understanding is a growing area of research, informing education, health care, elite sport, leadership and business sectors all over the world.

This Objective focuses on supporting the girls in recognising, understanding and experiencing their physical sensations, rather than top-down mental analysis to a bottom-up focus on the physical experience of the feeling. So, for example, when identifying a feeling in the body—where is it? Does it have a shape or colour? Is it moving, or is it stationary? What happens if you do nothing, and just feel it? If this is more unfamiliar territory for you, you may need to practice these experiences more thoroughly in advance of leading the girls through the same ideas.

After learning to identify and name feelings, dealing with the more difficult emotions is the next set of skills that this Objective develops. Just as one might think of girls doing sport to build agility in the body, the same can be thought of with our emotions: to be able to manage them skillfully requires training and practice. While people might not ever enjoy the more difficult emotions, they can learn to not be scared of them, to learn from them, and to decide how to respond rather than just react to them.

Feelings and emotions are fundamental to our long-term success in life, our ability to stick with things, to self-regulate, to negotiate conflict and to solve problems. They influence our relationships, and our ability to be effective in our jobs, as well as our ability to take good care of our mental, emotional and physical health. Girls who grow up without the ability to navigate emotions are at a major disadvantage. Their disadvantage can also be hard to see unless you know what you are looking for, as this lack of skill often looks like avoidance or silence. These skills of emotional awareness and the capacity to learn from challenging feelings are a top priority within Strong Girls.

Emotions are not good or bad or wrong: everyone experiences difficult emotions such as anger, jealousy, sadness and fear. Girls need to learn that feeling a certain feeling doesn’t signify that they are “good” or “bad”, or that there is anything wrong with them. No one is happy all of the time, and that is not a realistic goal to aspire to in life. It also isn’t possible to control and choose our feelings. It is however possible to decide how to behave when they arise. It is healthy to be curious about them, talk about them, and learn from them. It is unhealthy to ignore or suppress them, and your role as a leader is to model this for the girls so they can see what that looks like in living practice.

Feelings are always changing, and even intense ones always come and go. It is possible for a girl to feel intensely sad in one moment and feel desperate that she will always feel that way, to only an hour later feel that feeling has completely disappeared. Our emotions pass through us like waves, building, reaching a peak, and subsiding. Sometimes this is over in a few minutes, and sometimes it takes longer, but this pattern is something you’ll want to encourage the girls to observe and feel in their body at every opportunity.

Every feeling has a message: feelings tell a girl important information about herself and her life, guiding what she cares about, and who she can trust. Our feelings give us information on when something is good for us, or perhaps not so good for us. For this reason it is really important to not ignore your feelings, or pretend they don’t affect you. You can support the girls in asking them questions like: “What do you think thinking this feeling is telling you?” and explore together the messages they are being offered.

How this translates over the next 3 lessons:

**Lesson 1:** Girls learn to name and locate feelings in their body.

**Lesson 2:** Girls practice learning from their feelings and sharing them with others.

**Lesson 3:** Girls practice using tools for dealing with each common difficult emotion.

**Learning Outcomes:**

1. Girls can better identify feelings and emotions in their body.
2. Girls learn how their mind interacts with and tells a story around feelings and their meanings.
3. Girls develop a better relationship with “negative” or difficult feelings.
4. Girls can better choose how to act when faced with difficult feelings.
5. Girls better realise that all emotions are normal and experienced by everyone, thus developing more compassion for themselves and others.
6. Girls better understand how feelings are fleeting and changing all the time.
7. Girls are better able to know and share their true feelings.

**Suggested sports/activities for this Objective:**
Any sport or activity can be adapted to support emotions. This Objective offers a range of ideas to help girls develop their inner experience of the girls. Putting the girls in front of something a little more scary and emotionally challenging works well here: ice swimming, jumping off a diving board, horse riding, trying a zipline through the forest. Ideally find three different activities which challenge the girls in different ways, perhaps bringing up physical fear, or being observed or seen by others. Even doing something like handstands, jumping up onto a box or climbing up high on something might all work if you have less resources or access to more unusual activities.
Leader reflection exercise:

Reflect on the following questions:

| Inside me | How do I assess what I am feeling? Do I feel it in my body? Is this easy or difficult for me to do? How do I manage difficult feelings? |
| Outside me | Where do I let my feelings stop me from doing what I really want to do? |
| Inside other | How do I notice when others are experiencing difficult emotions? |
| Outside other | How are group dynamics affected when people experience difficult emotions? |

Note down some of your reflections here.

From all that you have written down, pick out something that you have learned that you would like to share with the girls about your own experiences with feelings including managing the difficult ones. Remember to incorporate all four perspectives in your sharing. How does what you are learning about yourself enable you to better support the girls?

Lesson one

Objective 6

1. Give the girls a brief introduction to the Objective, and share any reflections from your teacher reflection exercise. What are you learning? What is inspiring you? Check in with them on how their reading went for this Objective and if they would like to share anything that came up for them.

2. Start a discussion about the feelings brainstorm that you did in their course introduction. In what kind of situations do some of these feelings come up, and what is the experience? Do the girls know where they feel each of these feelings in their body? Can they name the sensations that they feel?

3. Introduce the new activity, and have the girls try to notice the feelings present, observe how long they last for, how many different feelings there are. Ask them to notice how their feelings can all change in a short period of time, going from happy to sad, or from scared to excited and back to scared again. Stress that the point of this exercise is to show the fleeting nature of feelings. Even if it feels like there isn’t much change going on, you can reassure them that this is about building the habit to look inside and observe.

4. End with a reflection about what feelings can be common when trying new things, like a new sport. Use this as an opportunity to talk more about the difficult emotions of shame or fear as well as easier ones like excitement.

Girls’ Discovery:

1. Practice checking in often with your feelings and see what you can learn. Notice how your feelings change during the course of a day. At the end of one day look back and try and remember all the different things you have felt as the day went on, and note it in your journal.

2. Come next week with something to share with the group about what you learned as you observed your feelings.

Leader Lesson Reflection:

1. What worked well in this lesson?

2. What worked less well? Or What didn’t work? Or “This lesson would have been even better if I...?”

3. What observations did you make of the girls that you want to take with you to the next lesson?
**Lesson two**

**Objective 6**

1. Give the girls a short refresher from last week's lesson and encourage them to share their homework. Ask them all to name which feelings are present for them right now as a way of checking in as a group. Use the prompt sheets if needed.

2. Introduce the activity.

3. During the reflection time at the end of the lesson, ask the girls about how they manage and learn from their feelings at present. Capture different possibilities on a whiteboard or flipchart as you may want to reproduce what comes out of the discussion and give copies to the girls after the lesson. They will likely need quite a bit of support here, so come prepared with examples from your leader reflection exercise to help the different strategies land and make sense to them.

   a. What can you do with a feeling? Examples: express it, talk about it, ask for help from a school counselor/parent/trusted adult to understand it, try and change it (perhaps by exercising or doing something you enjoy), or take some time to be alone with it.

   b. What options do they feel they have? Which of these are more appropriate in what contexts?

   c. Use this as a chance to hear what questions they have on this topic and what help they would value.

**Girls' Discovery:**

1. Practice observing the difficult feelings you experience over the next week. Which ones are the most common? Notice what you feel in your body when this is happening, and write about it in your journal.

2. Come ready next week to share your most common difficult feelings.

**Leader Lesson Reflection:**

1. What worked well in this lesson?

2. What worked less well? Or What didn’t work? Or “This lesson would have been even better if…”?

3. What observations did you make of the girls that you want to take with you to the next lesson?

**Lesson three**

**Objective 6**

1. Give the girls a short recap from last week. Ask for sharing from their homework, particularly around which feelings come up a lot for them, and which are easier and more difficult for them to experience.

2. Introduce the activity for the lesson.

3. Use the reflection time at the end of the lesson to ask the girls about their most common difficult feelings. Talk through a few examples of situations where difficult feelings came up for them. See how they might like to try a different strategy next time, and if they are willing to give it a go. Talk through some common examples to get the process going. You can give an imaginary example of a friend who lies, someone takes credit for your work at school, or of someone you like who finds out and then makes fun of you. Ask the girls what they think their feeling would be in that situation. Then ask what they could do to manage it. Be sure to cover their most common difficult feelings, including sadness, shame, and fear; as well as different types of strategies.

4. Give the girls their homework. Assign the reading assignment for Objective 7: “How can I use self-awareness and compassion to better manage my problems and conflicts?”

**Girls' Discovery:**

1. As you discussed in this lesson, practice doing something different in response to a common difficult feeling that comes up. What happens when you try a new way? How does it feel to you? Write about this in your journal.

2. Share one common difficult feeling you have with someone you trust, maybe a friend, parent, a school counselor or coach.

3. Do your reading assignment in time for starting the next Objective: “How can I use self-awareness and compassion to better manage my problems and conflicts?”

**Leader end of Objective Reflection:**

This is your chance to capture ideas for the future, and integrate what you learned with the next group of girls. What worked really well over all three lessons? What would have been better? Do you feel like they had the experiences that you wanted them to? Were the activities the right ones to support what you wanted the girls to experience and learn? What might you try next time?
Objective 6

Ideas and tips for integrating this Objective throughout your course:

1. The girls may regularly be tired or low in energy when you meet them, or alternatively very high in energy and hard to calm down enough to get their attention. Use these opportunities to ask what feelings are present. Even if you don't get clear answers the repetition will build their capacity to ask that question of themselves.

2. The course as a whole provides lots of opportunities to encourage them to name what they are feeling and enquire into what message that feeling might have for them.

3. This is a great place to connect breathing or mindfulness exercises if you have the opportunity. Both of these really support young people in having more awareness of what is going on in their body and mind. A fantastic addition would be to include a regular five minute meditation practice in the course!

Objective 7

Learn how to problem solve, to deal with conflict and to recognise the perspectives of others
Leader preparation
Objective 7

There are times when things go wrong in life. These times can of course be very hard, but they are also often the moments that give the greatest opportunities to learn and to grow. Life can be much like strength training in the gym—it’s only when stretched and tested to its limit does a muscle actually grow and get stronger. In a sense, people respond to challenges in much the same way. Knowing that you can and will get through your challenges, and that you will do so gaining new skills and insights provides a powerful form of self-confidence. This Objective aims to support the girls in their awareness that they are in control of their lives, no matter what obstacles they encounter: in their health, education, work, relationships, or in their sports interests.

Problem solving skills are a key part of developing this growth mindset. Research has highlighted serious influences on mental health for young people who can’t problem solve. If someone lacks these skills they may avoid taking action when faced with a problem, and then rather than putting their energy into solving the problem, they invest their time in avoiding the issue. When someone acts like this without thought, these more impulsive choices can build up into bigger problems over the long term.

A clear formula is simple to teach, and a great process for girls.

1. Identify the problem. Stating it out loud can make a big difference when girls feel stuck. “I don’t have anyone to sit with in French class” or “I’m not sure if I should join the higher football league or stay with my old team.”

2. Think of a few possible solutions. They don’t necessarily all need to be good ideas, the key is to find many different potential ways to go forward.

3. Identify the pros and cons of each solution. Think about the positive and negative consequences for each potential solution identified.

4. Pick a solution, the one that feels best in the moment, and get them to test it out! If it doesn’t work, they still have other things to try. Encourage them to ask for help from others as a practice.

Self-reflection and being aware of self-talk are important pieces of problem solving. While people need to acknowledge any external circumstances involved when something difficult happens in life, it is also valuable to be able to reflect on yourself and see what role you played. With this growth mindset girls are more empowered and confident in their abilities to overcome whatever challenges may come in life. For example, can you make new choices so that your situation can improve? This may be changing your own habits, attitude, or outlook, or perhaps changing the people or things that you give your time and attention to. Looking at yourself and asking yourself, “What do I need to do differently in order to change this?” is a crucial first step so that you don’t keep coming up against the same problem.

This builds on the self-talk learning from Objective 2. Sometimes when life hits you with a challenge, you can blame and criticise yourself for not being more disciplined, or for what happened in the past which has now caused your life to go sideways. When girls face challenges in life, negative self-talk can be our own worst enemy! A key part of this Objective is to convey, along with the empowering message of self-responsibility, the need for compassion towards yourself and the ability to forgive your own mistakes, learn from them and move on.

Conflicts and relationship challenges are one of the biggest concerns for girls at this age, and this is where much of this Objective focuses. Sadly, these skills are rarely taught in school, and even many adults have significant challenges with these interpersonal and relational skills. Some adults have developed skills through trial and error, and others through therapy, coaching or other personal development work, but in general this is an area where it is very common for people to struggle. Conflict is a normal part of any healthy relationship, whether it is personal or professional. Everyone has different values, perceptions and needs in life, so they will not agree with each other all of the time. The key is not to avoid conflict, but to understand what is happening, to learn how to resolve it in a healthy way, thereby building trust and making yourself and the relationship stronger.

The principles of “nonviolent communication” teach people to better understand themselves and others in conflicts by focusing on the basic human needs in relationships. These principles teach an awareness of a person’s feelings and needs as a place to focus, rather than using the judgments, labels, guilt or shame that is a more common focus in a conflict. Non-violent communication offers an excellent structure for teaching girls how to navigate conflicts or challenges in their relationships.

Many behaviours in conflicts can be considered “violent”, and result in hurt or harm to others. Examples of this are bullying, blaming, speaking without listening, criticalising, name-calling, judging who’s “good/bad” or what’s “right/wrong” with people. Non-violent communication is, just as the name suggests, the opposite of this.

Not only is it useful for resolving conflicts, it also encourages the girls to clearly and directly state their needs and make requests from others. However, this is only one in a set of communication tools, and is more suited to those who the girls can trust and who care about their feelings in return. In other situations the girls will need more direct and assertive ways to respond, like setting boundaries or even ending relationships that are not supportive or healthy.

Non-violent communication uses a simple method for clear communication, consisting of four points of focus:

1. Observation. State the observations that are leading you to feel the need to say something. These should be factual observations, not your opinion, judgments or evaluations of something. So: “I saw, heard, noticed…”

Example: “I saw you talking with Jenny and I heard my name,” states an observed fact, while “You were gossiping with Jenny about me behind my back,” makes an evaluation or judgement.

2. Feeling. Share what you are feeling. Name the feeling without attaching other thoughts to it. So: “I feel… sad/hurt/angry/surprised/confused/frustrated” rather than “I feel that…” or “I feel like…”, which are ways to state an opinion, not a feeling.

Example: “I saw you talking with Jenny and I heard my name (observation). (I feel confused and worried about why (feeling)).

3. Need. State the need that you have. This is something universal, not specific to a person, activity or time, but a basic need that all people experience. So: “because I am needing…” or “I need to feel trust/freedom/understanding/connection/safety/respect/acceptance”

Example: “I saw you talking with Jenny (observation). I feel confused and worried about why (feeling).”

4. Request. The final step is to make a clear positive request for your friend to act to meet your need. Ask them clearly and specifically for what you want, rather than just hinting at it, or stating only what you don’t want and expecting them to figure it out for the rest. So: “Would you be willing to…?”

