



Why are female-only table tennis sessions important?

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To engage and retain more women and girls in the sport, there needs to be a focus on improving experiences of those existing members and players we aim to recruit.

To see gender parity in the future there needs to be an increased availability of **female-only sessions**, league divisions and more visibility of women and girls in the sport.

The new #LevelTheTable funding pot is a great opportunity to receive support to increase the number of opportunities for women and girls in the sport. Applications for up to £2,500 are open – [click here to make an application](#).

Women and girls have different motivators and barriers in sport to boys and men. These motivators and barriers will also change depending on life stages they are experiencing, meaning engaging females into table tennis is not a 'one size fits all' approach.

The top barriers generally reported by women for not wanting to take part in table tennis include:

- **Being the only girl or woman** in a session/division and not wanting to play with or against men all the time. Due to the low number of women present, sometimes there is no suitable female toilet or the environment is not suitable for women and girls to be in.
- **Other life commitments** – research has shown that girls are more likely to drop out of sport at key transition periods e.g. from school to university or from university into a first job.
- **Suitable level and social sessions** – feedback from the [research we undertook with TASS](#) showed women are keen to be re-engaged into the sport but there isn't currently the right offer at clubs, leagues and at competitions.
- **Coaching** – not enough female coaches are active in the sport and more coaches need to be up-skilled on

how to overcome barriers for women and girls at different life stages, keeping them retained in the sport.

Alongside this, some women and girls will only participate in sport if it is female-only, due to cultural or religious reasons. By only offering mixed sessions, it will never create that environment enabling more audiences to participate in sport.

Teresa Bennett coaches a women-only table tennis session at Brighton Table Tennis club which has been very successful in bringing new players into the sport. The session has built a strong community who now regularly communicate outside of the session and look out for each other. Four players started volunteering at the session and have now gone on to become coaches, completing their [Level 1 Session Coach course](#). Teresa's top tips on running a female-only session are below:

- When you have new players, make sure each is welcomed and given clear information on where the toilets are, where they can get water etc as well as making sure they are ready for the session e.g. source them a bat if they haven't played before.
- Having a female coach make a big difference to the session. If that is not possible, recruiting a female volunteer to help out can really help to encourage women and girls in the session.
- During the session, the emphasis needs to be on practising and improving technique, not on competition as this can be off-putting to women, especially those who are new to the sport or are there for the social side.
- Really get to know the players – this helps break down barriers and build relationships, which is highly valued by female players.
- If you have lower numbers, encourage them to bring a friend along – this has really helped grow the Brighton session.
- Offer different price points so that women in different life situations are not put off by too high a price.

If you are looking to offer more women and girls' opportunities and are not sure where to start, or want some support, please get in touch with Jenny Leach on jenny.leach@tabletennisengland.co.uk who would be happy to go through your plans with you.

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