



Freestyle BC Girlstylerz Program Manual





*Thank you to Via Sport for its contributions and making this document possible.
Version 1 (Completed October 2019): Written by Danika Mazur, edited by Yunji Li.*

"This manual focuses mostly on the training and social responsibility of coaches working with female athletes. However, the information in this manual can be utilized by parents, directors, officials and other decision-makers in the sport" (Page 7)

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PART 1 Introduction

“[Girlstylerz] gives these girls a place in the sport; a reason to get to the mountain and get their boots on because all their friends are here. The program is really focused on being a team and it can't be a team unless everyone's there. I think the girls really feel that and they feel like they're part of it.”
– Danika Mazur, Head Girlstylerz Coordinator, Freestyle BC –

History

Girlstylerz was first created in Vancouver in 2016 and originated as a camp designed to bring the club's female participants together for a unique training experience. It expanded into a full winter program intended to open up the doors to female participants interested in the sport of freestyle skiing, offering them a fun and safe entry point into the club's pathways. Marketing an all-girls program increased the club's ratio of female athlete participants and aided in the development of an equally representative culture within the club.

The “Girlstylerz” name was shared with the provincial sport organization in 2018 as part of a province-wide female athlete development initiative funded by Via Sport. The program is intended to be implemented in a way that best suits the culture of each club independently. It is *not* intended to segregate girls and boys, rather it is to be utilized as a mindset, a culture and an attitude towards coaching and including athletes who identify as female.



Notable Freestyle BC Alumnae

Andi Naude

Home town: Penticton, BC

Home club: Freestyle Apex Ski Club

Achievements:

- 6th place, Olympic Winter Games, Pyeongchang 2018
- Rookie of the Year, FIS World Cup 2013
- Champion, FIS NorAm Grand Prix 2012



Cassie Sharpe

Home town: Comox, BC

Home club: Mt. Washington Freestyle Ski Club

Achievements:

- Gold medalist, Olympic Winter Games, Pyeong Chang 2018
- Gold medalist, X Games, Oslo 2016
- Silver medalist, FIS World Championship, 2015
- FIS world Cup winner, Tignes 2015



Elena Gaskell

Home town: Vernon, BC

Home club: Silver Star Freestyle Ski Club

Achievements:

- 5th place, Big Air World Cup, Quebec 2018
- 5th place, FIS Slopestyle World Cup, Switzerland 2018
- Overall winner, Nor-Am Cup, 2015
- 2x gold medalist, Canada Winter Games Big Air and Slopestyle 2015
- Overall winner, Canada Cup, 2014/15 and 2015/16



Yuki Tsubota

Home town: Whistler, BC

Home club: Freestyle Whistler

Achievements:

- Two time Olympian, Sochi 2014 and Pyeongchang 2018
- Gold medalist, FIS World Cup, USA 2016
- Silver medalist, Winter Dew Tour, 2012



Jennifer Simm

Home town: Prince George, BC

Home mountain: Tabor Mountain

Achievements:

- Bronze medalist, Nor Am, USA 2007
- 6th place, World Cup, Italy 2003
- Gold medalist, Nor Am, Canada 2003

Kelly Ringstad

Home town: Vancouver, BC

Home mountain: Whistler Blackcomb

Achievements:

- Olympian, Salt Lake City 2002
- Bronze medalist, European Cup, Czech Republic 2001
- Three time gold medalist, Nor Am, Canada 1997

Kiera Leung

Home town: Coquitlam, BC

Home club: Freestyle Vancouver Ski Club

Achievements:

- Gold medalist, Nor Am, Canada 2014
- Gold medalist, Nor Am, USA 2013
- Silver medalist, Nor Am, Canada 2013

Kristi Richards

Home town: Summerland, BC

Home club: Freestyle Apex Ski Club

Achievements:

- Bronze medalist, World Cup, USA 2011
- Two time Olympian, Torino 2006 and Vancouver 2010
- Gold medallist, World Cup, Italy 2007

Sofiane Gagnon

Home town: Whistler, BC

Home club: Freestyle Whistler Ski Club

Achievements:

- Gold medalist, Senior Nationals, Canada 2017
- Bronze medalist, Senior Nationals, Canada 2017
- Silver medalist, Canadian Selections, Canada 2016

Sylvia Kerfoot

Home town: Vancouver, BC

Home mountain: Whistler Blackcomb

Achievements:

- Silver medalist, World Cup, Czech Republic 2008
- Overall 12th place finish, World Cup, 2007
- Bronze and silver medalist, Canadian Nationals, Canada 2006

Tami Bradley

Home town: Vancouver, BC

Home mountain: Whistler Blackcomb

Achievements:

- Silver medalist, World Cup, Canada 2003
- Bronze medalist, World Cup, USA 2001
- Two time Olympian, Nagano 1998 and Salt Lake City 2002

Tanya Callon

Home town: Penticton, BC

Home mountain: Apex Mountain

Achievements:

- 5th place, Nor Am, Canada 1999
- 4th place, European Cup, Switzerland 1999
- 9th place finish, Nor Am, Canada 1999