Example: “I saw you talking with Jenny (observation). I feel confused and worried about why (feeling). I want and expecting them to figure it out for the rest. So: “Would you be willing to…”
Example: “I saw you talking with Jenny and I heard my name (observation). I feel confused and worried about why (feeling). I need to feel I can trust you as my best friend (need). Can you share with me why you were talking about me?” (request).

How this translates over the next 3 lessons:

Lesson 1: Girls practice group reflection over life’s challenges including taking self-responsibility and forgiving themselves.

Lesson 2: Girls learn a framework for solving problems.

Lesson 3: Girls learn skills for resolving conflict using nonviolent communication.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Girls can better see the challenges in life as opportunities to learn and grow.
2. Girls become more aware of the importance of self-acceptance and self-reflection in overcoming the challenges life presents.
3. Girls learn a simple formula for problem solving and practice applying it in the context of sports.
4. Girls can better identify their own needs in relationships.
5. Girls become aware of the importance of making requests and asking for what they want in their relationships.
6. Girls become more comfortable sharing their needs with trusted others.
7. Girls gain experience with the use of nonviolent communication methods through role-play.

Suggested sports & activities:

You can use any sports or activity for this Objective. The second lesson involves role-play activities in the classroom and you can use costumes and props to make this more fun and exciting for the girls. Outdoor activities would be great with this Objective. If you have more time available, planning a hiking trip or going camping can be valuable, as lots of examples come up with longer periods of time together, giving useful material to work with.

Leader reflection exercise:

Reflect on the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside me</th>
<th>How able are you to identify and ask for your needs in relationships?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outside me</td>
<td>What have been your biggest challenges and “teachers” so far in life?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside other</td>
<td>What helps you to be able to receive and hear the perspectives of others when there is a problem or conflict? How able are you to make requests of others about your needs?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside other</td>
<td>Think of your workplace and colleagues. How do you as a group find solutions to challenges together?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note down some of your reflections here.

From all that you have written down, pick out something that you have learned that you would like to share with the girls about your own experiences with problem solving in life and conflicts in relationships. Remember to incorporate all four perspectives in your sharing. How does what you have learned about yourself enable you to better support the girls?
Lesson one
Objective 7

1. Give the girls a brief introduction to the Objective and share any reflections that you would like on the topic from your leader reflection exercise. This is a chance to share what has come up for you as you learn alongside the girls in your course. Check in with them on how their reading went, and answer any questions they may have about the new Objective.

2. Have them turn to a partner and take turns talking about their biggest life challenge so far. Afterward sharing in pairs you can draw on some of the challenges that the girls shared with each other, and point out aspects that all seem to have in common.
   a. What was the challenge?
   b. How much control or responsibility did they feel like they had in this circumstance?
   c. How did they treat themselves through it?
   d. What did they do to navigate the challenge, and take action, if it was necessary?
   e. What did they learn?

3. Focus the rest of the lesson on introducing the new sport or activity for this Objective.

4. End with a short group reflection on the new activity. How did the activity differ from their expectations? How do they feel afterwards? Give the girls their discovery task.

Girls’ Discovery:
1. Talk to someone close to you about how they solve any problems that come up in their life. How do they figure out how to get through the challenges facing them? Note down any new ideas in your journal.

Lesson two
Objective 7

1. Review what the girls covered in last week’s lesson, and invite them to share from their homework.

2. Have a discussion about how people might solve problems in general. Highlight the different aspects to problem solving: self-reflection, self-acceptance, as well as deciding on action. Explain the problem solving formula. Have them turn to a partner and talk about a current challenge they are facing and how they could use the problem solving formula to address it.

3. Spend the rest of the lesson on the planned activity for the week.

4. Give the girls their homework, making sure to explain the concept of “needs”. A simple way to describe needs may be those things that we all need to be happy and healthy in life—things like safety, love, acceptance, and being able to participate and to follow our goals or dreams. These are different to “wants”.

Girls’ Discovery:
1. Reflect on the challenges so far in your life that have involved a disagreement with a friend or person close to you. Find one example and reflect on what happened at that time. How did you attempt to solve the issue? Write down the example in your journal.

2. Reflect on how aware (or not!) you were of your needs as you navigated the challenge. Come next week ready to share your thoughts and reflections on this example.

Leader Lesson Reflection:
1. What worked well in this lesson?
2. What worked less well? Or What didn’t work? Or “This lesson would have been even better if I…?”
3. What observations did you make of the girls that you want to take with you to the next lesson?
Lesson three
Objective 7

1. Review last week’s lesson, and have a short discussion of the examples of conflict from their homework. Draw out the common types. Talk about how to figure out your feelings and needs, and how to resolve conflicts with those you trust using the ideas of nonviolent communication.

2. Role-play some examples together as a group and take a break with some simple games as needed. Take a look at “Communication role-play” in the supporting materials for an example to show the girls the contrast between violent and nonviolent communication styles. From this you will be able to come up with others from their homework examples.

3. End with a reflection and talk about situations where this approach might not work. Consider a person who you don’t think that you can trust to give you clear answers but whom you still need to interact with. What might you need to do then? Set a boundary? What if you were to just say “No!” like was practiced in Objective 4?

4. Give the girls their homework including the reading assignment for Objective 8: “How am I enjoying my life, and caring for and celebrating who I am?”

Girls’ Discovery:

1. Try and be aware this week of any feelings suggesting that your needs have not been met with one of your friends or family.

2. Reflect on what you have learned so far in this Objective. Bringing all of your new skills together, see if you can share your learning with them and make a request for something different. Be prepared that the answer could be no; just remember that you are also doing this to practice and learn for the future! Come next week ready to share how this went.

Leader end of Objective Reflection:

This is your chance to capture ideas for the future, and integrate what you learned with the next group of girls. What worked really well over all three lessons? What would have been better? Do you feel like they had the experiences that you wanted them to? Were the activities the right ones to support what you wanted the girls to experience and learn? What might you try next time?

Objective 7

Ideas and tips for integrating this Objective throughout your course:

1. The girls’ problems and challenges will come up often, as you are regularly interacting with them. You will have probably already been encouraging the girls often with reframing their self-talk. You can add the problem solving formula to this when deciding on actions, and also remind them of the importance of self-acceptance and reflection.

2. Encourage them to have a growth mindset to their challenges. Support them in not dismissing their struggles or feelings, and encourage them to explore how what they learn while dealing with their challenges can be useful in the future.

3. Ask the girls often about any new conflicts with friends or classmates, and look for chances to bring them back to the nonviolent communication process. School life at that age is often full of relationship challenges! Use the framework with them if interpersonal issues surface amongst the group. Hold the experience lightly, as a chance for all to learn. This is exactly what they have been training for!
Objective 8

Find the balance between achievement and having fun in sport and your life

This Objective aims to give girls practice with some of the awarenesses and skills they need for creating a healthy and happy life in the long term. Society today is obsessed with achievement, success and goals, including for children and teenagers. Parents want to encourage their girls in all that they do, and build their self-confidence from a young age. However, they often instill this focus by rewarding or praising external achievements, like getting an A on a test at school.

Girls learn that when they perform well people are happy with them. This starts a pattern of focusing on achievement over enjoyment or health. This Objective therefore aims to give the girls an alternative narrative, one that encourages self-care and flexibility around goals.

Deriving self-worth from achievement alone can have far reaching implications. If girls grow up always looking to the next target they need to reach, then no school grade or sports match will ever be enough. There is always the next exam or the next tournament. There is always the chance to study harder, play better or run faster. Such a pattern transfers to working life where there is always another ladder on the rung to be climbed, further success and recognition to be attained. Daily striving is what fuels the self-worth of many young women in our culture. Some of the most successful women on the planet have publicly shared their stories of over achievement, and the suffering that results from this process of chasing goals. Many describe stories of needing a total crash in order to course correct and then learn to find balance and satisfaction in life.

It is not uncommon that women place excessive demands on themselves. There is rarely time to really relax and recover, and their health can suffer. This has grown to become a well documented health phenomenon among young professional women. In Sweden, women in their 30’s are the most common visitors to stress clinics, with symptoms like panic attacks, breathing difficulties, skin or stomach problems, colds and other persistent infections, suggesting that the body is way out of balance. When a young woman arrives at a stress clinic, things have gone way too far.

It is important to work on these beliefs about self-worth and the behavioural patterns that they can encourage from a young age. The goal is not to discourage girls from pursuing their dreams with passion and dedication, but to teach them that their value is inherent and not dependent on their appearance, or on anything they might achieve at school, work or in sports.

As teachers, coaches, parents and caregivers of girls there is a need to be less concerned with their academic and athletic achievements and far more concerned with their social and emotional development and strengths. This is because emotional intelligence, healthy supportive relationships and good self-esteem are precisely the skills which determine long term health, longevity and happiness in life. Ironically, academic and professional success comes as a result of finding this balance!

One way in which self-acceptance and self-love is practiced is in self-care. If asked “Do you take care of yourself?” most people will say yes. If asked “In what ways do you take care of yourself?” many will struggle to answer. This suggests that while many of us think we do take good care of ourselves, in reality we are not all that clear on what that means in practice.

“Always work hard and have fun in what you do because I think that’s when you’re more successful.”
— Simone Biles
Given how girls and women are socialised, this is something that needs to be learned and practised. These concepts are certainly not so easy to learn as a teenager, when it’s normal to perhaps not always be making the best decisions regarding your health or wellbeing. These are lessons learned over time. Laying the foundation of what self-care means and why it is important is very well supported through sports practice, and can kick start the learning process!

How this translates over the next 3 lessons:

Lesson 1: Girls identify what contributes the most to their happiness and well-being.

Lesson 2: Girls explore the pressure of school, sports and home.

Lesson 3: Girls learn how to “toot their own horn!” and practice using affirmations to increase their self-worth.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Girls explore and share what activities, places and people bring them the most fun and happiness in life.
2. Girls become more aware of the importance of having fun.
3. Girls receive the message that they are valuable for who they are, irrespective of their academic or sporting abilities, or their appearance.
4. Girls become more aware of society’s norms and values around achievement.
5. Girls practice self-appreciation and practising affirmations.
6. Girls can more clearly identify when they are doing an activity to achieve something or for their own enjoyment.
7. Girls develop a clearer understanding of their own value as a unique person.
8. Girls learn the meaning of self care, and the importance of rest and relaxation.

Suggested sports & activities:

Anything frivolous and fun can be used in these three lessons. Trampolining, playing games at the swimming pool, going to an animal farm, a picnic, having a campfire and grilling sausages, visiting a laser dome or going paintballing. These activities might not even be sports at all but just time as a group together that is relaxed and fun or something new and exciting to try, without a pressure to learn anything new or take on challenges.

Leader reflection exercise:

Reflect on the following questions:

- **Inside me**: To what extent do you derive your self-worth from your achievements?
- **Outside me**: How good are you at self-care? What self-care practices and habits do you use regularly?
- **Inside other**: How do you help others find their own balance of fun and achievement?
- **Outside other**: How have society’s values about achievement affected you and others that you know? How do you think they affect the girls you are supporting?

Note down some of your reflections here.

From all that you have written down, pick out something that you have learned that you would like to share with the girls about your own experiences with focusing on achievement and with self-care. Remember to incorporate all four perspectives in your sharing. How does what you have learned about yourself enable you to better support the girls?

Note down some of your reflections here.
Lesson one
Objective 8

1. Give the girls a brief introduction to the Objective, and share any reflections that you have from your leader reflection exercise. What are you learning? What are you inspired by? Check in with them on how their reading went and answer any questions.

2. Have a discussion about fun! How do they get energy from doing fun things or being in certain places or with certain people?
   a. What are the very best things in the girls’ lives right now?
   b. What are their most favourite things to do and people to be with? Why?
   c. Talk about being happy in life. Where do they think that feeling and experience comes from?
   d. Invite them to share times when they were the happiest, most energetic or had the most fun possible. Why was that?

3. Focus the rest of the lesson on introducing the new sport or activity for this Objective.

4. End with a short group reflection on the new activity. How did the activity differ from their expectations? How do they feel afterwards? Give the girls their homework.

Girls’ Discovery:
1. Between now and next week, notice the feeling of having fun and enjoying yourself. What were you doing? Note this down in your journal.

2. Think back to what you and others shared in class about fun. Can you do some of these super fun things more often? Come next week with something new that you noticed was fun to share with the group.

Leader Lesson Reflection:
1. What worked well in this lesson?
2. What worked less well? Or What didn’t work? Or “This lesson would have been even better if I...?”
3. What observations did you make of the girls that you want to take with you to the next lesson?

Lesson two
Objective 8

1. Review what you covered in last week’s lesson, and talk to the girls about why fun was such an important topic last week.

2. Discuss the pressures of school, sport, home, and social media. Bring up how it is easy for it all to become too much, and why this isn’t healthy. Ask about what is fun about success and achieving goals; and also about what it feels like when there is too much pressure. How do they tell the difference? Have they ever worked so hard at something that it just wasn’t fun anymore?

3. Introduce the activity for the rest of the lesson.

4. End with a short reflection around the importance of resting and relaxing and ask about their strategies for taking care of themselves.

Girls’ Discovery:
1. Do something relaxing just for yourself this coming week, something that feels really good. Maybe having a bath, baking a cake, playing with the dog, or taking a nap. Note it in your journal, feeling free to be creative: you could draw it, color it, or illustrate it with one word that takes up a whole page.

2. Come ready to share about what you did to relax, and how you felt afterwards.

Leader Lesson Reflection:
1. What worked well in this lesson?
2. What worked less well? Or What didn’t work? Or “This lesson would have been even better if I...?”
3. What observations did you make of the girls that you want to take with you to the next lesson?
Lesson three

Objective 8

1. Have a brief recap of the last lesson and share from the girls’ homework on relaxation. Discuss with the girls the ideas of worthiness, and that they are all valuable and perfect just as they are. It is not something that needs to be earned. Do not hurry this message or underestimate its significance, some girls may never have received this message from their own parents or from other significant adults in their lives.

2. Do the “toot your own horn” exercise, using the sheet in the supporting material. This exercise is an excellent way for the girls to explore what makes them good and likeable people. It encourages them to feel good based on who they are as a person rather than because of their appearance, abilities, and successes. Although they can feel good about these things too, of course! The worksheet lists several sentence prompts that the girls can fill in with something positive about themselves and their lives: something that “toots their own horn!”

3. Give the girls their homework, including the reading assignment for Objective 9: “What influence does society have on me? How can I help make society better for all of us?”

Girls’ Discovery:

1. Put your “toot your own horn” sheet up somewhere at home where you can look at it every day until next week. Look at it at least once a day and feel how worthy and good you are, just for being you! Note any thoughts you have in your journal.

2. Do your reading assignment, in time for starting the next Objective: “What influence does society have on me? How can I help make changes in society?”

Leader end of Objective Reflection:

This is your chance to capture ideas for the future, and integrate what you learned with the next group of girls. What worked really well over all three lessons? What would have been better? Do you feel like they had the experiences that you wanted them to? Were the activities the right ones to support what you wanted the girls to experience and learn? What might you try next time?

