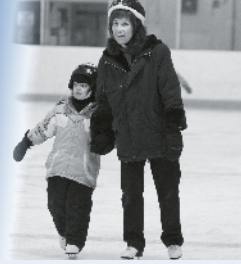




Structuring Physical Activity Programs, Services and Environments to Address Barriers for Mothers and their Families



To increase participation in physical activity among mothers and their families, we must first understand the barriers they are facing. By understanding these barriers, physical activity programs, services and environments can be modified to attract and encourage more mothers and their families.

Addressing Barriers to Physical Activity for Mothers and their Families

- **Create supportive neighbourhoods:** provide opportunities for community members and neighbours to come together and be physically active in a welcoming and comfortable environment.
- **Engage physical activity 'champions':** physically active mothers need to be highlighted as positive role models for other mothers, motivating them to participate and encouraging their families to be supportive.
- **Increase partnerships:** between traditional and non-traditional partners to help overcome barriers and allow greater access to physical activity for the mothers and their families.
- **Create welcoming environments:** ask regulars to welcome new participants; provide opportunities for people to connect during classes; encourage staff to learn everyone's name and say hello.
- **Create comfortable and culturally-appropriate spaces:** women-only weight training areas and pool times; lycra free zones; no rules regarding culturally sensitive sports-wear; plants in front of mirrors; showers with curtains.
- **Get creative around transportation:** offer education sessions on how to use the bus; encourage participants to carpool; provide transportation subsidies.
- **Invest in staff training:** understanding health issues; adapting activities; developing new programs/services; cultural sensitivity; communications; addressing cliques and other negative situations.
- **Variety is important** create a menu of choices, e.g. women's only, intergenerational, multi-cultural, sports, fitness, adventure, family-based activities, traditional activities (i.e. dances and games), etc. Partner with other groups to provide the greatest variety of options.
- **Be flexible:** offer programs and services throughout the day and evening, and provide flexible memberships where women can stop and start easily.
- **Communicate effectively:** provide detailed descriptions of programs and services, e.g. time, place, date, cost, age target, level, class outcomes, clothing, what to bring (water, a mat), etc.
- **Build confidence:** offer skills sessions and taster sessions where women can drop-in, try new activities, bring a friend and have fun.
- **Include a social component:** offer refreshments; encourage women to go for a coffee; plan end of the year parties.
- **Reach out:** develop outreach programs to increase awareness of what is available in cultural centres, schools, community health centres, apartment complexes, churches, etc.; many do not identify with mainstream programming.

Incentives and Motivators

- **Goals/rewards:** Setting goals or having a reward is an incentive and motivator for many women. You can incorporate these into your programs.
- **Having a buddy:** Having someone to do things with is motivational. Providing opportunities for women to meet buddies is something you can do.
- **Cost savings:** Money saving incentives such as family discounts

Identified Barriers to Participating in Physical Activity and Sport for LSES Mothers. Cross Canada Focus Groups, 2009

Internal Barriers	External Barriers	Impacting Barriers
Body weight and body image concerns	Weather	Understanding benefits of physical activity on health
Feeling guilty about leaving family responsibilities	Accessibility to transportation	Availability of affordable childcare
Competing priorities - low priority given to physical activity	Lack of affordable options	Isolation- being at home all day or moving to a new community
Lack of confidence to learn new skills or try something different	Overall costs - clothing, equipment, childcare, etc.	Unsupportive partners, family and/or friends
Putting others' needs before your own		Lack of supportive friend networks to share childcare or do things together
Life transition- dealing with all the changes and societal expectations of being a mother		Lack of programs offering financial assistance
		Instructors lack knowledge of health concerns and cultural needs

Source: Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity. 2009. *Unequal Opportunities, Unequal Outcomes - Physical Activity Beliefs and Behaviours in Low Socioeconomic Status (LSES) Women in Canada.*

encourages women to participate in physical activity.

- **Invitation:** Personally invite women to participate to make it special. Women are more interested in being invited than getting a generic flyer.
- **Having fun:** Laughing and having fun is a huge motivator for women. Build this in whenever you can.
- **Pedometer:** Using a pedometer is a great incentive for keeping active. It is seen as an easy, inexpensive tool that regularly reminds women to keep moving.
- **Competitions, events or challenges:** Competitions, events or challenges are motivators for many women- planning family events can be fun for the whole family.
- **Music:** Having good music playing in the background is motivating. Ask women what they want to hear and play it.

Ask Mothers what they Want

If you are looking to change or modify your programs, services and/or environments, ask mothers what they think. This will allow you to focus your energies accordingly. The *Organizing Focus Groups and Community Consultations* fact sheet can help.

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For more information on CAAWS' *Mothers in Motion* project, please contact caaws@caaws.ca or visit the website at www.caaws.ca/mothersinmotion/e/.

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