Female Experiences in Freestyle BC

The following are accounts recorded from a survey taken in 2019 inquiring about female experiences and participation in the sport of freestyle skiing, specific to British Columbia. These are direct excerpts from parents, coaches and athletes at the club and provincial level:

- *"There has definitely been times where it has felt like the boys are running the show."*
- *"Girls can be mean, going behind others backs and gossipy, which I find happens less with the boys."*
- *"From the fantastic but overworked coaches we have, most of their attention and high expectations are directed at the larger number of boy participants (who are also more advanced, aggressive freestylers). The coaching for the girls has been supportive but largely indulgent (not much is asked or expected of our female participants). I would like to see a female coach for our team that can be a female role model in the sport and who would expect a higher level of commitment and hard work in their freestyle participation."*
- *"I think that the coach I had did not teach me much. I felt like their solution when I was learning things was 'just try it again'."*
- *"I think the biggest hurdle is the apparent lack of women coaches who are able to coach freestyle teams. I know our team tried hard to recruit a female coach but was unsuccessful. Perhaps a greater recruiting and training drive among older female participants would help this."*
- *"I truly believe general training should be grouped by ability rather than gender. Growing up, the boys pushed me to be a better skier and if it wasn't for them there is a lot I wouldn't have tried."*
- *"Sometimes the park can be busy and intimidating."*
- *"The season before Girlstylerz was formed, I was in a group with all boys who were at least 2 years older than me. None of them really paid attention to me, including the coach and I felt really left out and didn't feel I learned much."*

- *“I competed in the boys U16 category, and won. Some of my male teammates and their parents told me I only won because I was a girl.”*
- *“There’s been a few times where I was made to feel like I wasn’t good enough, or that I didn’t deserve to be there. When I first started skiing park, I was always the only girl and the boys wouldn’t talk to me, or go up the chair with me, and this always made me feel so disheartened.”*

As part of this survey, a poll was taken to find out which group makes girls feel most excluded and disempowered. The results collected show:

7.1%	By parents
7.1%	By female peers
14.3%	By media
21.4%	By male peers
21.4%	By coaches
28.6%	No group

While it is encouraging that a majority number of participants indicated they do not feel excluded by any group, the percentages of female athletes reporting on feelings of exclusion and disempowerment is concerning; specifically, by **coaches** and **male peers**. Consequently, this manual focuses mostly on the training and social responsibility of coaches working with female athletes. However, the information in this manual can be utilized by parents, directors, officials and other decision-makers in the sport.

Using This Manual

The content of this manual is intended to be informative and should be used in consideration when developing and implementing a program that includes or caters to athletes who identify as female. Much of the content within this document is experiential and opinion-based, though evidence-based research is utilized when possible to support these opinions.

For the purpose of this document, the terms *female*, *women* and *girls* will be used to describe chosen gender identities. However, strategies in this manual can be applied to any program and any athlete, gender non-specific.

The coaching strategies outlined in this manual are strictly pedagogical. Information on technical skill development and progression can be found at www.freestylecanada.ski under the coach course resource section.



PART 2 The Girlstylerz Program

Program Description

Girlstylerz caters to athletes who identify as female and can operate either as a part of Fundamentalz and Freestylerz or parallel to these, as a separate program. This should be based on the individual club's capacity, philosophy and goals. It focuses on all freestyle disciplines - technical skiing, moguls, slopestyle, half pipe and big air – and participants should be provided with an introduction to competition through both regional and provincial level events. The program should also focus on offering a safe and accessible introduction for girls to off-season training opportunities including water ramp, air bag, trampoline and dryland training. In addition, participants should have multiple opportunities throughout the training year to experience the various Girlstylerz workshops. Upon entering the program, participants should already be strong intermediate skiers who can ski parallel on a blue run, load/unload the ski lift independently and manage their own equipment.

Mission, Vision, Values

In 2018, a summit of the provincial sport organization membership was held to discuss desired outcomes of the initiative funded by Via Sport. Attendants were asked to collaboratively create language that could be used to define the desired essence of the Girlstylerz program. This language was used to develop the mission, vision and values for Girlstylerz. See below, as decided by the Freestyle BC membership:

MISSION STATEMENT: We offer athletes who identify as female the opportunity to participate and progress in the sport of freestyle skiing in a fun, safe and positive environment

VISION STATEMENT: To elevate and empower female athletes through the sport of Freestyle Skiing and to be a leader in program development within Freestyle Canada

CORE VALUES: Positivity, respect, inclusiveness, safety, empowerment

Program Coordinators

When deciding to implement programming that emphasizes the athletic development of female participants, the club may want to hire a program coordinator to manage these programs or groups. The coordinator's focus should be to assure that girl programs are well-supported, consistent and fun! Coordinators should report to the club's head coach/director, act as a resource to other coaches within their club and be a point of contact for female athletes and their families. They should also engage in collaborative dialogue and efforts with Girlstylerz coordinators from other clubs throughout the province. This role is most successful when it is paired with a considerable amount of administrative duties and therefore, coordinators should be compensated a suitable wage outside of regular training hours.