Objective 8

Ideas and tips for integrating this Objective throughout your course:

1. Many of the girls’ sport experiences before Strong Girls will likely have focused on drills, achievements and doing things well, developing new skills or improving existing ones. Throughout the course, remember to keep the focus on their effort, not on what they achieve in the sport specifically; on the attitude that they bring to participating fully; and giving things a try, being together with and supporting others.

2. Do what you can to create a space where the girls feel fully accepted and cared for, regardless of what they accomplish, what they look like, what they are interested in, and how they are different.

3. Take time to feel and appreciate their uniqueness. When moved to do so you can tell them they are valuable just as they are! It is important that this message comes from a genuine feeling and not because you feel that you should. Wait for the moment when it comes naturally.
Objective 9.

Reflect on societies ideals, norms and values and your own agency in society

The focus of this Objective is to give the girls language and context for understanding the influences around them, from society and the media, as well as those reinforced by family, friends and peers. This awareness can support them in more consciously deciding what informs their choices, including their own potential to influence the society of which they are a part.

The concepts of norms and ideals are in fact quite intuitive for many girls. Asking them what you “should do” in certain situations, and what you “should never do under any circumstances” will bring up a number of silent “rules” that are currently governing their behaviour day to day. Such rules among teenagers are often especially obvious, but in fact social and cultural norms are deeply entrenched for all of us.

Norms represent collective attitudes of a society and what is believed about how people should behave and how they should lead their lives. For example, what kind of clothes or hairstyles are considered appropriate, and in which contexts; what sports a woman might be expected to play, as opposed to a man; or how a woman as opposed to a man might behave in relation to a conflict in a boardroom meeting at work. These norms are generally unspoken, and yet have a very strong influence over our behaviour. Most people tend to behave in ways that conform to what is deemed “normal”, and avoid what is considered “wrong” within certain social groups or contexts. For example, among teenage girls the use of make up, and needing to look good and be popular are deeply rooted examples of social norms.

Ideals are also a particularly important topic for girls in the context of body image and appearance. Research shows that many girls with body image worries will skip meals, avoid seeing friends and family, avoid participating in extra-curricular activities such as sports, or even in seeing a doctor because of their beliefs about their bodies. The influence of unrealistic body ideals and body image issues have been shown to have a lasting impact on a girl’s confidence, resilience and life satisfaction. This impacts the degree to which girls reach their potential in school and other important areas of their lives.

Social media in particular is receiving a lot of scrutiny for its influences. While some girls are now using social media to democratise the beauty narrative, sharing their own perspectives with diverse body stories and images, most are negatively affected. This issue can have potentially very serious consequences in the short term, with young girls’ lives being very much disrupted and their health damaged.

“'To all the little girls who are watching, never doubt that you are valuable and powerful and deserving of every chance and opportunity in the world to pursue and achieve your own dreams.'

— Hillary Clinton

It can also have perhaps more subtle but long reaching effects on how habits of observing food intake and judging the body can stay with many women over a lifetime. When speaking with many thirty-something women, this reality becomes clear from their experience, including an awareness of how they were influenced as girls by their own mothers and grandmothers behaviour and beliefs. This pattern is not just a recent phenomena from social media and celebrity culture, but a deep rooted intergenerational consequence of women believing their value is derived from their physical appearance.

Strong Girls is not just about participating in the activity of sport. It is also about encouraging the girls to see the wider norms and power
structures that are present and how this affects them directly, as well as indirectly through wider society. This Objective encourages the girls to consider what norms or ideals might be present in sport in their school or community, what changes are needed, and if and how they might want to be part of creating those changes. To do this, the girls are supported in a civic or social activism activity or mini-project.

The girls collaborate on this project with a view to expressing their desires and experiencing their own agency and power! The girls will directly experience their potential to have influence, not just in their own lives but also to do so on behalf of others or for a higher goal or value that they hold.

For example, this project might involve engaging with or commenting on the sponsorship, media coverage or decision-making processes within sport in their hometown. Alternatively it could be in relation to something the girls see in the media, feel strongly about and want to raise awareness on. This wider perspective empowers girls to consider what they want from sport in their school or community. What changes are needed? How might each girl want to be a part of creating these changes?

Topics of interest could be how money on sports is spent by the city, who makes these decisions, and how they ensure that this distribution promotes equal opportunities and does not reinforce existing gender norms. For example, does more city funding go to typically “male” sports such as football and ice hockey, thus indirectly allocating more resources to the interests of boys and men than to those of girls and women?

Another area of interest might be exploring what channels have been established by the city for input into decision making by young women, or young people in general. This could lead to designing and proposing potential policy reforms to make sure this consultation happens in the future. Similar questions and investigations could be focussed on school resource spending and decision-making, as well as on the dominant culture surrounding sports in school.

How this translates over the next 3 lessons

Lesson 1. Girls identify norms and ideals from society that influence them.

Lesson 2. Girls collaborate around an issue of significance to them, planning how to challenge current social or cultural norms in the context of sport.

Lesson 3. Girls implement a social activism activity and experience their own power to influence.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Girls become more aware of what norms and ideals are.
2. Girls can more clearly identify norms and ideals in society in general, and in sport in particular.
3. Girls become more aware of how their lives are influenced by norms and ideals.
4. Girls discover their ability to choose which norms and ideals they want to conform to.
5. Girls become more aware of their own power to influence society around them for their own benefit, and for the benefit of others.
6. Girls experience the feeling of personal power and agency.
7. Girls take practical steps towards a change in society or in their school in a way that has personal meaning to them.
8. Girls collaborate around a social activism project.

Suggested sports & activities:

These three lessons are taken up with classroom based activities. This Objective can be a great time to add a group outing to a sports event, as it will reveal lots of norms and structures for the girls to reflect on. Local sports teams may be very willing to donate tickets to encourage girls to come and watch matches or competitions, so ask for their support for your Strong Girls course. You can also ask for a behind the scenes tour and the chance to meet some of the players or competitors.

Leader reflection exercise:

Reflect on the following questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside me</th>
<th>Inside other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What messages have you internalised from society about how you “should” look and be?</td>
<td>What norms and values do you judge other people by?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you currently not show up as fully yourself because you are worried about being judged, or getting something wrong? What norms or values are you adhering to in doing this?</td>
<td>How can you, and the girls, have a role in influencing society by being fully empowered?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note down some of your reflections here.

From all that you have written down, pick out something that you have learned that you would like to share with the girls about your own experiences with norms and ideals in society and how they have impacted you. Remember to incorporate all four perspectives in your sharing. How does what you have learned about yourself enable you to better support the girls?

...
Lesson one

Objective 9

1. Give the girls a brief introduction to the Objective and share any reflections that you have from your leader reflection exercise. Did you have any insights or inspiration about how you understand or are affected by social norms? Check in with them on how their reading went for this Objective, and answer any questions they may have.

2. Discuss with the girls the ideas of norms and ideals, particularly around how to behave and how to look. Explore examples they see around them:
   a. What are the norms for teenage girls and for women in general in society?
   b. What is “expected” of them?
   c. How do the girls feel about this expectation?
   d. How does it affect them?

3. Have the girls google the names of different sports together with the words “women” or “girls”; for example, google “girls” and “hockey”, or “girls” and “motorsport” and compare with “boys” and “hockey” or even just with “girls” and “gymnastics”. Have a discussion around what comes up for them about how girls and women are portrayed in sport.

4. Give the girls their homework.

Girls’ Discovery:

1. Reflect on what we have talked about and learned this lesson. Watch the world around you over the coming week. What do you see in your town, community, neighbourhood or in school that you would like to change? This can be about sport, or something else entirely.

2. Come ready to share something you would like to change in society for the next lesson.

Leader Lesson Reflection:

1. What worked well in this lesson?
2. What worked less well? Or What didn’t work? Or “This lesson would have been even better if I...?”
3. What observations did you make of the girls that you want to take with you to the next lesson?

Lesson two

Objective 9

1. Review what you covered in last week’s lesson, and ask for some examples from the girls’ homework. Use this as a way into a discussion about inequality and society, what changes the girls think are needed, and what they would like to see done differently.

2. Brainstorm and formulate a few ideas together around a social activism activity that the girls can work on together, or in smaller groups. A few different activities are fine if several of the girls have different ideas.

3. Plan together for these activities, listing out the steps involved, and then get started! Formulate the girls’ homework based on their plans.

Girls’ Discovery:

1. Take the next steps in your social activism activity or mini-project!
2. You might be working with some of your friends and teammates on this, so make sure you coordinate with each other and communicate clearly so everyone knows what they are expected to do before next week.

Leader Lesson Reflection:

1. What worked well in this lesson?
2. What worked less well? Or What didn’t work? Or “This lesson would have been even better if I...?”
3. What observations did you make of the girls that you want to take with you to the next lesson?
Lesson three
Objective 9

1. Do a brief review with the girls to see where things are and discuss together the final stages in the social activism activities or mini projects, including sharing the progress on homework as needed.

2. Have the girls get to work on their social activism activity, and support them as needed. Bring in any opportunities to practice drawing on their earlier learnings around self-talk from Objective 2, their unique strengths from Objective 4, and conflicts and team work from Objective 7.

3. Give the girls their homework, including their reading assignment for Objective 10: “What do I really want to try?”

Girls’ Discovery:

1. Reflect on what you have experienced in your group and the influence that you had through your mini-project.

2. How does that feel? Are you surprised? Enjoy the feeling that you did something to stand up for your beliefs, and make a contribution to society on behalf of others!

3. Is there something you can or would like to perhaps carry forward with the work you began?

4. Do your reading assignment ready to start the next Objective: “What do I really want to try?”

Leader end of Objective Reflection:

This is your chance to capture ideas for the future, and integrate what you learned with the next group of girls. What worked really well over all three lessons? What would have been better? Do you feel like they had the experiences that you wanted them to? Were the activities the right ones to support what you wanted the girls to experience and learn? What might you try next time?

Objective 9

Ideas and tips for integrating this Objective throughout your course:

1. This Objective is one that may need a little more advanced planning, and/or time to actually complete than the others. With this in mind, you may want to start the girls thinking about it earlier in the course, or you may want to make space for it to continue over a holiday break, or even up until their course is finished. There are many ways of doing this to fit the school schedule and the ambitions of the girls. You can adjust the 3 planned lessons here accordingly.

2. For example, if it’s a letter that they are writing then in lesson 3 they might already have it finished and then deliver it together as homework. They can take photos or make a film of them doing that. If it is a project that is a bit bigger in scale, then the girls can start in lesson 3 and then run with it until their course ends. The idea of having Objectives 9 and 10 close together is that it gives the flexibility to have mix of mini-project work and organizing, while trying out their remaining sports or activities.
Objective 10.

Learn new physical skills and experience new sports and activities

Offering girls new physical and outdoor experiences is, in a sense, the foundation of the whole Strong Girls Program, and is the focus of the final Objective. Research clearly links a girl’s involvement in sport to both her emotional, psychological and physical health, which leads to improved academic performance and self-esteem.

This connection needs to be supported at a young age and maintained, otherwise the opportunity can be missed, with life long consequences. If not built early on, girls can lack both the confidence and motivation to include physical activity as part of their lives as they grow older. They can come to believe that it is not something for them, or they are not athletic or “sporty” enough to take part. They also miss a key developmental window for gaining physical competencies and skills in how to use their own bodies. It is precisely this self confidence and physical competence that allows girls to continue to explore sport as they get older, as they try new things and continue to lead active and healthy lives.

Given the increased visibility of women and girls participating in sport, it is now common to hear the opinion that girls have ample opportunities to participate and, consequently, girls who do not participate choose not to do so because they simply lack interest. Research shows that this is simply not true. It is the cultural norms and structures present in sport which are the biggest influence on girls’ participation. In other words, it is the way sport is offered and organised that puts girls off, not sport itself.

Girls need sport in their lives. It is the culture of sport that needs to shift, not girls, in order to make sure that their needs are met. For example, many sports clubs still place a strong focus on performance and competition over fun and shared experience. Girls often feel this underlying interest from their trainers or in the club environment despite the message of inclusion being verbally communicated. Girls will hesitate to get involved when they feel that sooner or later they will have to deal with judgements over their ability, comparison to others, or a pressure to enter competitions.

So far in the girls’ course you have been creating that fun and shared experience! A further step as a Strong Girls leader is to open up pathways to some of those sports and areas of sports culture where this change is still very slow. By giving girls the chance to explore and test anything they still might be curious about, they are more likely to discover something they are passionate about. For some this might be wrestling, for others running, for others still dance or yoga or perhaps mountain biking or hiking. As their course draws towards a close, this Objective focuses on filling any gaps in the girls’ experiences. It sets them on a path to continue their interest in sport and physical activity, and thus to enjoy physical and emotional health well into the future.

What is left that they want to experience? What did they perhaps encounter on the course that they want another chance to try? Which sport feels most challenging and what would help them find a way in to trying it and discovering if they like it? Who can you contact, or support them in contacting, to ask for help in opening up these pathways? For example, perhaps a phone
call to the local boxing gym to ask if it is possible to start a girls’ group that can train together just for fun. Perhaps it’s talking to the local football club about the chance for a group of girls to take referee training. You are encouraged to leave as much of this to the girls as possible so that they also learn themselves how to ask for change in some of these established norms and stereotypes. This is a great way to connect the learnings between Objectives 9 and 10.

These lessons may be about actually doing those activities which the girls identify, or alternatively they might be used in a more practical way to set up those opportunities. The girls can be guided through how to create these opportunities for themselves, and at the same time be part of a process of changing the sports culture and structures. The sport or activities themselves might then come later.

First you’ll want to identify what they are interested in, and encourage them not to put limits on themselves. Then you can help them as needed in writing an email, looking up a beginners class, or perhaps contacting the trainer of a club and asking if a group of them can come along and try something out. Encourage the girls not to hold back from asking for someone’s time, or to ask to be able to try something for free. This is their agency in action!

On this note, don’t be cautious in your own requests or demands of others. Now more than ever, sports clubs and sports organisations know that they need to make these changes, as do public service providers, schools and parents. Make the most of this change process that is underway and help give it a push in the right direction! By doing so, you model for the girls how to be a force for change in society, and to give them ideas to create their own opportunities.

For those who might help and support you, you can assist them by providing them with some information about your Strong Girls course and about how they can best meet the needs and interests of the girls.

How this translates over the next 3 lessons:

Lesson 1: Girls are supported in taking the initiative to take care of their own needs and create opportunities for themselves to continue to explore sport and try new activities.

Lessons 2 & 3: Girls get the chance to try new physical activities or to repeat activities that they have already really enjoyed.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Girls connect with their desires around testing new sports and physical activities.
2. Girls are empowered to explore new opportunities including asking to be included in environments that might not typically be open to girls.
3. Girls try new things, and decide what they like and don’t like without self-imposed barriers to participation.
4. Girls feel less afraid to try and fail, or to change their mind confidently.
5. Girls understand the connection between creating a foundation of interest and curiosity and sustaining motivation in the long term.
6. Girls feel more inspired to continue their participation in sports and physical activity, including trying new sports in the future.

