



Talk to Me Principles – Supporting you to engage all women in physical activities

Developed by Women in Sport and Activity Alliance

Activity Alliance developed the Talk to Me principles based on research with disabled people. It also involved a mix of people who provide or deliver activity to disabled people. The principles support sporting providers to engage more disabled people, but if applied effectively, are also relevant to all audiences.

Through the Get Out Get Active (GOGA) programme we are testing these principles and understanding how to apply them for different audience groups e.g. women, younger people etc.

Women in Sport have developed the following information to share practical ideas, insight and better practice in engaging all women in activity. It is gathered from learning through GOGA and additional insight where available, further information can be found later in this resource.

Activity Alliance developed the Talk to Me principles based on research with disabled people.

Principle 1



My Channels

Use communication channels that I already trust e.g. social media, local media.

Principle 2



My locality

Travelling to get to activities can be a significant barrier for disabled people. I would much prefer opportunities to be closer to home.

Principle 3



Me, not my impairment

Many people do not identify with being disabled and are put off by advertising that focuses on disability.

Principle 4



My values

Everyone has values. Understanding what my values are and linking an activity to these can make taking part more appealing.

Principle 5



My life story

As people grow older our values change. Keep me interested over time through new ideas.

Principle 6



Reassure me

Some disabled people fear standing out and need to be reassured that any activity we attend will be welcoming and suitable for our needs.

Principle 7



Include me

Some disabled people need to know we are good enough to take part. Providers should make sure that people with varying ability levels feel included in sessions.

Principle 8



Listen to me

Disabled people can be limited by our impairment and should be able to discuss our needs in a safe and private environment before starting an activity.

Principle 9



Welcome me

An unpleasant first experience can prevent anyone from taking part again. Ensure my first experience is enjoyable so I'm likely to return.

Principle 10



Show me

Engage disabled people who are already involved in your activity to promote it to others.

1. My channels

Use communications channels that women already trust.

Hearing about an activity via friends and family (word of mouth) is consistently the most effective form of marketing. Women who regularly attend sessions will be your biggest advocates. Consider how to encourage and help existing participants to spread the word. Could you give them a leaflet to share with friends or put up at their workplace?

Social media is used and can act as a digital word of mouth. Ask existing participants to share a social media post with their friends. Everyone has a personal communication preference. Some women will use social media more than others and some not at all. Mixing up channels and formats helps everyone.

Consider where women are in your locality. You could reach local women through large employers, hairdressers, local papers and websites, faith centres, community groups, health centres and surgeries. Or if they're parents or guardians - perhaps through local schools.

2. My locality

Travelling to get to activities can be a significant barrier for some women. Take the activity into the local area, including outdoor sessions or venues in new and unexpected places¹ (1). Having activities on your doorstep reduces many barriers associated with the time and cost of travel. It also increases people's confidence as local residents are familiar with their surroundings. However, remember what you may consider 'local' can be very different to others.

I Will If You Will in Bury demonstrated that people will follow a good instructor and that the cost and quality of sessions are important in determining how far people will travel.²

“ If I'm feeling brave, then I'll walk down to Morrisons. ”
GOGA research
(Inactive female)

Successful programmes engaging women take place in a variety of locations such as workplace courtyards and local health or faith centres. Programmes using facilities on the local bus route or meeting at school gates or coffee shops are also successful.

3. See me as an individual (not just led by my gender, age, impairment etc.)

Many women do not identify with being disabled and are put off by advertising that focusses on disability. Specific activities designed for disabled people are not always appealing, for disabled women to participate in. Being clear on the level of the activity (for example all abilities, beginner, low impact, inclusive etc.) will help women decide its suitability. Using images of relatable women taking part in the activity can also help demonstrate its suitability. Perhaps arrange a local photo shoot to use familiar faces in your promotion.

Similarly, women in later life often do not associate with the term ‘older women’ and marketing using this language does not resonate.

Marketing and communications that align and address more than one value for women will maximise your chance of it being relevant.