EXAMPLE OF QUALIFICATIONS REQUIRED:

- Professional and current freestyle coaching certification with a nationally recognized organization (Freestyle Canada or national equivalency)
- Completion of additional training in female specific coaching (for example, Keeping Girls in Sport online module by Jump Start)

EXAMPLE OF POSITION REQUIREMENTS:

- Has one or more seasons experience coaching within a Freestyle Canada sanctioned club
- Interested in or has experience coaching female athletes/mentoring girls
- Able to work proactively in a team environment as well as motivated to get work done individually
- Versatile to individual athlete development profiles
- Capable of planning and monitoring athlete progression
- Has strong and positive communication skills that support in building relationships
- Understands the Freestyle Canada athlete development pathway
- Willing to submit to an RCMP criminal record check

EXAMPLE OF PREFERRED ATTRIBUTES:

- Has athlete and competitive experience



- Has certifications higher than FC Fundamentalz
- Has experience in managing logistics

EXAMPLE OF COACHING RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Provide female athletes with training through the implementation of on-hill program preparation and delivery
- Responsible for coordinating female athlete opportunities on airbag, water ramp, and other off snow training opportunities (trampoline, dryland etc.)
- Plan and implement goal-setting, video analysis, etc.
- Attend Timber Tour events and other local ski events with female athletes
- Provide guidance to female athletes on their pathways in training, competition and other opportunities within the sport
- Provide female athletes with feedback on progress and suggestions for improvement
- Implement team code of conduct and expectations
- Act as a mentor/role model to the team

EXAMPLE OF ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Act as a resource and guide for associate coaching staff in supporting female athletes
- Plan and participate in team-building activities outside of regular training hours
- Operate and engage in various female athlete recruitment events/opportunities
- Communicate professionally and courteously with athletes parents
- Engage in program marketing ventures
- Seek opportunities for sponsorship or partnership with companies that could support program/athlete equipment, lifestyle or training needs
- Work closely with the club's director and other program head coaches
- Advise the club board of directors on the program's direction, progress and needs
- Collaborate with other FBC Girlstylerz coordinators when possible

PART 3 Program Content

The following section outlines examples of various well-received ***workshops and activities*** that can be implemented as part of the Girlstylerz program. It is widely recognized that girls must feel accepted before they can put forward the effort required to perform proficiently. Incorporating extra activities like the ones outlined below into the programming will increase team spirit, bonding and the athletes' sense of security. This subsequently will increase athlete performance and retention.

It is best to designate some administrative time to create visuals or slides to accompany each topic. Workshops that are aesthetically appealing and/or interactive are much more engaging for the participants. Using photos and videos of the participants themselves is an effective way to personalize presentations and to better engage the athletes¹. The following activities can be used but are not limited to the ones outlined in this section. Coaches should work to get creative and have fun with team activities! Building a good rapport with the group will allow for more flexibility with implementation.

Code of Conduct

This team building activity is a great way to establish boundaries and expectations within the team/group. It is best to hold this meeting before the season begins or as early in the training season as possible (utilize a private, comfortable space with access to technology for slides). This activity is a good opportunity to convey the expectation that *Girlstylerz is a safe space where bullying is not tolerated and positive encouragement amongst peers is expected*. Creating a code of conduct *with* the athletes rather than *for* them allows them to feel more connected to the code therefore, increasing their commitment to it.

¹ Clubs should be sure to include a photo release indication as part of their registration to ensure the safety of its members.

Steps:

1. **Review** what a 'code of conduct' encompasses. Refer to the Alpine Responsibility Code. The athletes should be familiar with this and it may help to inspire ideas for your code.
2. **Explain** that you will be creating a code of conduct as a team. The code of conduct will determine how the athletes should act towards themselves, their peers/teammates, their coaches and others on the mountain.
3. **Ask** the participants questions that will inspire the direction of your code. Example, *how do you want your team to be recognized? Who should be considered in the code? How do you want to be treated during training?*
4. **Create** the code. Have the participants take turns creating a point. It is important for participants to feel that their ideas and contributions are valid - try to incorporate every suggestion. Once the code is created, it should be printed and signed by each participant. It can be referred back to at any time throughout the season. A new code should be created every year to ensure that new participant's feel connected to it and included.

Goal Setting

The scale of risk versus reward can vary significantly between males and females. Males typically view the instant gratification of learning a new trick as reward enough and therefore any risk is easily outweighed. While for many girls, the seemingly endless risks tend to outweigh any reward, delaying progression and contributing to withdrawal. Furthermore, what many coaches fail to recognize is that new and young female athletes in the sport may not yet have an intrinsically motivating factor or 'reward' for performing a new skill or trick. Holding frequent goal-setting meetings and workshops throughout the training season is beneficial in helping the athlete to understand what their goals or 'rewards' are and what the steps are in reaching those goals. A thorough understanding of progression will increase the athlete's intrinsic motivation, outweigh fear and allow them to rationally assess risk.