Suggested sports & activities:

Whatever the girls express an interest in!

Leader reflection exercise:

Reflect on the following questions:

Inside me
- How do you feel when trying something new? Do some feelings prevent you from trying new things?

Outside me
- What physical skills would you love to learn or develop? What new sports would you love to try?

Inside other
- How do you accommodate for the fact that everyone learns new physical skills in different ways? How can you use this awareness to support the girls’ development?

Outside other
- How does each new physical skill, sport, or activity you learn or experience help you to be a stronger and more engaged person in society?

Note down some of your reflections here.

From all that you have written down, pick out something that you have learned that you would like to share with the girls about your own experiences with different sports and activities. Remember to incorporate all four perspectives in your sharing. How does what you have learned about yourself enable you to better support the girls?

Note down some of your reflections here.
Lessons 1, 2 & 3

Objective 10

As described in your preparation reading, this Objective has a different structure to the previous nine. There are still three lessons scheduled here, though it could even be more depending on the girls’ desires, and the opportunities and time available. But the format and content of these lessons will depend on what the girls want to try and the practical and logistical implications of making that happen.

The first lesson is a planning opportunity that builds on the girls’ reflections and gets them started in realising their ambitions for new sports and activities to try.

1. Give the girls a brief introduction to the Objective, and have them respond out loud to what excites them and what scares them about this new Objective. Offer your additions based on your reflection exercise, including sharing some personal insights and experiences.

2. Discuss the girls’ answers to their homework, including what they are excited to try, a limitation they might perceive, and how you are all going to go about making their wish happen.

3. Start to put the plans in place to organise the steps required, following up with each girl after the first lesson as needed.

The second and third lessons will focus on doing the activities! Some of the girls may be doing something alone, others in groups. Make sure there is a chance for all to report back to their teammates and share their experiences with each other, either in lesson 3 or when you start the course evaluation.

Girls’ Discovery: (three weeks)

1. Do the tasks you have agreed with your teacher or coach to create this opportunity.

2. Once things are set up, enjoy the chance you now have to try something you are really curious about or have always wanted to try! Keep notes in your journal on what you enjoyed the most, and why.

3. Explore how you feel before, during and after trying something new. Be aware of your self-talk, and of feeling the emotions present in your body. What do you learn from paying attention in this way? Write down a few ideas on this in your journal.

4. After your new experience, share something with the external person who helped you to make it happen. Perhaps the coach that invited you to a class or training session, or the person who responded to your request and supported you in trying something new. Tell them why this opportunity was important to you and what you learned from it. Note this in your journal.

5. Think of one more activity that you want to try someday in the future, maybe not for a while, but perhaps when you are older. Something that one day in your life you want to be sure to experience. Write this down in your journal for when you need a reminder in the future!

6. Come ready to share about your experiences to the final lesson.

Leader end of Objective Reflection:

This is your chance to capture ideas for the future, and integrate what you learned with the next group of girls. What worked really well over all three lessons? What would have been better? Do you feel like they had the experiences that you wanted them to? Were the activities the right ones to support what you wanted the girls to experience and learn? What might you try next time?
Leader preparation

At the end of your Strong Girls course it is important to reflect on this experience and acknowledge yourself for all the time and energy you have invested!

1. How has the journey been for you?
2. What have you learned about yourself in this role?
3. Have the girls benefited in the way that you hoped?
4. What worked really well? What needs improving?
5. What is the potential for the future? Where are there remaining challenges?

The original Strong Girls Project was very much a journey, testing new things, asking questions of all of those involved, with lots of reflection and revision. Using the Program that emerged (the one that you have been using here in this book!), there will still be challenges to navigate and new ideas emerging on your journey. Implementing any Program such as this one into your own course needs to be seen as a process, adjusting it to get the best fit for your school, club or the different groups of girls that you might support. Society and our education systems are also rapidly changing, so taking this growth-mindset and holding the perspective of an ongoing journey as you reflect on your Strong Girls course will help in creating a course which continues to evolve and grow rather than something that is rigid and standardised.

There is a Leader reflection exercise for the evaluation, much like all of the Objectives. In addition to this you may gain from setting aside an hour or so to read back over all of your end of Objective reflections, and pull those together into concrete learnings and plans for your next steps.

The course celebration is an important final time together. A dedicated ending gives the girls the chance to really acknowledge their own and each others journeys and to celebrate all of their achievements during the course. Let the girls decide together how they want to celebrate the end of their Strong Girls course.

Once you have completed your evaluation and celebration with the girls and your own reflection process please consider sending a summary to the Strong Girls Project. Feedback from those who are using this material is essential to keep improving and developing the course. Even a quick phone call or email to share what has been learned is very much appreciated. Particularly if specific challenges have come up for you, you are likely not the first, and we can pass on suggestions from how others have worked to overcome the same challenges or obstacles in their courses. We can also learn from your experiences!

Leader reflection exercise:

Reflect on the following questions:

**Inside me**

How do you feel about what you have achieved with your Strong Girls course?

How do you see the girls have changed? Which experiences and parts of the Strong Girls experience do you believe have made the biggest contribution to that? How can you best encourage them to hold on to and use the new skills and awarenesses that they have gained?

**Outside me**

What looks different to how you expected?

How can you use some of this experience from running this course in school more generally or in wider society?

**Inside other**

How do you feel about what you have achieved with your Strong Girls course?

How do you see the girls have changed? Which experiences and parts of the Strong Girls experience do you believe have made the biggest contribution to that? How can you best encourage them to hold on to and use the new skills and awarenesses that they have gained?

**Outside other**

How do you feel about what you have achieved with your Strong Girls course?

How do you see the girls have changed? Which experiences and parts of the Strong Girls experience do you believe have made the biggest contribution to that? How can you best encourage them to hold on to and use the new skills and awarenesses that they have gained?

Note down some of your reflections here.
Evaluation & celebration planning

1. Have a brief catch up with the girls and share based on the different activities they have been doing for the last three weeks:
   a. What have they experienced, and was the activity as they thought?
   b. What did they learn about themselves in this process?
   c. Is there anything still left to try?
2. Talk about the end of the course, and based on your Leader reflection exercise share some personal insights and experiences. Lead a discussion of the girls’ experience of their course using the Group discussion open questions in the supporting material. Record this conversation so you can listen closely rather than take notes, and refer back to it later.
3. Have the girls complete the individual evaluation questionnaire. There is a template in the supporting material to guide you.
4. The next lesson will be the final time you all meet as a group. Have the girls decide together what they would like to do to celebrate finishing their course to a close. This can be done as a part of the second to last or final lesson, depending on what fits best. Suggestions for this would include:
   a. Have each girl in the “hot seat” and have some or all of the other girls share their impact, influence, a special moment they had together, one word they would use to describe them, or some other form of appreciation for an allotted short amount of time, for example 2-3 minutes. You’ll need to give some framing and modeling on this so it doesn’t end up devolving to “I think you’re cool,” or “I like your hair.” Help them make this meaningful without too much pressure.
   b. Have the girls write a short thank you card to each of their teammates, sharing what they appreciated or what impact the other person had on them, and then collect and distribute them.
   c. Have the girls write a letter to their future selves with reminders about this experience. What do they want to tell their future self? What do they most want to remember or hold onto from this experience? What’s the biggest thing they learned about themselves? Give them an envelope and have them address it to themselves then send it to them in a month, 6 months, a year from now.
5. We recommend doing some kind of special ritual to bring your Strong Girls course to a close. This can be done as a part of the second to last or final lesson, depending on what fits best. Suggestions for this would include:
   a. A final sports excursion or “final match”
   b. Printing out awards or giving superlatives
   c. Get a company to donate something for them to recognise their achievement
   d. Invite the local paper or a local sporting celebrity to attend or support your event
   e. A final sports excursion or “final match”
   f. Printing out awards or giving superlatives
   g. Get a company to donate something for them to recognise their achievement
   h. Invite the local paper or a local sporting celebrity to attend or support your event
Adapting the program

One of the Strong Girls Program’s biggest advantages is its flexibility and adaptability. It can be used in schools, after-school programs, weekly sports club training sessions, or any formal or informal learning environment that aims to support girls. While designed for the school system, the Strong Girls Program has a modular structure, so the course can easily be scaled up or down according to the needs and realities of the learning environment.

Your use of the material can be as simple as choosing and testing a few lessons from one or more of the Objectives, to add a new dimension to a school sports program that you may already have organised. Or you can use the full Strong Girls Program and totally re-structure how sport is offered to girls at your school or sports club. You can also use the lesson plans to support your daughter or a girl in your circle of care and influence. You’ll find guidance here on a variety of different options for meeting different needs to fit your circumstances.

You will also find a section here about securing support and help from others in setting up and running your course successfully. This can include financial resources, sports clothing and equipment or other people to contribute and enhance your efforts.

Adapting Strong Girls for a sports team or club

The Strong Girls Program can help you to better support the girls you are coaching and bring new girls to your sports team or club. If you wish to set up Strong Girls in your sports club, or start a course with a team of girls you are coaching, start by reading the first three chapters in the handbook. Before you start Chapter 3, it helps to get really clear on what your training schedule looks like. How often do you interact with the girls? Can you have a lesson with them on this material once a week, or just once a month? There is no need to “sacrifice” regular training sessions; this is about integrating new perspectives into what you are already doing, and expanding on how you coach and support the girls.

Also reflect on what financial and human resources you have to work with, including reflecting on your own strengths and weaknesses in relation to the Strong Girls Objectives. Being clear on this before you start to plan will give you a bit more focus. With these considerations in mind you can then select specific Objectives or lessons that feel like a good fit.

Many sports clubs struggle to recruit girls. Using the Strong Girls Program to initiate a girls course is a great way to attract more girls and will also appeal to many parents. The focus on supporting personal development and teaching life skills adds great value to learning a new sport, as well as providing a more novel entry point. Many sports clubs recognise the importance of encouraging young athletes not to specialise too soon, and Strong Girls helps support that kind of diversification. Team up with other clubs or planning some excursions to try new activities is of great value.
A Strong Girls camp

Strong Girls offers a great resource for planning a girls sport and leadership focused camp! Many towns are keen to host summer sports camps to boost activity levels for children and teenagers. Based on the number of weeks you have available, you can pick out a few Objectives to focus on and include multiple lessons a day as a more intensive Strong Girls course.

We recommend that leaders partner up with local sports clubs and invite their women members and coaches to participate, to offer diversity in activities and in role models.

Strong Girls is a great framework for an outdoor adventure camp. Time in the outdoors camping, hiking and being with nature gives a great context for the Program material. Some schools in the original Strong Girls Project started their courses off with their own mini-camp, covering the introductory sessions of the Program in the space of one to two days and then integrating the Program material with activities like hiking, kayaking, rock climbing, team building games, cooking outdoors and general outdoor education. This can be a great investment in building trust between the girls in the group, and in developing a team feeling.

Strong Girls +

Many people recognise the need to fundamentally change how sport is taught and offered to girls. The Strong Girls Project serves as a valuable foundation for this, but you do not need to stop there: follow your highest ambitions!

For schools or clubs with more resources available in terms of their planning time and financial support, there are two areas that can be really valuable additions to the Program: drawing on diverse women as role models, and connecting the girls with other girls around the world.

Women as coaches and role models

The first of these is to try and involve women from outside the school in the girl’s experience. Women who join your course as role models and coaches can play a key role in supporting the achievement of the Program Objectives. Giving the girls the experience of being supported by a group of competent and inspiring women, all with different experiences to share, is invaluable at this age. If you are able to find women who can come into school, or coach at local sports facilities, it is a great opportunity to invite them to share their own personal experiences and wisdom with the girls. Adding role models is a powerful way to solidify the messages of the Program.

While initially this can seem like a challenge, with good planning and knowing where to look, it is very easy to find women locally who are very enthusiastic about coaching and supporting girls. Many women with an interest in sport have their own stories of struggle or exclusion in their early experiences, and jump at the chance to help girls experience something different. This was a core part of the original Strong Girls project in Umeå, where many women volunteered to support and coach sports as diverse as weightlifting, cross country skiing, MMA, dance, spinning, ice hockey and orienteering.

Your goal is to find women with a relatively high level of competence in their sport—but by no means do they need to be professionals or women involved in competitive sports. Their passion for physical activity and their own life experiences are the most valuable attributes they can bring to the Program. Most importantly, these women should be aware of the challenges girls face in today’s society, and should have a strong motivation to help empower girls through sport with a wider perspective than just their physical skill development. You may of course need to provide some guidance and support for those who agree to help you, perhaps organising an informal meeting where all the women supporting the girls can meet each other, talk about their own experiences, and explore their questions together ahead of coaching the girls.

You, other staff members in your school or coaches in your club may already have some contacts that you can reach out to and find such women.

Girls supporting girls

This option can create an extremely powerful course, and involves helping others. This theme is already touched upon in Objective 9, but there is great potential for expanding this to incorporate a much wider social educational experience or social activism opportunity.

For example, each girl, a smaller groups of girls, or the whole group may decide on a specific project or societal contribution they want to follow or support over a period of months rather than weeks. This might be raising money to support a particular cause, or using their voices to raise awareness in their school or community. This needs to be something they specifically choose and are passionate about. The process of discovering the internal drive and motivation themselves to create the change that they think is important is critical to using this as an opportunity to expand the Program.

One example of a project is to support girls of a similar age in other countries from less privileged backgrounds. The Strong Girls Project is well connected to several charities working internationally to support girls’ empowerment through sport, and can facilitate these connections if needed.

A really fun and valuable exercise for the girls is to raise money through a planned sports activity. A good example could be sponsorship from their friends and family members for doing an ice bath or a 24 hour bike ride with the girls working as a team on a stationary bike. This can be expanded and supported by a social media campaign about what they are doing, requesting that others show their support by contributing to their chosen cause through donations.

The money raised can be used to support girls of the same age in other countries who are much more limited in their opportunities, including in sports.

The Strong Girls Project can arrange for a physical gift to be given to a group of girls in another country such as sports equipment or other things highly valued by girls. Personal letters or other small gifts can also be sent. There are other imaginative ways that connections can be made, giving the girls in both locations the chance to learn from each other’s experiences and ideas around sport, their bodies, their relationships and global society.

This gives girls an opportunity to broaden their horizons, and develop empathy and awareness of the situation in other areas of the world. This quality is very important to nurture with girls who come from relatively privileged societies and safe communities. This broader world awareness is an invaluable part of any girl’s developmental process.

Using the program with your daughter

If you are the parent or guardian of a teenage girl, you can use our ideas and lesson plans as a guide to expand her engagement around sports and physical activity. For example, you can use the Strong Girls Program to support her in her existing school sports, or by trying new sports together. You can reflect on those experiences using the questions and perspectives directly from the lesson plans.

You can talk to teachers, coaches, as well as other parents about the importance of new approaches to sport which are more well suited to girls and their needs. Most girls are still taught by men, and even the best of male coaches have many knowledge gaps around how to support girls of this age.