Some of GOGA’s most successful activities engaging disabled and non-disabled women have included all-ability cycling, Couch to 5k walk/run sessions, walking Netball and beginners golf. The providers promoted these as fun sessions for all abilities, in a relaxed and supportive environment.

4. My values

Women in Sport’s ground-breaking research³ highlighted every woman’s relationship with physical activity is unique and highly complex. However, all women have a set of simultaneously held values that drive decision-making and prioritisation within their lives.

These values have different degrees of importance for different women.



“I want to grow old disgracefully.”
GOGA female participant
Value: Having Fun



These values align very closely to those found to be important by disabled people through Activity Alliance's Motivate Me research. These were friendships and connections, my health, progressing in life, mental strength and wellbeing, having fun and feeling free and family and support systems.

All women share the same core values although this can be in different ways. For example, the core value 'achieving goals' can be dominant for some disabled women who are striving for independence through the activities they choose.

There is an opportunity for providers to frame sport in a way that appeals to women's values. For example, emphasising an activity as a way to have fun or help to achieve goals such as independence, helps women to see how it is relevant to their lives

5. My life story

A woman's relationship with physical activity and sport is complex, based on personal factors, influences and triggers. The six core values that Women in Sport research identified represent what is important to women in modern life and how they want to spend their time and energy.

However, these values will change over time and particularly at different stages in their lives.

Regular programme monitoring and consultation with women is key to ensure sessions continue to align to women's values and everchanging lives.

It's also important to remember women and girls move in and out of activity both physically and emotionally over time. Be aware of this, notice the shifts and support women to come back despite changes in life stage and circumstances¹.

“ I used to walk for miles, used to love walking on the beach. ”

GOGA research
(Inactive female)

“ It was not what I expected. I thought it was going to be starchy, more like some other gyms... here you can wear what you like, no one looks you up and down. ”
GOGA female participant

6. Reassure me

Most women, when considering new activity, they will experience a number of emotional barriers before practical barriers are even encountered. Some women fear standing out and need to be reassured that any activity will be welcoming and suitable for their needs. The fear of being judged can also include:

- A fear of being in unfamiliar territory and not knowing how to use any of the equipment.
- A fear of exposure for lacking ability or knowledge.
- A fear of looking like the odd one out by wearing the wrong thing or not having the right gear.

Think about what you can do to reduce these fears through the pre-session information you provide. Examples of information you can include to provide reassurance are:

- When to arrive and where to go. What to expect at the session. What to bring and wear. How much and how to pay.
- Providing named contact details for who to talk to discuss needs before attending shows you are open to further questions and requests. Some disabled women may have additional support queries related to your opportunities. Providing this extra information could be what prompts a disabled woman from just thinking about being active to taking action.

“ There’s a fear factor. I have to know where I’m going. If I’m stressed, then it makes all my symptoms worse. ”
GOGA research
(Inactive female)

“ I just have to take it day by day so I can’t commit. ”
GOGA research
(Inactive female)



7. Include me

Some disabled women need to know that sport and physical activity is for them. Women in Sport's 'Me, not my age or impairment' research⁴ found inactive disabled women had low confidence in their own ability to be active.

Women could be encouraged to participate by making small changes to existing opportunities. This can be achieved by recruiting additional volunteers or by making changes such as allowing a friend to accompany a visually impaired woman for free. Providers should also make sure that women with varying ability levels feel included in the sessions.

8. Listen to me

Discreetly engage in conversation with women about their capabilities, remembering that the fear of being judged for many women is an important concern. Don't hide behind rules which may prevent disabled women from accessing sessions. Work together to find solutions that meet health and safety requirements **and** allow the women to take part.

Women in Sport research⁵ found there is a need for sports clubs to consult with women more and be flexible and adaptable enough to make changes to the way the club is run.

Use feedback from participants to keep improving the experience. Start by asking them what method of feedback they prefer (in person, online, text). Then use that method to ask them what they like and what could be done better, and act on this immediately so they can see that you take their feedback seriously².



9. Welcome me

Ensure the first experience at your session is enjoyable so women are likely to return. Making women feel welcome and comfortable from the beginning is vitally important.