Steps:

1. **Ask** the participants some thought provoking questions to get them thinking about their own feelings and dreams. For example, what do you want to be when you grow up? What is your favourite thing about freestyle skiing?
2. **Review** the concept of *today goals* versus *someday goals*. Someday goals are those great big dreams and are made up today goals which are easily achievable and more focused on immediate social, emotional and physical health. For younger athletes, today goals are more important than someday goals and so it is important to emphasize those. For example, a today goal could be 'to make a friend who likes skiing'. A someday goal could be 'to stand on the podium at a world cup mogul event'.
3. **Explain** the pathway. Refer to sources such as www.freestylecanada.ski or the Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) model at www.sportforlife.ca for more information and visuals on what the various pathways may be.
4. **Create** goals. Provide each athlete with a piece of paper and have them create 3 – 5 today goals and 1 - 2 someday goals. Consider having athletes write or doodle a picture of each goal.

Furthermore, one of the barriers in sport most reported on by girls is the lack of parental support. Often, parents don't know what the goals and rewards are for their child performing seemingly risky maneuvers. Providing *both* athletes and parents with an understanding of what some realistic goals and progressions are in the sport can help parents to be more supportive of their child's participation. Include parents in the goal-setting process by relaying information to them via email or parent sessions.

Mental Training

1. Mindfulness

Practicing mindfulness is a great way to address fear management. A good strategy for tapping into a mindful state and learning to regulate the part of the brain that controls fear, the amygdala, in high-stress situations is to *practice* in low-stress settings. Incorporate this practice into regular training. Find a quiet, comfortable spot; this may be in the lodge or

in a low-traffic area on the hill. Encourage the athletes to get comfortable – click out of their equipment, get warm, dry, etc. Ask the athletes to be still and quiet for *one minute* at first. The time length can increase with practice and age. Athletes should practice deep breathing and clearing their minds of all thoughts; a good strategy is to try to focus only on the sounds they hear around them. This type of mindful practice will become useful to athletes when they find themselves in scary or stressful situations while training or competing. Team yoga is also a good cross-training activity to support in the practice of mindfulness.

2. Visualization

Visualization is good practice by any athlete to better manage fear, assess risk and to successfully work through progression. Athletes should always practice visualizing their tricks and runs before performing them. This should be practiced in multiple parts of the course/facility; for example, at the top of the run, the entrance of a feature, the landing of a feature (when appropriate) and during video review. Visualization is a life-long practice and for many young athletes, the fear of falling often overshadows effective visualization technique. It can take many years for some athletes to attempt a new trick or maneuver but diligent visualization routines will support in progressing them towards their goals.

3. Competition Preparation

Athletes should undergo thorough preparedness training prior to attending any level of competition or event. The coach should review important items such as **schedule, timeline, weather, equipment, scoring, venue** and **goal review** leading up to the event. This can simply be done during lunch on a regular training day prior to the competition or in a more official workshop setting off-mountain. Preparing the athletes with a realistic outline of how the event may unfold will ensure management of fear, pressure and appropriate expectations of results.

Social Media Awareness

Social media is embedded within today's society and the reality is that there is no sign of its decline in the foreseeable future. It can be both a useful and enjoyable tool but also a

great risk and weakness. While mainly the responsibility should be that of parents and teachers to monitor and inform children about social media use, coaches can have a great impact on their athletes' use of technology and social media as well. Addressing the topic of social media before it becomes a problem can avoid conflict but may also encourage some great benefits for the athlete, the team and the sport.

One of the greatest risks of athlete use of social media within the team environment is the social conduct with which it is used. It is important to reiterate that the team values and code of conduct apply to behaviour in person *as well as online*. Though it can be a challenging action to isolate, *cyberbullying* should have a zero tolerance policy in any club or sport organization. "Cyberbullying involves the use of communication technologies such as the Internet, social networking sites, websites, email, text messaging and instant messaging to repeatedly intimidate or harass others...Bullying can be a traumatic experience, and some forms of bullying can even be considered illegal" (retrieved from <http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cycp-cpcj/bull-inti/index-eng.htm>). Coaches can help to prevent cyberbullying by having pre-emptive discussions with their team and monitoring online social dynamics when possible. Furthermore, it important that athletes are not only mindful of their online conduct towards their teammates, but also towards and about officials, sport leaders, organizations and companies. Coaches can help by role modelling positive online conduct themselves. ***Water bottle challenge:*** *Using a water bottle with a squeezable sports cap, find a solid dry surface like a table and have the athletes gather around. Ask the athletes to call out as many different terms related to social media as possible (for example, Instagram, Facebook, like, comment). For each call out, squeeze some water onto the table (a colourful sports drink works well). When the athletes have run out of ideas, challenge a volunteer to get the liquid back into the bottle using only their hands and without removing the lid. When it becomes clear that it is almost impossible, explain that the liquid represents one's online actions and the table is the world. The point is to demonstrate that once your actions have been posted online, there is no taking it back. Reiterate the importance of being selective and careful of what gets posted. Suggest the 'grandmother rule': never post anything that you wouldn't want your grandmother to see. Then apply this rule to teachers, potential sponsors and favourite pro athletes.*

A positive factor of social media within sport is that it is a great way to stay connected to current events and professional athletic careers. It can also help to grow one's own athletic career as well as the programming of the club or sport organization. The coach can have a great influence on how to use social media to advance involvement in sport. Via Sport offers a great toolkit on their website called "12 Ways for Athletes to Find Social Media Success". Coaches can visit the website www.viasport.ca to become more informed. The coach can also have an influence on *when* to use social media. Communicate the importance of having a balance between time spent online and enjoying other aspects of life. For some, going offline can bring relief, clarity, calm and well-being which subsequently has a positive impact on training.