Lend your book out and see what others might gain from reading the introductory chapters on the challenges facing girls, and how sport can be used more effectively to support them. Your city or municipality-run Strong Girls camp in the summer holidays, or an after school program hosted by a community center are great additions to local community programming.

Getting help and support for your course

Many organisations and individuals are very keen to support better sports opportunities for girls in particular, or girls empowerment more generally, and time invested in building these contacts really pays off. Some options to explore include:

- Local yoga studios, public swimming pools, and gyms, including CrossFit gyms: they generally have plenty of women participating that you can reach out to. Often sports facilities have staff employed during the working day and have quiet mid-day hours that give some flexibility, either for their staff to help you or to use their venue and equipment.

- A city or municipality-run Strong Girls camp in the summer holidays.
In looking for role models, find the women first and then negotiate with their employers to get a few hours of their time donated. Women still typically have a larger burden at home, so making it possible for them to coach during work time with the support of their employer makes a huge difference, and respects their contribution to your course.

Approach younger women who are studying sports science or sports medicine, and who may be motivated to gain leadership and coaching experience. Building a connection with any sport-focused course coordinators at the University or College in your town is helpful for this.

Approach local companies in your town for sponsorship. This helps to cover costs of entry to sports facilities, transport costs for excursions, or hiring sports halls. Clothing companies may also sponsor printed Strong Girls T-shirts. A sports store or brand might cover other clothing and equipment. We have found that for many girls not having appropriate and "peer-accepted" sports clothing and shoes can be a barrier to participation. If you are working with specific socioeconomic groups, you may find this a challenge. Sports bras and good training shoes are particularly important!

Try and set up an exchange with another local school where you get the chance to "borrow" one of their women sports teachers. You can offer to get "loaned" out yourself at a future date so the girls at both schools get the chance to meet different women as an exchange arrangement.

Contact local professional sports clubs who have an interest in recruiting more girls to their organisation. Often they struggle to know how to reach out to young girls, and may be open to a collaboration. Other clubs might also be able to send along one of their professional athletes to meet and talk with the girls. Be bold in your requests to others; you have nothing to lose! And this is a great chance to practice yourself what you want to teach the girls. People are pleased to help where they can—often someone well connected can be enlisted to advocate on multiple fronts, with connections to sports leaders, sponsors, sporting equipment suppliers, venues, and more.

Contact your regional or county sport federation and tell them what you are doing. These are organisations that are specifically formed to provide support for sport, and often have dedicated staff for outreach and program development.

Look into what governmental agencies support sports, at all levels of government. What are their mandates? What intergovernmental agencies and organisations do they work through and partner with? Follow up on any programs or organisational support that may be available and push for their support.

Draw on people's willingness to do good and help out. You can use social media to promote your course and use of the Strong Girls Program, and talk about what you are doing, why, and what this means for the girls.

Theoretical background to Strong Girls

In designing the Strong Girls Program, there were two goals: first, to give girls a totally different experience of school sports than what is the norm; and second, to use the excellent potential available in sport to support girls' personal development and wellbeing. These combined goals allow girls to be better equipped to deal with life in today's world, particularly as it relates to gender equality and damaging norms and ideals in society and in sport.

By becoming more at home in their own bodies, more in touch with their inner selves, and more connected in their relationships, they are empowered to navigate society with their own agency, and be part of needed changes. To create a program that would offer these opportunities, we reviewed leading theories of human development and psychological models of change. From these a theoretical ground for the structure and Objectives of the Program was created. This review was guided by the following questions:

- How do we learn and develop through life and what can be done to support that development in teenage girls?
- What skills and awarenesses are most supportive to a happy and healthy life as a teenage girl and young woman?
- What is unique about sport and physical activity in how it supports a girl's development and empowerment?

Integral Theory, and particularly Ken Wilber's work, offered an excellent tool to approach these questions. Also referred to as the integral approach, this school of thought started in the 1970s with the publication of his book, "The Spectrum of Consciousness", which attempted to synthesize eastern religious traditions with western structural stage theory and models of psychological development. Integral Theory is widely considered to offer the first truly comprehensive map of human experience and development - the AQAL Integral Framework. AQAL stands for "All Quadrants All Levels", and particularly Ken Wilber's work. In addition to all lines, states, and types) and is a framework that describes all human knowledge and experience through different interlocking perspectives. While this may sound abstract, the framework simply provides a thorough way of understanding more of what is happening in any given moment as a human being engages others and the world around them.
Strong Girls draws specifically on two elements of the Integral Theory framework. These were used as models or "lenses" to frame an understanding of how leaders and girls learn and develop throughout life and how a sport-based personal development program could support that process.

The two lenses used in the framework we developed are the Four Quadrants Lens and Lines of Development Lens.

Four quadrants
According to Integral Theory, there are at least four primary dimensions or perspectives through which a person can experience the world: subjective, intersubjective, objective, and interobjective. These four perspectives, represented graphically in figure 9, are the upper-left, lower-left, upper-right, and lower-right quadrants.

The subjective quadrant on the upper left describes our individual, interior experiences: our thoughts, emotions, memories, beliefs, states of mind, perceptions, and immediate sensations: in other words, our "I" space.

The objective quadrant on the upper right describes the individual, exterior things: our material body, including the brain, and anything that you can see, touch, or observe scientifically in time and space: in other words, our "it" space.

The intersubjective quadrant on the lower left describes our collective, interior experiences: our shared values, meanings, language, relationships, and cultural background: in other words, our "we" space.

The interobjective quadrant on the lower right describes the collective exteriors: systems, networks, technology, government, and the natural environment: in other words, our "its" space.

The core of the Strong Girls philosophy is to capitalise on the vast potential that sport and outdoor adventure offers to support a journey of empowerment for girls, on the inside and the outside, looking at not just themselves, but also others and society. Therefore, translating these quadrants in order to effectively support girls’ development using sport as a tool, we looked at these different elements:

- The psychology of the mind, emotional intelligence, and awareness: the upper left
- The physical body, movement and behaviours: the upper right
- Their cultural conditioning, with the habits, ideals, norms, and values of their culture and important relationships: the lower left
- The physical world that culture has produced in society, including sports clubs, schools, and advertising: the lower right.

This view was used in two ways in the Program. Firstly, we used it to inform our overall view of a sports-based personal development program for girls, namely what should be included to maximise the developmental opportunities that engaging sports offers. In this way the quadrants lens was used to structure the overall scope and approach of the Program, integrating and structuring the most important connections between sport, personal development, and society, illustrated in figure 10.

Of course there is a lot more than just physical strength and skill or keeping the body healthy involved in sport. By using the quadrants, we were able to expand our own awareness of what sports are really engaging, which helped us to develop a program that helps girls build that awareness too.

Using these four perspectives opens their eyes to different ways of looking at themselves and their world. Our modern western society has quite a pathological focus on the exterior or “objective” perspective, and the interior, or “subjective” perspective is much neglected—hence many young people lack the skills needed to navigate their emotional lives and relationships. Our society tends to deny or marginalize subjective, individual experience, feelings, and values. What we know to be true is that understanding how to navigate these aspects of our lives is incredibly important for many things: leadership, wellbeing, relationships, personal success, and happiness, to name a few.

Lines of development
The second Integral lens we used is the concept of different lines of development. A line is otherwise commonly referred to as an intelligence.
So multiple lines of development refer to our multiple intelligences. These are things like our intellect, emotions, morals, spirituality, our musical ability, interpersonal skills, and kinesthetic ability. For example, one can be very highly developed cognitively, or intellectually smart, without being particularly developed morally or emotionally.

This understanding of development is supported by several other researchers in this area. Howard Gardner, in his theory of multiple intelligences, suggests that we all have the capacity to advance along different lines of intelligence. Some of us may develop into classical pianists, while others develop into exceptional athletes, or are quick to learn new languages, or are proficient at solving math problems. Daniel Goleman’s renowned books on emotional intelligence show this as another aspect of ourselves that can be learned and developed, similar to any other recognised skill or capacity.

Each of these “lines”, or forms of intelligence, appears to have a common path of development that all humans move through as they grow. However, they do so at different paces, and some don’t advance as much as others. For example, humans have been shown to grow morally through the same stages. Children are first concerned with only themselves, and are egocentric, but later expand their care and concern to their larger group to include their friends and family, an ethnocentric focus and identity. If they are able to transcend this level, they begin to care about all humans, and become world citizens. This is the level you could say we are trying to reach now, to create a sustainable and peaceful global society. It is also possible to develop beyond this level.

The Strong Girls Program focuses on the development of the following lines:
- **Cognitive:** “What am I aware of?”
- **Interpersonal:** “How should we interact to ensure healthy relationships?”
- **Self-identity:** “Who am I?”
- **Moral:** “What should I do?”
- **Values:** “What is important to me?”
- **Needs:** “What do I need?”
- **Emotional:** “What do I feel?”
- **Somatic:** “How do I experience and use my body as a tool?”

These lines, together with the quadrants, were used to inform the 10 Objectives of the Strong Girls Program. Insights from both quadrants and lines were also integrated. For example we use the Four Quadrant perspective within each Objective, translating this into a practical structure in order to support both your leadership development, and to support the girls in understanding themselves and the world more consciously and fully.

In addition to Integral Theory, Strong Girls was also inspired by ideas from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, or ACT, which is an action-oriented approach to psychotherapy. The focus with ACT is to learn to stop avoiding, denying, and fighting with more difficult emotions, and instead learn a new way of relating to them. This new way is focused on accepting that nothing is wrong, and that these feelings are actually appropriate responses to certain situations. The presence of these feelings does not need to prevent the person from moving forward in their lives or from taking certain actions. ACT focuses on 5 areas:
- Accept your difficult feelings and be present with them
- Choose a valued direction
- Take action

Such an approach is very appropriate for encouraging teenage girls to stretch their comfort zone within new sport and group experiences, and to learn how to navigate difficult emotions when they experience them. For example, when faced with a scary or challenging activity such as ice swimming, the girls can be encouraged to acknowledge emotions of fear about the temperature of the water and how their body will react. Accepting these emotions, rather than suppressing or judging them gives them the opportunity to choose with more awareness how they want to respond. For example, do they want to get into the water, or not? This way, the girl chooses consciously what she wants, rather than being steered or limited by her emotional response. With the support of their coach, girls can then follow through in the direction they choose.

For many girls, doubt, fear of failure or judgement from others are real obstacles. Obsessing, worrying and playing things over and over in the mind keeps them stuck, and drains energy. It undermines their own trust and confidence in themselves, and these patterns easily form habits that last a lifetime. With the chance to repeat this process in the face of new and different challenges, the girls quickly gain some distance between their feelings and how they may choose to respond.

Asking a girl why she is scared of the cold water is not helpful. What is helpful is accepting the reality of how she feels, and the situation in front of her, and working with her knowledge of what she wants in that situation to support her in moving ahead and executing that choice.

At the same time this helps girls to say no to situations or actions that they do not wish to take. By accepting their emotions, choosing a direction, and taking action, the girls are encouraged to respect and honour their own preferences and choices independently of the challenging emotions that can surround any activity.

If you would like to explore your reading into some of the research and work we have used in developing the Strong Girls Program we suggest the following books and search terms:

You’ll find a treasure trove of information online by searching for Integral Theory, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and emotional intelligence. There may be other terms covered here that you are curious about, such as “the four quadrants” or “lines of development” that are well documented and will add to your depth of knowledge, if you are interested.

Why is this program only for girls?

The question “Why a program only for girls?” frequently comes up when running courses, sports or otherwise, that are exclusively for girls. You may have these questions yourself, or you may face such questions from others when implementing your own Strong Girls course.

Some people are proponents of mixed groups in sports in general. When it comes to development focused sports-based interventions, we do not support this position. Boys and girls are perhaps not so different—though there are of course biological and physical differences—but as individuals with their own unique potential, dreams for the future, and challenges to overcome, all humans are ultimately all the same, young or old, female or male.

However, in our current society, girls and boys have different needs at this age if they are to develop to become empowered, self-referenced individuals. Society has socialised girls and boys with very different expectations and opportunities. While Strong Girls indirectly aims to contribute towards shifting that process of socialisation, unfortunately our society at present it is still one that is not supportive of girls’ development and wellbeing. Neither is our current sports culture. The Strong Girls Program is designed to meet the current reality, rather than a future ideal. This program is an important step toward that ideal.

While many of the topics in the Strong Girls Program are just as relevant for boys, the Program is designed as a girls only program for several key reasons:
1. Girls themselves say they value this girl-only space to test and explore new sports and activities.
2. Girls and boys are socialised very differently, growing up with very different expectations and opportunities. Sport is still strongly influenced by unhealthy cultural norms. For these reasons mixed programs will inevitably prioritise the needs and comforts of boys over girls until wider cultural norms and socialisation processes change. Many of these norms are connected to unconscious bias and therefore can be hard for proponents of mixed programs to recognise.
3. Girls can be under a lot of pressure in our society. Competition is encouraged between girls based on who is the prettiest and the most popular with boys. An all-girls space lets girls explore who they are outside of this dynamic, and focus on themselves and their girl relationships.

4. Many spaces, including sports facilities and sporting areas are comfortable and familiar for boys, but overlook some of the needs of girls. Because issues like privilege and lack of access to resources are often not recognised or are misunderstood in mixed classes, a girls-only class allows these to be dealt with more adequately.

5. Boys often dominate in sports lessons in particular, a clear pattern seen by many sports teachers involved in the Strong Girls Project. In a girls-only group, girls get the chance to play sport with others who have similar patterns of behaving and without being intimidated, or by having boys dominate physically or verbally.

6. Girls and boys have different needs at different phases of their lives. Girls need a safe space to talk about and work through issues that they’re dealing with, like fears they may have, self-esteem, and body image topics. Boys and girls also experience very different hormonal and developmental changes, and may be interested in different things at different stages of development as a result. Girls-only programs allow space to accommodate for that.

While in the future we hope that mixed classes will be appropriate for a program with goals such as this one, currently they are not a wise choice in most circumstances.

Personal development focused sports programming for boys is also very important. If you are interested in running a similar program for boys, advice and further references to support that are offered below.

Adapting the Program for boys

Sport opportunities which focus on personal development are also valuable for boys. It is vital to create spaces where boys can be supported in developing their emotional intelligence, and can have discussions to learn about themselves and the society of which they are a part. In fact, such programs are as important, if not perhaps more important in some respects for boys in this time. Boys need a lot of support to be in the world in a different way, particularly in how common attitudes towards girls are modeled for them in school and in sport.

In the context of supporting the healthy development of boys, sport can be a powerful tool for challenging destructive masculinity norms prevalent in society today, and for building greater self-awareness and emotional intelligence. Unfortunately, programming of this kind is very rarely offered, and is vastly underused at present.

Sport is a traditional connection point for men and boys, and a space where masculine norms are formed and enforced. Research makes strong links between sports, violence, sexual assault myths and the perpetration of violence. Social learning theory shows that children mimic what they see adults do. Role models often start out as parents or other family members, but soon become peers, and anyone viewed as successful, including media and celebrity types. For many boys, sport presents some of their biggest and most influential role models.