Think about how you can help reduce the fear of being in an unfamiliar environment, inexperienced with the equipment or feeling exposed as lacking ability. Consider having someone welcoming and well informed to tell people what to expect, where to go, what to do and what equipment to get on arrival. Organising in advance for one of your regular participants to provide the welcome has the added benefit of instantly connecting them with other people in the session².

Women in Sport's research with visually impaired women⁶ found a good induction programme or tour of the facilities can help women's confidence and safety concerns which encourages them to return.

“ He made us feel very welcome, we knew there was going to be a familiar face. ”
GOGA female participant

Whoever welcomes participants should try not to draw too much attention to the fact that a participant may be new. During the session, reassure women that they can take it at their own pace and do what they are comfortable doing.

As a provider, you may need to consider if your current attendees are open and welcoming to new participants. Think about what changes you may need to make or what you need to communicate to existing participants to make it a welcoming environment for new people.

Additionally, many women need the flexibility to be able to miss a session here and there. A warm welcome back and “great to see you again” can go a long way.

10. Show me

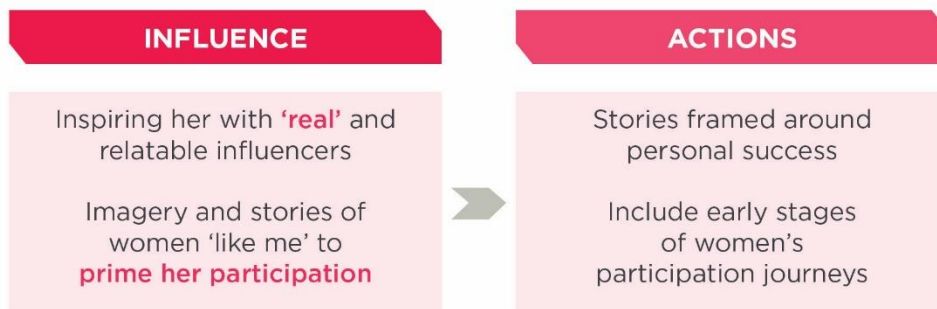
Making physical activity second nature for women relies on women of all ages and abilities not only becoming active but celebrating it and encouraging others to join in. Relatable women visibly enjoying being active at their own pace and somewhere local feels more attainable for potential participants².

Women in Sport's 'What sways women to play sport?'⁷ found it is not just those who are 'sporty' who influence others to participate in sport. Providers can utilise a 'sway factor' to affect women's sporting behaviour.



POSSIBILITIES

OPENING HER EYES TO WHAT SHE CAN DO



Providers can motivate disabled women with 'real' and relatable influencers using imagery and stories of women 'like me' to demonstrate what is possible. Try to frame stories around personal success and include early stages of women's participation journeys.

Using images of local women can improve your communications and ensure they connect with your local audiences. Feature disabled women in stories, social media posts and other communications to make sure that disabled women understand that activities are genuinely for them.

“I couldn't run 5k on day one, but you talk to the other girls and hear how much they've progressed, it really encourages you. You think 'if I keep practising... ”
GOGA female participant



We hope you've found these ideas useful. Please share with us how you engage women in the community to be more active.

- ¹ Go Where Women Are, Sport England
- ² Helping Women and Girls To Get Active: A Practical Guide, Sport England
- ³ Understanding Women's Lives in 2013 & the role of sport and physical activity, Women in Sport
- ⁴ 'Me, not my age or impairment', Women in Sport, 2018
- ⁵ The Ideal Sports Club for Women, Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2011
- ⁶ Small Changes, Big Differences: Making Physical Activity Accessible for Visually Impaired Women, Women in Sport 2016
- ⁷ What Sways women to Play Sport? Women in Sport, 2015

Useful links:

[Women in Sport](#)

[Activity Alliance](#)

[Get Out Get Active \(GOGA\)](#)

[Talk to Me principles](#)

[Inclusive communications guide](#)

For further resources, please contact:

Women in Sport

<https://www.womeninsport.org/research-and-advice>
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