Daily 15 minute offline challenge: Challenge the athletes to go offline for a minimum of 15 minutes a day. Time can increase with practice and age. Provide the athletes with a method of tracking minutes such as a chart or a diary. Encourage them to record what they spent their time doing while they were not online.

Socials, Teambuilding, and Ice Breaker Activities

Giving athletes opportunities to demonstrate their strengths on and off the mountain allows them to connect with their peers on various levels. Typically, girls must feel accepted in order to perform. Organizing various social opportunities and team-building activities outside of regular training creates a culture of camaraderie, acceptance and friendship. A **team social** should be held prior to the start of training. This is a good opportunity to meet the team, review the training plan for the year and have some fun! A social at the beginning of the year pairs well with the code of conduct workshop.

Throughout the season, **team-building activities** can be held to strengthen bonds and foster friendships. Activities might include:

- Movie nights
- Multi-sport activities (a hike, soccer, volleyball, rock climbing)
- Team dinners
- Community events
- Team fundraiser events

It is also important to keep regular training fun and to create opportunities for the athletes to become more comfortable with their peers. **Ice breaker activities** are a great way to start or end the training day. Some examples of these are:

- *Girlstyler Bingo*: using paper, create a grid with various qualities written in each square wherein athletes must find and write the name of a peer who matches that quality (for example, “favourite trick is a 360”)
- *Compliment circle*: pair participants up and have partners face each other creating an inner circle and an outer circle. Athletes must give their partner a non-physical compliment. Once they have done this, the outer circle moves one person to the right and repeats until they have moved around the entire circle
- *60 second facts*: the setup is the same as the compliment circle but instead of giving compliments, participants have 60 seconds to find out as many facts about their partner as they can before moving to the right
- *Human knot*: all participants stand in a circle and randomly hold hands in the middle. The goal is to untangle everyone’s arms without letting go
- *Empathy drawing*: each participant is given a piece of paper and a pencil. The coach calls out a series of specific drawing instructions (“draw a circle in the middle”, “put a cross above it”, “shade in one corner”, etc.). Participants are not allowed to see anyone else’s paper and instructions can only be given once. All participants reveal their drawings at the same time, demonstrating that everyone has a different perception, understandings and likes/dislikes and that none of these are wrong
- *Scavenger hunt*: hide ski-related objects and group the athletes into teams to find all of the items on the provided list
- *Rock, paper, scissors tournament*: two participants face off first while the rest of the participants wait in a line. Players who lose must become the cheer squad for the winner. Eventually, the whole team will be standing behind one player in the final round

PART 4 Coaching Female Athletes

"It definitely is special when you bring girls together. There's this natural environment that's fun, encouraging and there's a sense of camaraderie and friendship. I don't know if that's how we're raised as women or if that's an innate energy that comes from within us when we spend time together and we connect; but it's a really special thing."

– Danika Mazur, Head Girlstylerz Coordinator, Freestyle BC

Statistics and Barriers

"Adolescence is a pivotal time for predicting whether or not a girl will continue to participate in sports as she grows older. Alarming, as girls enter adolescence, their overall participation rate drops by 22% and school sport participation drops by almost 26%" (The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS 2016).

"Women and girls typically report more barriers to sport and physical activity participation across their lifespan than men and boys, affecting their involvement as participants, athletes, coaches, officials and leaders" (Tucker Center, 2007; Werthner, Culver & Mercier, 2010).

"Girls self-reports of barriers to physical activity include a lack of encouragement, positive role models, self-confidence, and the money necessary to participate" (Youth Net Halifax, 2001).

"As athletes, women and girls may be subjected to training programs and interpersonal situations that are not suited to their needs and do not support optimal preparation or performance" (Johnstone and Millar, 2012).

"Women and girls, who account for more than 50 percent of the population of Canada, continue to be underrepresented in the sport and physical activity system. It is time to create optimal conditions and systems that support women and girls to be active at all stages of participation and competition, and in all roles" (Johnstone and Millar, 2012)."