Some male athletes are catching on to this potential for positive influence but there is much more to be done to support boys in this way, and consequently to create a safer space for both girls and boys. In our research, we did not find any similar programs for boys, or any organisations running programs with the same developmental focus as Strong Girls. However there are more and more individuals and groups working specifically in sport to challenge damaging masculine norms, which can offer a starting point.

Below are some tips for working with boys, developed in partnership with Locker Room Talk.

Locker Room Talk is a non-profit organisation in Sweden that works preventatively with gender equality and supports healthy identities in teenage boys towards girls and each other. You can read more on their important work here: www.lockerroomtalk.se

Eight tips for leaders working with boys:

1. Start with yourself! Have a critical reflection on the example that you are setting. Reflect specifically on how you speak, and on what norms or values you may be reinforcing with the boys you support. How do you interact with them and others around them? Read up on unconscious gender bias. How does that shift your view of yourself and how you interact as a teacher, coach, mentor or role model?

2. Be prepared to say what is uncomfortable. Question the boys behavior when needed, and ask questions about their motivations, how they think, and why they do what they do. Be careful not to use shaming language, but support them in seeing more clearly. The boys need you to point things out and start these conversations so that they have the opportunity to talk, reflect, and learn in a safe and respectful environment.

3. Have a long-term focus. This work is about little and often. Look for the opportunities in all training sessions or your time together, and keep reinforcing your messages. Give the boys the opportunity to practice what they are learning, including new ways of talking and being together. These new skills and awarenesses can only be developed with practice.

4. Ask for help from others. People who have already developed tools or who have experience of working to support boys in other contexts outside of sport are invaluable collaborators. Psychological health and emotional well being are particularly important topics for boys. Read and educate yourself on the issues and solutions.

5. Teach the boys about emotions and feelings, including how to name and locate feelings in the body. Boys feel just as much as girls, but perhaps have less language to express what they feel. Most of the boys we work with receive less guidance and support in interpreting their feelings than girls.

6. Coach the boys on healthy emotional processing. Girls and women tend to be more verbal. Boys and men are more vocal and physical, either processing emotions in a burst of energy or projecting them as something else, or physically releasing it by shouting or hitting something. This difference isn’t bad, but it is important that they have access to other ways of processing, and learn what is appropriate in different situations. Support them in developing the ability to become more self-aware and in control of their emotions, as well as testing new alternatives for processing their emotions.

7. Talk to the boys about how to cultivate more meaningful relationships with each other.

8. Talk about, and ask for help and support from men who act as healthy role models. Talk about how men show up in society, and what the boys believe needs to change.

There are other approaches to include boys in your implementation of Strong Girls without necessarily including boys physically in your course and jeopardising the safe space for girls. You could include some mixed events organised by the girls like games, a bonfire, or a barbecue, where boys could choose to join in. This is also a good community outreach opportunity to encourage other girls to join the group or course.

If you are using the Strong Girls Program in school as part of sports in the core curriculum, then half of the sport lessons could be covered with mixed groups and activities. It is possible to have two parallel programs running with opportunities to come together and have the boys and girls talk over certain topics together, though this would need further development and some expert input.

Internationally, if you are looking for a program for boys, you can check with the organisations and resources listed below. The Strong Girls Project website offers a regularly updated list of materials that are useful for working with both girls and boys around emotional intelligence, communication, relationships and leadership skills through sport and physical activity.

- The Hopeful Institute www.thehopefulinstitute.com
- Steve Biddulph www.stevebiddulph.com


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Master list

Strong Girls Learning outcomes

Introduction: Self-awareness

1. Girls have a better understanding of what they will be doing in the course and why.
2. Girls understand the expectations of their participation.
3. Girls feel included and invested in this experience.
4. Girls feel a sense of safety in the group and with you as their leader.
5. Girls understand what it means to reflect, and develop practices for reflection.
6. Girls have a simple understanding of the "four perspectives": inside, outside, me, other.
7. Girls have more understanding of what they are feeling, how it affects what they do, and how others are feeling.

Objective 1: Goals

1. Girls develop a better sense for what they desire in their life.
2. Girls are less influenced by goals imposed by society or others.
3. Girls understand the purpose and value of defining and stating goals.
4. Girls know better how to focus their efforts towards their goals.
5. Girls appreciate that goals can be flexible and change over time.
6. Girls see failures as valuable learning experiences that fuel success.
7. Girls are kinder to themselves around setbacks or failures.
8. Girls are better able to ask for support to achieve success with their goals.

Objective 2: Negative thinking

1. Girls can better recognise the negative voice in their head and how it affects their beliefs about themselves and their actions.
2. Girls develop a better relationship with this negative voice, recognising it as only one voice and not the whole of them.
3. Girls can better choose to develop and use a positive and encouraging voice.
4. Girls realise that by using this positive voice it sets them up to have more confidence, to feel better and to have more successful outcomes.
5. Girls are better able to observe negative self-talk, and to bring in positive thoughts to their inner and outer course goals.

Objective 3: Expression

1. Girls can better identify their own ideas and opinions.
2. Girls become more comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions with others.
3. Girls become aware of the importance of speaking up and expressing themselves.
4. Girls can more clearly identify different communication styles: passive, aggressive and assertive, and understand the benefits of communicating assertively.
5. Girls develop one of their reframing examples into a

Objective 4: Strengths

1. Girls are more able to talk about their own strengths with confidence.
2. Girls are more able to feel satisfied with themselves.
3. Girls further develop their assertiveness, and are more able to take up space.
4. Girls are able to set and enforce boundaries.
5. Girls learn to put their own needs before the needs of others in situations that they find uncomfortable.
6. Girls have an embodied experience of their boundaries with specific body postures.
7. Girls learn the power of their bodies to communicate their boundaries.
8. Girls develop their respect for the feelings, needs and boundaries of others.
9. Girls reflect on what it means to be Strong!

Objective 5: Compassion

1. Girls develop a better sense for the elements of good relationships with others.
2. Girls experience greater trust for each other, and their team.
3. Girls have a greater understanding of the importance of compassion.
4. Girls understand, can describe, and are less likely to take part in "mean girl" behaviours.
5. Girls appreciate the need to take care of their own emotions in order to experience good relationships.
6. Girls are more able to support their peers with challenges or failures.
7. Girls are better able to ask for the support they need when dealing with challenges.
8. Girls learn how to give and receive feedback with their peers.

Objective 6: Body signals

9. Girls can better identify feelings and emotions in their body.
10. Girls learn how their mind interacts with and tells a story around feelings and their meanings.
11. Girls develop a better relationship with "negative" or difficult feelings.
12. Girls can better choose how to act when faced with difficult feelings.
13. Girls better realise that all emotions are normal and experienced by everyone, thus developing more compassion for themselves and others.
14. Girls better understand how feelings are fleeting and changing all the time.
15. Girls are better able to know and share their true feelings.

Objective 7: Problem solving

1. Girls develop a better sense for the elements of good relationships with others.
2. Girls become more aware of the importance of self-acceptance and self-reflection in overcoming the challenges life presents.
3. Girls learn a simple formula for problem solving and practice applying it in the context of sports.
4. Girls can better identify their own needs in relationships.
5. Girls become aware of the importance of making requests and asking for what they want in their relationships.
6. Girls become more comfortable sharing their needs with trusted others.
7. Girls gain experience with the use of non-violent communication methods through role-play.

Objective 8: Balance
1. Girls explore and share what activities, places and people bring them the most fun and happiness in life.
2. Girls become more aware of the importance of having fun.
3. Girls receive the message that they are valuable for who they are, irrespective of their academic or sporting abilities, or their appearance.
4. Girls become more aware of society’s norms and values around achievement.
6. Girls can more clearly identify when they are doing an activity to achieve something or for their own enjoyment.
7. Girls develop a clearer understanding of their own value as a unique person.
8. Girls learn the meaning of self care, and the importance of rest and relaxation.

Objective 9: Society
1. Girls become more aware of what norms and ideals are.
2. Girls can more clearly identify norms and ideals in society in general, and in sport in particular.
3. Girls become more aware of how their lives are influenced by norms and ideals.
4. Girls discover their ability to choose which norms and ideals they want to conform to.
5. Girls become more aware of their own power to influence society around them for their own benefit, and for the benefit of others.
6. Girls experience the feeling of personal power and agency.
7. Girls take practical steps towards a change in society or in their school in a way that has personal meaning to them.
8. Girls collaborate around a social activism project.

Objective 10: Physical skills
1. Girls connect with their desires around testing new sports and physical activities.
2. Girls are empowered to explore new opportunities including asking to be included in environments that might not typically be open to girls.
3. Girls try new things, and decide what they like and don’t like without self-imposed barriers to participation.
4. Girls feel less afraid to try and fail, or to change their mind confidently.
5. Girls understand the connection between creating a foundation of interest and curiosity and sustaining motivation in the long term.
6. Girls feel more inspired to continue their participation in sports and physical activity, including trying new sports in the future.

Master list
Suggested sports & activities

Objective 1
• Football
• Basketball
• Floorball
• Javelin
• Long jump
• Shooting
• Archery
• Weightlifting
• Golf driving range
• Team building games
• Trampolining
• Slack-lining
• Arm wrestling

Objective 2
• Ice bathing
• Aerial assault course with slides or drops
• Diving board at a swimming pool
• Rock climbing
• Weightlifting
• Powerlifting
• Board breaking in martial arts
• Tyre flipping
• Pull ups
• Power and "No!" poses

Objective 3
• Dance (hip hop, jazz, modern)
• Yoga (hatha/jin, vinyasa, acroyoga)
• Watch a film or documentary

Objective 4
• Weightlifting
• Powerlifting
• Wrestling
• Cricket
• Basketball
• Netball
• Handstands acroyoga style
• Tyre flipping
• Pull ups
• Power and "No!" poses

Objective 5
• Rock climbing
• Bouldering

Objective 6
• Ice swimming
• Jumping off a diving board
• Horse riding
• A zipline through the forest
• Handstands
• Jumping up onto a box
• Climbing up onto something

Objective 7
• Outdoor activities
• Hiking trip
• Camping

Objective 8
• Trampolining
• Playing games at the swimming pool
• Going to an animal farm
• Hosting a picnic
• Having a campfire and grilling sausages
• Visiting a laser dome
• Paintballing
Objective 9

- Live sport event or match
- Social activism, doing something in the community

Objective 10

- Dream a dream!

Other sport ideas:

- Badminton
- Abseiling
- Baseball
- Squash
- Tennis
- Paddle
- Curling
- Outdoor swimming
- Tree climbing
- Darts
- High jump
- Discuss
- Shot Put
- Sprinting
- Hurdles
- Skateboarding
- Cycling
- Roller derby
- Kayaking
- Canoeing
- Skiing
- MMA
- Spinning
- Ice hockey
- Orienteering
- Wrestling
- SUP
- Tug of war
- Frisbee
- Fencing
- Surfing
- Fly fishing
- Kite flying
- Bowling
- Beach volleyball
- Capoeira
- Go Karting
- Rugby or touch Rugby
Introduction

List of feelings

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Objective 1

List of inner goals

I want to feel... during strong girls

Motivated
Interested
Proud of myself
Inspired
Healthy
Satisfied with my achievements
More confident doing new things
Cheerful
Surprised
Enthusiastic
Eager
Grateful for my friends
Optimistic
Happy
Full of energy
Brave
Excited
Supported
Loved and cared for
Part of a team
Strong
Energetic

These suggestions are just for inspiration to get you started, you can also make up your own inner goal!
Objective 1
List of outer goals

I want to... during Strong Girls.

Be a great team member
Learn how to coach others
Get better at understanding my feelings
Learn how to resolve conflicts with my friends
Test as many new activities as I can
Start playing a new sport regularly
Make new friends
Discover a sport that I really love!
Learn to find sport fun and not judge myself
Speak up and share my ideas and opinions
Get physically stronger
Improve a physical skill e.g. running, throwing, jumping
Learn how to concentrate more
Learn how to deal with feeling tired or low in energy
Improve my overall fitness
Learn how to tackle things that scare me
Discover more about myself
Increase my understanding of relationships
Get better at communicating my feelings
Understand more about society
Make changes in sport at my school
Make changes in sport in my town

These suggestions are just for inspiration to get you started, you can also make up your own outer goal!

Objective 3
My values

What is most important to me in my life is...

- Being loved and liked by others
- Caring for my pet/s
- Learning new things
- Being trusted and respected by others
- Being a great friend
- Developing myself
- Doing well at school
- Looking good
- Being an honest person
- Being a kind person
- Doing something meaningful with my life
- Having lots of money
- Having lots of friends
- Living a healthy life
- Taking care of the environment
- Spending time in nature
- Travelling the world
- Getting a job that I really enjoy
- Developing my self confidence
- Feeling good who I am
- Taking care of my friends and family
- Spending time with my family

These suggestions are just for inspiration to get you started, you can also use your own ideas!
Objective 3
What is most important to me

Draw any kind of sporting outline like this runner and make copies to hand out to the girls. They can divide up their girl and colour different proportions according to the relative importance of their 5 identified values. Have them include a key so that they know which value is which.

Objective 4
My strengths

My top INNER strength (an emotional skill) is....
- I am great at calming myself down
- I am good at knowing what I like and don’t like
- I am great at talking positively to myself
- I am good at dealing with obstacles
- I am really good at sharing how I feel with my friends
- I am good at telling the difference between feelings, like knowing if I am sad or angry
- I am good at saying no when I need to
- I am good at asking for help
- I enjoy challenges
- I am good at appreciating differences in others
- I am confident sharing my ideas and opinions

My top OUTER strength (a physical skill) is....
- I am great at running
- I am great at ball sports
- I have good balance
- I am great at jumping
- I have good endurance, I can keep going for a long time
- I am good at moving slowly
- I am good at moving fast
- I have good coordination
- I am good at riding a horse
- I am good at swimming
- I am flexible
- I am strong
- I am good at following a rhythm in music
- I am good at dancing

My top OTHER strength (a relationship or social skill) is....
- I am good at helping people
- I am a great listener
- I know when people are sad
- I am good at making people laugh
- I am good at making everyone feel welcome
- I am good at questioning things in my school or town when I think something could be done better
- I am good at communicating my ideas
- I am good at motivating my friends to be more active in society

These suggestions are just for inspiration to get you started, you can also use your own ideas!
Objective 4
Power poses

This exercise is based on physical exercises in feeling confidence and power in the body by practicing and experimenting with two physical poses—the confidence pose, and the "No!" pose. This is kind of like working with embodied boundaries! Doing these explorations with poses also shows some of our patterns as individuals. How do each of us do the pose? What does it say about how we approach other things or situations in life?

1. Power poses

Body language governs how we think and feel about ourselves. So, how people hold their bodies has an impact on our minds and emotional states. In other words, by commanding a powerful stance, someone can make themselves actually feel more powerful. Have the girls try the "The Wonder Woman" power pose: stand with your feet apart, hands on your hips, chin tilted slightly upward. Have them explore how this feels. Most people, as well as feeling confident, will feel quite calm in this posture. This one is great for just before an exam or an important match or competition, or any situation where the girls might want to feel more confident and strong. Have the girls give examples of when they could use this pose. You can also use this pose regularly with the girls from now on in their course to boost their energy and confidence ahead of something they are about to do.

Get them to see if they can demonstrate other power poses—any pose where you take up a lot of space and hold your arms and legs away from your body. For example, sitting with legs spread out, arms stretched out relaxing confidently into a chair.

You can also have them do contrasting postures: sit hunched over in a chair, legs crossed. Physically practising these contrasts will allow them to actually feel the difference!

2. How do you say "No!"

This is the basic posture (a). Demonstrate the basic posture yourself and get all the girls doing this together.

Explore their individual variations, and how they might adjust them to get a stronger No! Help them feel the differences and guide them towards a powerful "No!" You will likely find two variations:

1. Observe if they are they pushing away with their extended arm, leaning forward, rather than standing their ground and saying no? This is more like pushing away something unwanted rather than using your own power to command (b).

2. Do they have their hand closer into their body, and are leaning back and away, avoiding rather than saying "No!" This is more like escaping from something unwanted rather than using your own power to command (c).

Play around with moving the arm and the feet positions, move the body weight back and forth and see if they can feel for themselves which is the most powerful "No!". Then have them say no strongly at the same time as they put up their hand. Have them get louder and louder with their "No!" Have some fun with this!
Objective 7
Communication role-play

This is just one example. Try and come up with others from your leader reflection exercise and from the girls’ examples.

“Violent” communication example

Person #1: You never listen to me when I’m talking to you. You’re ignoring me constantly and always on your phone. You just don’t care about me and what’s going on in my life!

Person #2: Yeah, right! I listen to you all the time!

Person #1: You can’t listen to me and check your phone at the same time! You’re so selfish!

Person #2: I’m selfish?! You don’t even... (discussion goes nowhere and ends in frustration for both people)

Non violent communication example

Person #1: When I see you checking your phone while I’m talking, I feel frustrated because I’m needing to be heard. Would you be willing to put your phone down for 2 minutes and hear my idea?

Person #2: When you ask me to put my phone down and listen to you I feel anxious because I want to reply to an important message. I also feel concerned because I want you to know I care and I am interested in your life.

Would you be willing to wait 2 minutes while I finish this message so I can give you my full attention?

Person #1: Yes, sure. I can wait 2 minutes.

Objective 8
Toot your own horn!

Complete the statements below. Don’t worry too much if you can’t complete them all; just have a go at as many as you can. When you are finished, keep these handy for the next time you might feel down on yourself, and need a reminder of all that you have to appreciate about yourself and your life.

• I like myself because...
• I’m an expert at...
• I feel good about...
• My friends would tell you I have a great...
• My favorite place is...
• I’m loved by...
• My favourite things are...
• People say I am a good...
• My favourite things about myself is...
• I consider myself a good...
• What I enjoy most is...
• The person I admire the most is...
• I have a natural talent for...
• My goals for my future are...
• I know I will reach my goals because I am...
• People compliment me about...
• I feel good when I...
• I’ve been successful at...
• I laugh when I think about...
• The traits I admire myself for are...
• I feel peaceful when...

These suggestions are just for inspiration to get you started, you can also use your own ideas!
Evaluation

Group discussion open questions

These are some questions to get you started. Follow the flow of the conversation and what the girls might want to talk about. Aim to get information that is useful for you in revising your course, as well as supporting further reflection as a group on all that they have learned and experienced together. This will further enhance all of their learning and a sense of achievement. Don’t forget to record the discussion!

1. Which activities do you most remember from all of those you have tried during Strong Girls?
2. What was your favorite sport or activity? Why was that?
3. Which discussions that we have had do you remember most?
4. What has been the best thing about Strong Girls overall? Has it been how you thought it would be?
5. What was difficult about the course?
6. What parts did you really dislike or not enjoy? How should we change those parts for the girls who come after you?
7. Are there any ways that YOU would show up differently if you were to do the course again?
8. How are you different now compared to the start of the course? In your thoughts and emotions? In your body? In your relationships with other people?
9. What advice would you give to the next group of girls who do Strong Girls?

Evaluation

Individual questionnaire (template)

This template is intended as a starting point. You will likely want to select from or adjust these questions, based on your particular group of girls and the structure of your course. The first example illustrates how to use a simple scale for the girls to record their answers.

Think of everything you’ve done during Strong Girls, all you’ve learned and experienced. Answer the statements below and check the option you think best matches how you feel, if you agree or disagree with the statement.

| I have tried activities that I would never have tried without Strong Girls |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Agree | Does not agree at all |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

- I feel more confident about testing new things and activities
- I am more confident to challenge myself even in front of other people
- I have become better at setting goals that I really want to achieve
- I have a clearer understanding of what I need to do to reach my goals
- I now better understand my own feelings and emotions
- I am now less worried about or scared by my difficult emotions
- I have new tools to manage my feelings and thoughts in new situations
- I better understand how my inner life influences how I behave and what I do and say
- I have become better at saying what I think and sharing my thoughts and opinions
- I have become better at setting boundaries and deciding for myself what I want
- I know myself better now than I did before Strong Girls
- I have become better at helping and supporting my friends and teammates
- Being kind and compassionate to others even when I disagree with them has become more important to me
- I have a new view of sport and physical activities
- Strong Girls has changed my view of sport: now I think it’s much more fun!
- I see more opportunities for me in sport and adventure sport now
- I have learned new physical skills and abilities through Strong Girls
- I feel stronger after doing Strong Girls
- I am more likely now to try new sports in the future
- I know more about how norms and values in society affect girls and women
- I can more clearly see how norms and values influence sport for girls and women
- I would like to join Strong Girls again if there was the chance
- I would definitely recommend Strong Girls to a friend, classmate in my school, or sister
- I believe more strongly now that sport is really important for girls and me
- I am more aware now of my ability to influence society
- I am more aware now of my ability to help others with less opportunities than me
Course introduction

Girls' Preparation

How do I feel?

In the introduction lessons of your course, we will lay the foundations for our group work together. The Strong Girls course is set up for you to have a great experience, to learn a lot about yourself and how you are with others, to try new things, and to emerge stronger and happier as a result! Most importantly, you’ll have a lot of fun!

The point of these first few lessons is to give you an overview to the course, and to gather input from you and your teammates on the types of activities and sports you would like to do in our time together. We’ll also spend time talking about the way you would like the group to be so that you feel comfortable, inspired, and excited to fully participate. We will establish some team rules for the group to support this.

We will also talk about a common way of talking and thinking that will support us along the way. That way we’re all exploring the same kinds of things on our own and together as we progress through the Strong Girls course.

As a part of our foundation we are also going to talk about the importance of self reflection: which means taking time to think about yourself, your life, exploring questions, and sharing with others about what you find out. We will be doing a lot of reflecting on our experiences as we go along, and we know this might be totally new to you. But, don’t worry! We will help guide you along the way.

And finally, we’re going to explore our feelings (sometimes also called emotions). Do you know what you’re feeling right now? Nervous perhaps? Excited? Sad? Annoyed? Happy? If you’re lucky, you’ve maybe already had someone teach you about this part of yourself. However, most of us have not had this kind of support and even though we all have feelings it is very rare that feelings and emotions are something that we learn more about in school. It’s almost as if we’ve been living only knowing one part of what’s going on!

In order to be Strong Girls we’ve got to see and be curious about more of who we, and others are. In other words, we’ll be looking at a bigger and better “map” for understanding ourselves, as well as others and life in general. We’ll get to talk a lot more about this and we’ll help you to look inside regularly at what you are feeling, and how that might be influencing the kinds of things you do, say, and how you interact with other people.

Here’s some initial reflection questions to get you going before we start:

• How well do you understand your feelings?
• How do your feelings influence what you do and say?
• How comfortable are you around other people when they have strong feelings?
• Do you feel like you are more able to recognize your own feelings, or those of others?
• Think about the different places you spend time in: your home, school, in your community, amongst friends. How acceptable do you think it is, to express your feelings? How does this affect you?

In this Objective, you are going to learn about the power of goal setting, and to understand how to work with goals in a good way. Having goals helps you to progress in your life, and reach for the things you really want. They are, in effect, the outcomes that you want to work towards to create the life you want.

Being clear on them, and even sharing them out loud with others, offers a way to focus your efforts. However, as girls, there is a lot of pressure from the outside (parents, peers, social media) to do and be and feel and have certain things. Some of these things, when you really think about it, might not even be what you really want at all! Others might just be totally unrealistic, like being happy ALL the time. Or looking perfect ALL the time. Or scoring ALL the goals. These things aren’t actually doable in real life. Only you can know what you really want, and if you have the desire, resources, and the support you need to achieve it. This next set of lessons are designed to help you to figure this out for yourself in a supported environment.

So: creating goals actually starts with reflecting on things you are already doing and what is true for you. Why are you doing these things? Do they bring you fun, appropriate challenge, fulfillment, and help you feel good? Or not? Are you doing them for yourself, or because others want you to? What are some things you’d like to be doing, or ways you would like to be feeling, that you’re not currently? What would that look and feel like? What support would you need? Then look at the whole picture. Does it seem realistic? Does it excite you, or overwhelm you? If it excites you, game on! If it overwhelms you, maybe scale it back a bit or prioritise what needs to come first in order for other goals to follow.

It’s important to remember that goals can—and often do—shift and change over time. So, you’ll want to revisit your goals regularly to see if you still feel like they are what you want, and are still doable. If it doesn’t feel that way in a week, or a month, or a year from now, it doesn’t mean that you’ve failed; it means you’ve learned more about what you want, what’s possible, and you’re able to refine your plans even more. Great! Even if you do stumble and feel that you’ve failed miserably on some aspect of a goal you’ve set for yourself, if you can be kind to yourself, you can see what you’ve learned from the experience. You can redefine or even wildly change your goals in a way that feels in line with what you know about yourself now. You just didn’t know this before. And now that you do, that’s fantastic progress!

Remember, you can’t go it alone. Yes, your goals are all yours, but you still need support from others. People to talk to, to help you reflect, and to give you practical help. If the goals that you’ve set for yourself ever feel too heavy, there’s a good chance that you need some support. Although your goals come from you, and from what you want and need, you are encouraged to reach out to your parents, friends, teachers and coaches to support you in achieving your goals.

Here’s some initial reflection questions to get you going before we start:

• What are your goals for being in Strong Girls?
• What would you like to be able to do and how would you like to be able to feel as a result of your participation?
• What help do you think you might need to achieve these goals?
Objective 2

What story am I telling myself?

While you’re going about your daily life, all day, every single day, there is a story, script, stream of thoughts, or voice that occurs in your head. We sometimes call this “self-talk.” This voice looks at what’s happening, what you’re doing, or not doing, and what others are doing or not doing, and it makes judgments about those things. That story can sometimes be quite harsh or negative. Most often that voice is also hardest on you and your actions and more forgiving of others. You may have never realized that this story is even running. The powerful thing, and important to remember, is that it’s not usually telling the truth about you, or about what’s happening!

For example, when you’re trying something new, this voice might be saying, “You can’t do that! Who do you think you are?” Or when you’re talking to someone it might say, “Why did you say that? That was so dumb. They are going to think you are really stupid!” Or when you look in the mirror it might say, “You look terrible. Look at your hair and your clothes! Ugh!” “There are many sounds and shapes this voice or stream of thoughts can take, and when you don’t recognize it as just a thought or voice, it can easily slip into the driver’s seat and keep you from doing the things you most want to do. Often this negative self-talk gets in the way of enjoying the things you most want to do and can receive more support.

Here’s some initial reflection questions to get you going before we start:

- How familiar are you with this negative voice inside you?
- Have you noticed what situations bring it out more than others?
- How does it leave you feeling?
- What effect do you think it has on your actions or behaviour?

Through trying some challenging, new, and exciting sports and activities, you will get lots of chances to spot the negative voice and choose instead to focus on a more positive alternative. This shift isn’t always easy. It’s actually something that many of us will need a lot of practice with, and will need to come back to again and again during our life. But, it has big implications for your life and for your overall happiness if you can start on this process now. So, be kind to yourself, be your own best friend, give it a shot, and let someone know if and when this is really hard for you so you can receive more support.

Objective 3

What is really important to me? How can I effectively express myself?

In a world filled with information, sometimes it can feel hard to find your own opinion, or even to know what really matters to you. And if you don’t know what’s really important, you can have trouble expressing yourself. Feel like it’s not worth sharing your view, express yourself in a way that isn’t productive or doesn’t reflect who you really are, or just not want to talk at all. At worst, being surrounded by all of these opinions on every topic can produce feelings of being lost, lonely, angry, and sad. We are going to work on this, including learning the difference between taking on others’ opinions and discovering your own values and ideas.

In this Objective we’re going to work to understand a few different things, and we’re going to do it in a unique way. First, we’ll talk about the ways people communicate with one another and how effective those different ways are. Passive and aggressive communication both come from not really knowing or trusting your own opinions and ideas. When you’re passively communicating, you are in some way fearful of sharing what you really want or think. When you’re aggressively communicating it’s more like, “my way or the highway!” This aggressiveness actually also comes from a lack of self-confidence and is really just an overreaction to opinions or ideas that are different. Some people back away, and some move towards challenging things, but the reactions of both are ultimately coming from fear and confusion over how to respond.

Interestingly, both these two forms of communication are not very effective! You’ll get a chance to experiment, get a feel for them, and discover why a third alternative could be better. In fact, being assertive is the most effective form of communication. People who use this style often know themselves well and are not so fearful. This means they can more clearly ask for what they want, or express their opinions openly. Don’t worry, no one is perfect, and all of us fail to communicate clearly sometimes—but by understanding these three styles you will have more options, and you’ll gain confidence over time.
**Objective 4**

**Girls’ Preparation**

**What are my greatest strengths?**

Sometimes girls have an easier time identifying and speaking about what’s wrong with themselves rather than what’s right or good. This habit is reinforced by a society that tells girls they shouldn’t talk about their skills with confidence, and that they shouldn’t take up too much space, but rather that they should be friendly, humble, and prioritise making other people happy. This can lead to girls feeling bad about themselves, not focusing on developing their inherent strengths, and saying yes when they may actually mean no. And what’s worse, girls themselves often reinforce these norms with each other as well. Does any of this sound familiar?

Stop and think for a moment: what are your strengths? Have you talked about them lately? What are your weaknesses or struggles? Have you shared those? Which of these is easier for you to identify and share with others? How does it make you feel, to speak about your strengths with others? How about for your weaknesses?

Everyone is really great at something! And of course everyone has areas for improvement. This is unique to each of us. If you are one of those girls who would much rather focus on your innate strengths, we’ll help you to discover what it actually feels like when you are confident and strong, and how to respect and support others in their confidence and strength.