- *“PHYSICAL BARRIERS e.g., low physical fitness; presence of illness/disease; lack of physical literacy (knowledge of fundamental movement skills/fundamental sport skills).*
- *PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS e.g., limited confidence in their physical abilities or knowledge about physical activity and sport; low perceived behavioural control; low physical self-efficacy. There may be feelings of fatigue, fear, lack of confidence or negative attitudes; concerns about body weight, poor body image and low self-esteem.*
- *TIME-BASED BARRIERS e.g., too much work or school work; responsibilities to care for younger siblings, children, or elderly parents; housework or chores; parental or family expectations for women and girls to be at home. Women often report feelings of guilt or experience difficulty prioritizing sport and physical activity participation over other responsibilities and interests.*
- *INTERPERSONAL BARRIERS e.g., low family or partner or caregiver motivation to support women’s and girls’ physical activity engagement; family or partner or parental belief that sport is not as important for females as for males; lack of social support including a lack of peer support; limited positive feedback; limited role models; concerns about being perceived as unfeminine or a lesbian; and contradictory marketing messages and strategies.*
- *ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY BARRIERS e.g., cost; access to appropriate equipment; transportation; access to quality facilities; lack of culturally relevant activities; language and literacy barriers; experiences of discrimination or racism; accessibility issues for women and girls with a disability. For females with care-giving responsibilities, there may be limited access to alternative care or respite from such roles. The built environment and/or climate may pose additional challenges, both directly and indirectly.*
- *PROGRAMMING BARRIERS e.g., lack of choice and variety, no female-only opportunities; low quality/untrained instructors and coaches; undesired focus on competition or specialization; commitment requirements” (The Canadian Sport for Life association, 2012, Pages 10 – 11).*

Coach Values

In this manual, the application of best practice in coaching female athletes is not about the content of progression and skill. Rather, it focuses on the *coach's attitude* towards working with female athletes. Coaching female athletes requires some practices that may not align with the coach's original philosophy. However, if the coach hopes to create a better professional experience and a better training environment for their athletes, there are some easily adoptable values. The acronym C.A.K.E.S. outlines five important values that Girlstylerz coaches should prioritize in their practice and philosophy:

Communication: *There are two parts to this focus.*

Focus part 1 is communication with the athlete. Coaches should always be conscious of their behaviour and model appropriate language while talking to and *about* girls. This is not only a positive example for female athletes, but it sets healthy boundaries for male athletes too. Everything a coach says and does is closely revered by the athletes. Parents and teachers don't always get to be their child's role model. However, coaches often are due to the shared passion for sport and the athlete's admiration towards the coach's knowledge and accomplishment within the sport. Being a role model is a great responsibility not to be taken lightly. When possible, diverge away from small talk that draws attention to the athlete's image, such as clothes and hairstyle. Rather, always make an effort to acknowledge intrinsic qualities and accomplishments. Coaches should strive to acquire a strong self-awareness for this is required of good communication skills and thoughtful question-asking.

Focus part 2 is communication with the parent or decision-maker of the athlete. Parents simply want to know what is going on and it is their right to know. More information available to parents will make it easier for coaches and coordinators to implement training opportunities. There are two easy ways to improve this line of communication. The first is a quick and simple verbal check-in at the beginning or end of each training day. *"Today we are refining 360 and working towards 540"; "[Athlete] was making great progress with their turn timing in the moguls today"*. This offers the opportunity for parents to ask questions about training and programming.

Another strategy that will improve communication and also contribute to the organization of the program is to implement the use of one or more online communication platform (for example, Team Snap or Google Calendar). This allows the coach to convey important information and feedback quickly to multiple users.

Advocacy: Advocacy is an extension of communication. Coaches in any sport should always stand up for gender equity but it is even more important of coaches in male-dominate sports. Coaches should always be considering the needs and well-being of their female athletes at meetings, events, competitions or summits. However, this level of consideration is necessary on and off the clock. For example, if a colleague uses derogatory or demeaning language even in private, they should be redirected. Coaches should take the time to reflect on commonly used words or phrases that may contribute to the marginalization of women so that they can correct it when it used by others.

Kindness: Coaches should always strive to demonstrate a demeanor of kindness. It is natural for kids to act out as they deal with the inevitable upheavals of social dynamics and hormones during the stages of growth and maturation. *It's hard being a kid because kids can be mean!* Therefore, it is important to show kids how *not* to be mean. Coaches are role models and if athletes see their role models behaving disrespectfully to others, then there is no hope of breaking the cycle. According to McLeod (2018) on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, "Students need to feel emotionally and physically safe and accepted within the classroom to progress and reach their full potential". This is true of the athlete being more likely to reach their full potential in sport if they are exposed to a training environment where they feel safe and accepted – where the people around them are kind.

Empathy: Coaches should always strive to act professionally, not personally. They should be diligent in their willingness to acknowledge and honour the life experiences and perspectives of their athletes and their families. If the coach does not agree with the values and life choices of a particular athlete and their family, it is not the place of the

coach to say so². Adopting the practice of total empathy will increase the level of respect between athlete and coach and therefore create a working relationship free of conflict.

Skiing As Love: Coaches should avoid encouraging small talk that emphasizes a culture of dating within the training environment. This is something that will likely manifest on its own and should not be superfluously prompted. Athletes should find *freedom* from the pressures of social dynamics in their sport – they should not feel *distracted* by it. Strive to help athletes find love in their training, their goals and ultimately, within themselves.

Managing Social Dynamics

It is the coach's responsibility to be aware of and to manage the social dynamics of the group. This is a challenging task when paired with the responsibility of athlete tracking and progression. Nonetheless, facilitation and monitoring the team's social dynamics is a crucial part of creating a positive training environment. In a poll taken in 2019, it was recorded that 21.4% of respondents consisting of all girls and women within the Freestyle BC organization claimed that they feel most excluded and disempowered by their male peers. On the contrary, 7.1% indicated that it is their female peers who cause feelings of exclusion and disempowerment. In total, more than a quarter of girls and women reported on exclusion by peers in the sport. This section looks at four proactive strategies for managing the social dynamics within the team environment.

1. **Host a conduct discussion for male athletes.** This could be held in a similar format to the code of conduct session outlined on page 12 of this manual. The coach/host should gather the athletes in an off-snow setting to highlight the expectation that all teammates should be treated with respect and positive encouragement. This can be a very challenging topic to address with a group of adolescent males. It would require the coach/host to have a strong connection

² If a coach suspects an athlete's well-being or safety is compromised, they should refer to procedures outlined in The National Coaching Certification Making Ethical Decisions module.

with the group prior to implementation and to be well prepared with an organized plan. The key focus should be to open up a dialogue about derogatory or demeaning language towards or about girls and women. The coach/host should emphasize the seriousness of eliminating commonly used words or phrases that may contribute to the marginalization of women.

2. **Be a safety net.** The coach should establish the role of someone who can be trusted and who can be contacted for help. This message should be conveyed to the athletes and their families early on in the training season. Coaches can uphold this role by having frequent check-ins with the athletes and inquiring about their state of social and emotional well-being. However, these check-ins should be discrete. If the coach notices an athlete appears to be struggling, a private chair lift ride is a great opportunity to open up a dialogue.
3. **Establish a team leader.** Recognizing a strong, natural leader within the group who consistently demonstrates good team values is a great way to support positive social dynamics. The coach may want to officially appoint a team leader or can subtly delegate tasks to a chosen athlete (for example, leading the group inside for lunch).
4. **Pay attention.** The coach should always be attentive to the interactions between athletes on the hill, in the lodge and on social media if possible. An easy intervention to ensure an inclusive group setting is to delegate chairlift groups and to ride the lift with different groups of athletes in order to get a feel for the social dynamics. Establish a team rule that no athlete should ride the chair alone.

Understanding Injury Risk and Prevention

This section considers factors based on anatomical differences between males and females. There is much evidence-based research indicating higher risks of injury to women specifically and it is valuable for coaches to familiarize themselves with research of this kind.

Women are two to eight times more likely to tear their ACL than men in non-contact pivoting sports (Muray et al., 2012). Gender differences in the rates of ACL injury are thought to be because of **hormonal, anatomical and neuromuscular factors** (Griffin et al., 2000).

Due to biological intrinsic risk factors and massive influx of female adolescent sport participation, late adolescent female athletes are at the greatest risk of rupturing their ACL (Hewett et al., 2006; Sell & Lephart, 2012). A 26-year case-control study found that recreational female skiers had 2.2 times greater chance of ACL injury than males (Natri et al., 1999). Similar results were found in a 10-year longitudinal study on young alpine skiers. It found that female participants accounted **for 68% of all ACL injuries** (Raschner et al., 2012).

There are various physical factors that these rates are attributed to. Estrogen and progesterone receptor sites have been found in human ACL cells, raising the possibility that there is a potential connection between these hormones, the menstrual cycle and a female predisposition to injury (Liu et al., 1996). Wojtys et al. (2002) found a strong association between the phases of the **menstrual cycle and the susceptibility of ACL injury** for female athletes. Beynnon et al., (2006) also found a correlation between the menstrual cycle and ACL injury, and reported that female skiers have been found to be **three times more likely to sustain an ACL injury** in the preovulatory phase of the menstrual cycle compared the postovulatory phase.

This research puts more emphasis on the importance of the coach's responsibility to be considerate and attentive to the athlete's reports on their physical state. It is not appropriate of the coach to ask direct questions about an athlete's cycle or other personal factors. Rather, best practice is of the coach to be diligent with a daily check-in routine. The coach should monitor and track each athletes' reports on well-being. Examples of questions that will help the coach to check-in with the athlete's general physical state include:

- How are you feeling today?
- Did you get a good night's sleep?
- What did you have for breakfast this morning?
- Are you feeling tired, thirsty or hungry?
- Are you experiencing any soreness or pain?

With research showing the possibility of higher risk of injury during the menstrual cycle, coaches must be sensitive to reports of cramps or other common symptoms. Cramps are never 'just an excuse'. Menstrual symptoms and physical experiences are in fact worse for

some women than others. Coaches must genuinely respect the athlete's reports. They can provide simple and general health solutions and suggestions; for example, "*when I feel low on energy, I drink extra water to help my body stay hydrated and energized*". If reports of symptoms persist on a regular basis, there may be a more serious health condition occurring. Maintaining regular communication and updates to the athlete's parents/guardians will help to resolve any concerns.