Here’s some initial reflection questions to get you going before we start:

- Name three strengths you already possess.
- How could you use those strengths to address an area of your life that you want to change? Note these strengths and how they can be used in your journal.
- What situations make you the most uncomfortable? What do you tend to do when you find yourself in those situations? What is another way you might choose to act?

**In the next few lessons, we’ll use your physical strength and ability to “strike a pose” to feel the energy and test physical forms of confidence. You’ll learn to identify and be more sure of your innate strengths. We’ll help you to discover what it actually feels like when you are confident and strong, and how to respect and support others in their confidence and strength.**

**Objective 5**

**Girls’ Preparation**

**How do I create great relationships, support others, and build team spirit?**

One of the most fantastic parts of being human is good relationships! Whether we’re talking about your best friend, your romantic love, your family, or your team, there are amazingly rewarding aspects of every relationship. Also, there are many difficulties. This is a big topic but we are going to focus in on a couple of aspects that will help you in learning how to become a supportive team member and friend.

The first thing we will look at is what it means to have compassion for others. To have compassion is to be able to “walk in someone else’s shoes”, and to try to really feel what it’s like to be in their situation. It seems relatively easy, right? Well, in fact we often get our own emotions going by listening to others, and then it becomes hard to separate what we’re feeling from what we imagine they are feeling. When these two get mixed up we often—without realising what we are doing—try to be supportive in a way that makes us feel good, and like we are helping but often this isn’t really what they need from us.

Compassion and supporting others is lifelong learning, for everyone. The first step is awareness and learning some basic pointers about how to offer support to someone else. One great way to practice this is when coaching a peer. Here are some tips:

1. **Keep the focus on your friend** that needs support. Share your own experiences only to help the friend feel accepted or supported, rather than as a way to focus attention back on you and how you got it right or know the solution.
2. **Listen** really well to what the person is saying they are experiencing. Reflect this back to them, and offer extra options rather than criticising their ideas.

**In practicing these three behaviours regularly, you will learn that your role as a support, whether that’s as a friend or teammate, is to understand and motivate the other person, not to correct them or give them advice.**

Now let’s get honest. Girls can be REALLY mean to one another, and often to both their “friends” and their enemies. In fact, it’s a really destructive pattern, and some grown women even still do it! We want to help you do your part in changing this pattern. Bullying, and “mean girl behaviour” really just comes from the normal insecurities that all girls feel. The girls who do this often are taking out their struggles on others. Your bodies, your feelings, your relationships and your lives are changing so fast that it’s shaky ground for everyone. Some people respond to that in ways that hurt others. As they say, hurt people, often hurt other people.

So, whether you’ve been the perpetrator, recipient, or bystander to this kind of behaviour—and maybe you have been all three—it’s great to learn more about why this behaviour happens. We’ll talk a fair bit about this problem in teenage girl culture and how you can help to find a better way to support yourself and others through this stage. This is not about liking everyone all the time. There are challenges in dealing with different types of people, with their different values and ideas. And, as we’ve talked about in previous lessons, knowing yourself and your needs and your boundaries are skills that take time to develop. But if we all take care of ourselves, and do this with compassion for others, then we all can feel safe and appreciated.
With a healthier relating to one another comes amazing peer support, opportunities for growth and learning, and a lot of fun with your team! Everyone wants to belong, and feel like they are a part of something bigger. Team spirit is a wonderful thing to experience and to carry with you in your life, and we hope that by exploring this theme you will all come to know the magic of the feeling of inclusiveness, camaraderie, joy, and the confidence that comes with being a part of a great team!

Here’s some initial reflection questions to get you going before we start:

• Why do you think girls are sometimes mean to each other?
• What can be done to change these patterns, and allow everyone to be more compassionate towards each other?
• What have been the best groups you have been part of? Think about what characteristics these groups shared. What made them so great?
• How do you typically show up in a group? Is there something you want to do differently in this group?

Objective 6

What can I learn from my feelings?

Feelings can be some of the best and worst things we experience in life. The range can go from the most exciting and joyful wave of positive energy to the darkest and yuckiest negative cloud of gloom. And sometimes we even experience this entire range all in one day! This will hopefully be one of the biggest takeaways for you from this Objective, that feelings change very often, sometimes slowly, and sometimes really quite fast. They are fleeting states that we ALL experience. Everyone feels sadness, fear, and anxiety, just as they do happiness, joy and love. Everyone has a full range of feelings, regardless of whether they feel comfortable experiencing them or expressing them. Sometimes we might need a little help with understanding and making peace our feelings, but they can, will, and do shift over time. This is something great to remember when you are in that negative gloom!

If you have more difficulty relating to your feelings, a really good way to get in touch with them, or notice them, is through your own body signals. Feelings are felt! Even though we tend to use our minds to try and understand them. Feelings are a physical sensation in your body not a thought or idea in your head. While we can sometimes ignore our feelings, our bodies don’t lie quite as easily. Have you ever felt sick before doing something you have been dreading? Or felt a great flood of energy and excitement when doing something you love to do? These are some of the many examples of the ways in which we experience feelings through our bodies.

So, while at times it can be hard to identify what we’re feeling, or to find the words and the courage to share it with others, we can use our body to help us to listen more deeply to what our feelings are trying to tell us. They are nearly always trying to share some important information that we need to recognise and become aware of. Sometimes a feeling is saying “this doesn’t feel right” or “this feels off” or even, “I’m in danger”. Sometimes a feeling can be telling you a happier message, that you’re right where you are supposed to be, doing exactly what you need to be doing it, and growing because of it. The messages are as varied as the feelings we feel. And these messages can be good at hiding, like clues that we need to put in some effort to be able to follow and understand. If we do, they can help keep us on track to make good choices for how we want to live our lives.

We can live in a way where we feel scared of and avoid our feelings, and where we only allow ourselves to experience the more easy and positive emotions. This is the common way to live for most people, and on the surface, it may seem easier. But you can choose a better way, one that values the easy and the difficult feelings, and learns from all the information that they have to offer. If you choose that path, your life will be more rewarding, you will be better supported, and have deeper and more meaningful relationships with others along the way—especially yourself.

Here’s some initial reflection questions to get you going before we start:

• How do you relate to your feelings? Are they mostly easy or difficult? Which ones do you prefer over others?
• How well are you able to identify what you are feeling?
• Have you noticed your body’s connection to your feelings? Can you recall some examples where you had a clear signal from your body about what you were feeling? What did it tell you?
• How are you at sharing your feelings with others? Why do you think that is the case?
Objective 7
Girls’ Preparation

How can I use self-awareness and compassion to better manage my problems and conflicts?

No matter what you do or don’t do, life just comes with problems and challenges! You can look at your life as a series of difficulties and feel exhausted, frustrated, upset with yourself, and even sometimes defeated or sad about the seemingly endless twists and turns. Or, you can choose to see these things as important experiences that come along to teach you something about what you want, need, and who you really are. That’s not to say that challenges are easy! But, it is important to try and remember this bigger perspective and to reflect frequently about how you are choosing to look at and navigate your challenges.

Part of this ongoing reflection involves self-awareness. Ask yourself: was there some way I contributed to creating this problem? For example, “I was such a jerk to my friend, no wonder they don’t want to talk to me!” or “I didn’t focus on studying for class and now I’m failing.” If you do see your own role in what has happened, it’s important to own and take responsibility for that. In this case, “I was a real jerk, and I don’t want to behave like that again.” or “I didn’t study at all. I won’t let my grades get out of hand again.” This is how you learn not to repeat your mistakes, and to improve!

However, it’s equally as important to accept your mistakes, knowing you are still lovable and not a bad person. A mistake is just a mistake, it doesn’t define who you are! Understand your deeper intentions for reflecting (to learn and make things right) and when you have learned the lesson, then forgive yourself so that you can move on with your life.

And, it’s also important to remember that sometimes, life just throws something awful at you and you did absolutely nothing to cause it. Someone you love gets sick, your parents split up, or you lose someone close to you. These are some of the most difficult challenges, because we can feel so out of control when faced with them.

It can really help to have some tools to navigate the various life challenges that will inevitably come. In this Objective, we will talk about a framework you can use to find the best way to solve problems, and a particularly useful tool for navigating conflicts with other people, which, if you haven’t discovered yet, is likely the most common challenge in life! Both of these tools help you become more self-aware, more able to understand what’s really going on, and to discover the best action for you to take. They are extremely useful and can be practiced again and again throughout your life.

Here’s some initial reflection questions to get you going before we start:

• What have been your biggest challenges in life so far?
• If you had a role in creating these challenges, were you able to take responsibility for your part in it? Were you able to forgive yourself?
• How do you typically go about solving problems? How well is this working for you?

Objective 8
Girls’ Preparation

How am I enjoying my life, and caring for and celebrating who I am?

This Objective is all about fun! Are you ready to have some fun?!?

In seriousness, we live in a society and culture where external measurements of success are considered the most important thing in life. Peoples jobs, their appearance, and how much money they earn seem to be the things that get the most attention. You probably have already experienced some of this with messages that you are not worthy or good unless you get all A’s, or score all the goals, make it into the right university, get the highest paying job, or have the most friends, all while looking really good doing it. This message can feel like it is everywhere, coming from parents, from school, from your friends, from sports, and from social media. While success is certainly something to strive for at times, and be proud of achieving when it comes, we can’t win all of the time. Focusing on achievement over everything else is a quick path to burn-out, depression, and stress; in short, not a happy life!

The constant striving and external focus says, “I’m not good enough unless I achieve this or become that”. This striving is wearing out our bodies, our relationships, our passions, our sense of well-being and aliveness, and is keeping us away from really enjoying our lives fully. When we feel like we can’t have the successes that others tell us we should be having, we feel like failures.

In the following lessons, we will explore achievement, enjoyment, well-being, and self-care. We will take a look at what makes you the most happy, what brings you the most energy and passion, what makes you feel good and worthy, and if what you’re doing currently lines you up and supports your happiness. We will explore the pressures of home, school, social media, and culture, and look at and how much you measure your own self-worth on your achievements and the opinions of others.

From there we will help you re-focus toward getting more of your feelings of self-worth from who you are, regardless of anything you do or achieve. And, we’ll help make sure that you are taking care of yourself so that you can really enjoy your life, including whatever successes and goals you decide you want to take on.

Here’s some initial reflection questions to get you going before we start:

• How pressured do you feel by others ideas of success? Where does that pressure come from in your life at the moment?
• Where do you feel like you may be working really hard for something that doesn’t bring you joy?
• How do you feel when you have success? Do you pay a price achieve it? How do you feel when you fail?
• What brings you a lot of enjoyment and fun?
What influence does society have on me? How can I help make changes in society?

In the last Objective, we talked about society’s influence on how we view and measure our success, and some of the negative effects that has in our lives. In this Objective, we will explore a much wider range of influences that society’s norms and ideals have on us and others.

First, what is a norm or ideal? These are the obvious—and sometimes less obvious—ways that what is considered “normal” or desirable is determined, influenced or created by society. Often these norms and ideals are reinforced by businesses and retail, so what we buy and spend our money on, or from media, which is what we watch and give our attention to—movies, tv, magazines, social media. Most simply, norms and ideals are what we think we should have, do, or be in life.

Some examples include the ideal that women should be thin and stay young looking to be considered beautiful and worthy of attention. And there is the norm that society values men’s sporting events more than those of women—we see this in how people pay considerably more money for men’s events than for women’s for sponsorship or attendance. And, as we talked about in the last Objective, how it is ideal to be the best at everything you do…and to just “be average”, well, that’s just being a failure! These are some well known ones and they probably don’t come as much of a surprise to you. But there are many others that are much more subtle.

We will bring more awareness to this wide-ranging and very common phenomenon so that you can understand how you are influenced by what society dictates. We’ll also look at what you are not influenced by. And by talking about this, you’ll come to understand that society’s norms and ideals are often not realistic, or very good for us. For example, the ideal of women being supermodel style thin is actually not achievable by most women, and not even really considered desirable or beautiful by many people. Health, beauty, and attractiveness is defined much more broadly than what we see reflected in magazines, movies, and social media. Seeing this influence, knowing the reality, and then deciding for ourselves what gets to influence our own lives—that is the work of this Objective. These are the ways that we can choose how we want to be, and not just accept the written and unwritten rules we have come to know.

The truth is that as members of society we all get to decide what is important and what values we want to live by. When society isn’t working how we think it should, then we also get to speak out, and step up and try to make change! You are going to come together with your Strong Girls teammates to work on an activism project that you feel passionate about and feel that you can make a difference with. You might think, “What difference can I really make?” In this Objective you are going to get the chance to discover that you have much more power to influence than you might realise!

Here’s some initial reflection questions to get you going before we start:

• How influenced do you feel by society’s norms and ideals? Which ones have the most influence on you in particular? How does seeing this influence make you feel?

• What norms and ideals really bug you, either in sport or other areas? Which seem outdated or just plain untrue?

• If you had a magic wand, what would you want to work to change the most about society’s influence on yourself and/or others?

Objective 9
Girls’ Preparation

What do I really want to try?

You’ve tried a lot of different things during your Strong Girls course, and hopefully you have gained some new physical and emotional skills along the way as well as having fun and challenging yourself! So, where does that leave you now? What sports and activities that we tried have you really loved? And what sports or activities do you still want to try?

Think big. There may be things that you love to watch on TV that you think “I could never do that because girls don’t typically play those sports...” or, “I don’t have the right body type to do that...” or, “That looks cool but it seems so expensive and out of reach for me…” or, “I’m not strong enough yet to do that...” or, “I wouldn’t have the faintest idea where to even begin.” Think about what you see as limits for yourself. Are they all really true, or do some of these limits feel more imposed by society or perhaps by your own beliefs about yourself? Stay curious! If you had a magic wand, what limits would you wipe away, and what would you really want to try if you knew it was possible?

There is still time to try new activities in this course, and you also have your whole life to try new things that you are curious or excited about! The possibilities are endless. If you stay open and curious about sports and about yourself, you might be surprised by what you find out, what you really love, as well as what you might be good at. Your testing of new sports might become a set of great adventures! Or, that one thing you decide to try out just might become a lifelong passion that brings you physical health and fitness, fun, lots of special new friends, confidence, and more chances to learn about yourself for years to come.

Too many of us think we have to do things a certain way, or we have to be good at something before we can really start. Or maybe we think we need to look a certain way just to earn the right to take part. For example, before we start a new activity we have to go to the gym to become fit first. Or we go to the gym so that we look good and that other people will notice that we look good while we are doing our new activity. Or maybe we have to play a team sport because it’s what our family wants us to do. Or just because we are really good or bad at something, that we have to either continue with it forever or bail right away. You don’t have to stick to any of these assumptions or rules! You can choose to follow your own desires, to trust yourself and let your interest and curiosity lead you to something that will be a great experience.

Here’s some initial reflection questions to get you going before we start:

• In the best case scenario, how would the sport in your life make you feel?

• In the best case scenario, how would you when feel trying a new sport or activity?

• What sports or activities do you think are really cool and impressive?

• What sports or activities do you really want the chance to try?

• What perceived limitations do you feel are preventing you from trying a new sport, and what support do you need to help you break through these limitations?