Anatomical differences between males and females in lower-extremity alignment, joint laxity, and muscle development potentially contribute to the higher incidence rates of ACL injury among females (Griffin et al., 2000). Hypotheses to account for why females have a higher likelihood of an ACL injury include: increased femoral anteversion, increased hip and quadriceps angle, excessive tibial torsion, and increased foot pronation (Griffin et al., 2000; Herrington & Nester, 2004). Female athletes collapse into valgus more rapidly compared to males due to increased internal hip rotation (Ebben, 2012). This can result in the compression of medial femoral condyle, and the loading of the ACL (Noyes & Barber-Westin, 2012). **In other words, girls' knees tend to cave inwards, creating more load on the ligaments and a higher risk of injury.** This evidence suggests that coaches should be diligent in their implementation of proper conditioning and warmup and cooldown routines. Failing to maintain good attention to physical preparedness while asking an athlete to perform strenuous and high-risk acrobatic maneuvers is negligent. As the expert, coaches should be well versed in appropriate and efficient warmup and cooldown routines. This will help to prevent the risk of injury. Furthermore, program coordinators should make dry land training programs available and accessible to all athletes. They should work to convey adequate information to families on the importance of dry land training. Strength training and conditioning is the most effective way to prepare athletes for the expected tasks on-snow and to prevent injury. But keep it fun and creative!

Finally, it is important to use proper progression in order to increase the likelihood of the athlete being successful when trying a new or higher difficulty trick. Encouraging an athlete to 'just send it' when they have not yet demonstrated the ability to proficiently perform the movements of the progression poses a higher risk of the athlete underperforming and becoming injured. Falls and injuries can cause major setbacks in the

athlete's psychological progress. The coach must be diligent in their athlete tracking processes, well-versed in sport-specific progression steps and both mature enough and confident in their judgment to hold athletes back or to push them further.

PART 5 Other Resources

For Directors, Clubs and Organizations

Self-Assessment

Directors, clubs and organizations should take the time to check in on how their policies and procedures are working in regards to female athlete participation and support. The Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity (CAAWS) offers a *gender equity self-assessment tool* for clubs and sport organizations and can be found at www.caaws.ca. This tool can help to better understand which areas the club or organization is excelling and also which areas can use improvement. The tool can be completed as part of a group meeting or assigned to employees and board members as an individual task. The discoveries upon completing this assessment can be disrupting, surprising and powerful.

Coach Apprenticeship Programs

One of the most effective ways the club can ensure that female athletes reach the *sport for life* category of the long-term athlete development (LTAD) model is to provide other pathways outside of high performance training and competing. Apprenticeship programs can be a great opportunity for **athletes** to acquire coaching and mentoring experience prior to their becoming certified. It is also an opportunity for high school students to fulfill Ministry of Education mandated work experience:

"To fulfill the career-life exploration requirements for CLC, all students must provide evidence that they have completed any one of the following and secure school approval that it meets the CLC requirement: A 30-hour work placement; 30 hours of volunteer or community service; 30 hours of paid student employment; or 30 hours of

fieldwork, entrepreneurship, or projects focused on an area of deep interest.” -

Retrieved from <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/support/graduation/graduation-policy-guide.pdf>

Athlete apprentices should commit to a minimum of 30 hours (5 days) per season, though the club can determine a schedule that best suits their capacities and goals. Apprentices should be under the supervision of their assigned supervising coach at all times and should never be used for ratio - supervising coaches should always take full responsibility for the safety of the athletes.

Apprenticeship programs can also be offered to **new coaches**. Arranging for a new coach to shadow a senior coach (or vice versa) on a regular basis can help to ensure the success and retention of female coaches. Rather than leaving them unattended and feeling unguided and inadequate, apprenticeship can foster new coaches to acquire strong coaching experience, knowledge and confidence. It also allows them to develop positive working relationships and creates a comfortable and positive working environment. The return on investments in new-coach apprenticeship can be a great accomplishment for the club and for the sport organization as a whole.

Suggested Eligibilities

- By invitation only
- Participants age 14+
- Individuals with 2+ years athlete experience in a sanctioned freestyle program
- Licensed Freestyle Canada (level 1/2) members
- Newly certified Freestyle Canada coaches *or* coaches looking to advance their career
- Can provide an administrative fee

Suggested Program Completion Outcomes

- A certificate of completion
- A written letter of recommendation
- A contact for a resume reference
- Insight into the role of freestyle ski coaching (techniques, strategies, athlete development, ethics)

For Parents

*“In order for women and girls to begin, maintain, and increase their sport and physical activity participation, communities, professionals, sport clubs **and parents** must work together to reduce the barriers that stand in their way.” (Tucker Center, 2007)*

Parents, guardians and other home support systems are equally as important as any professional in the sport and the athlete’s competitive career. The following are 5 strategies that parents can use to reduce barriers for their child and to better support their experiences as an athlete:

1. Become educated on the sport through volunteering, club and PSO meetings, information sessions and sport history and current events
2. Respect and trust the processes of the sport professionals (coaches, officials, directors)
3. Respect your child’s personal goals and development as an athlete
4. Encourage your athlete to be a risk-taker, teach them how to be resourceful and support them in their pursuits within the sport
5. Be present! Carpool to training, volunteer at events, attend competitions and be your child’s #1 fan!



Resources

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