



How to... 'engage with young mums'



Why it's important

Young females aged 16–25 will be at different stages of their life, some may be working, have started a family and some may be studying full or part-time. Where a female is in her life stage will have an impact on the barriers to participation in sport and physical activity. This factsheet will help to understand the barriers faced by young mums and provide ideas on how best to deliver sport and physical activity to them. Mums will have specific needs as they will have to manage childcare and other domestic chores as well as finding time and energy to engage in physical activity.



Factors to consider

Barriers and reasons for not participating

8% of the Leanne market segment (Sport England statistics) say that providing 'help with childcare' would encourage them to do more sport. Other factors such as cost and having someone to go with however are also an issue. There is a need therefore for projects to consult with the target group to find out to what extent childcare is needed. Consideration should be given to the following:

- Mums can be reluctant to leave their children so they may need reassuring that the childcare on offer is of high quality.
- Think about structuring activities for young mums in different ways: in a space where childcare is provided, mums and children together, separate activities for mums and children at the same time.
- Consider the role of other supportive carers – eg partners/mums – when are they most likely to be available to help with childcare?

Partnerships with relevant organisations such as children's centres, health centres and mum and toddler groups

Some of the most successful programmes for attracting young mums back into exercise are being conducted in partnership with a range of local organisations who engage with young mums in a range of community settings – eg children's centres, mums and toddlers groups. Using a community venue will make sure the activity is easy to access and convenient. Scheduling activity as part of the young mums' time at these activities/venues is a good starting point in considering the best way to get participants to take up physical activity sessions. The age of the children is an important factor to consider as this will greatly influence the type of session that will appeal to the young mums.



Activities for young mums with babies

Flexibility is key when considering planning activity programmes for this group. Sessions which have worked best are when mums can exercise while still caring for their young children. Sessions such as 'Pushy Mums' have operated successfully in Newham and Newcastle. These sessions are walking/exercise clubs where central to the session is the mum exercising with the baby in a buggy/pram. These sessions are usually led by an activity leader who makes the session fun and stimulating for the mums and builds on the following motivational drivers:

- Accessible – no special equipment or clothing needed
- Desire to lose weight and get back in shape
- No specific facility needs or costs
- Chance to meet and spend time with other mums
- Chance to spend good quality time with the baby in the fresh air
- Often takes place in a local park making the activity affordable and encourages females to visit their local park on a regular basis.

Other possible examples of mum and baby activities include swim and sing sessions in the pool.

Activities for young mums with toddlers and school aged children

As children get older and become mobile themselves, different opportunities present themselves when planning activity sessions for mums. Mums aspire to give their children the best possible start in life, and the majority appreciate the value of an active lifestyle for their children. Some ideas for targeting this group are:

- Family-based activity programmes through children centres and/or mums and toddlers groups where sessions for the young children are designed to involve the mums and where mums are encouraged to exercise alongside their child
- Activity for both mums and their children which take place simultaneously but in separate settings – allowing both groups to be active independently without distracting and disrupting each other. Mums will value their children gaining the skills and experienced gained through involvement in sport, as opposed to being 'minded'



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- Activity for mums and children together
- Activities for young mums in the evening when their partner or a grandparent can look after the children
- Activities for young mums with children at school where an activity starts just after they have dropped their children at school or an hour before they pick them up. This can be promoted by talking to the mums at the school gate. Time is key – if they have time to go home before the activity starts they probably won't come back out again. Activity needs to be social to continue the 'school gate chat' while doing some exercise.

Please note in all the above examples the focus has been on exploring the issue of caring for young children and its implications on becoming active. It is acknowledged that the mums also have needs and barriers outside of their caring responsibilities.





Us Girls Chorley

Timing

The timing of activities is vital when delivering to this target group. Mid-morning/daytime activities work well for young mums, however evenings are also convenient for young mums who have a partner or another family member who can look after their children whilst they exercise. Weekends are successful for family-based activities. Drop in/out sessions can be helpful for mums who are juggling childcare and other responsibilities. If possible it can sometimes help to be flexible – for example running a two-hour activity session where participants can 'drop in and out' so they just stay as long as they can.

Childcare solutions

Childcare co-operatives – This consists of a number of families in a community who decide to share childcare among themselves without the exchange of money. Members agree to take it in turns to look after the children while the mums access local services such as physical activity sessions. Childcare co-ops are usually intended for occasional childcare.

Mobile crèche providers – There are many mobile childcare providers that deliver quality and accessible childcare to community groups and local organisations. Most provide qualified experienced staff, and will provide toys, games and activities for children's play. Most cater for children from 0 – 11 years of age. Us Girls projects have often used these for one-off events/festivals.

Family support – Other family members such as partners, grandparents and siblings often help with childcare. Projects should consider when this support network is most likely to be available to look after the children so that the mum can have some free time to exercise.



Marketing and communication

Word of mouth – This method of communication cannot be underestimated and visits to local mums and toddlers groups are a must. If you can pass out flyers at group sessions and ask the leader/s to distribute also, this works well. It is worth investing time and effort in developing a relationship with group leaders as they will promote activities and provide valuable feedback.

Referrals from other service providers including health visitors – It's worth visiting the local children's centres and health clinics to explain to other service providers about the activity programme you are trying to establish. Take care to explain the ethos of what you are trying to do so you are seen as a trustworthy and credible activity provider. It is very important that other providers appreciate the quality service that is being developed as opposed to a short-term commercial operation.

Family friendly images – It is very important to ensure any marketing material produced includes family friendly images. Also ensure the images represent the activities being promoted thereby helping to paint a picture of what is being delivered.

Clarity of detail – Potential participants will need to plan their visit to a session quite intensively so it is important to provide as much detail as possible, including start and finish times, cost, equipment and clothing needs, childcare arrangements and standard of session.

Use of community-based notice boards – Identify and make use of community notice boards particularly in places young mums visit including local supermarkets, health clinics and GP surgeries.

Case study

Young mums' activity sessions, Chorley – Lancashire

The aim of the project was to engage with young mums in a specific area within the borough and encourage them to participate in sport and physical activity sessions. Young mums who attended play sessions at a local children's centre had expressed an interest in doing some sport and physical activity – one of their main barriers to participation was identified as the cost and availability of childcare. Daytime multi-sport sessions for the mums were introduced at the local sports centre with staff from the children's centre available to care for the children.

Information about the sessions was distributed to the existing young mums group and they were regularly reminded by staff at the children's centre in the lead up to the first session. The group were also consulted with to ensure that the activities being provided were what they wanted – these included trampolining, badminton, inline skating, netball and squash.

Challenges

The main challenge faced was getting the females to take part in the activities once they had arrived as a number of participants were low in confidence. To overcome this they were encouraged to join in by going on the trampoline and doing the activities with their child/ren as a way of introducing them to the activity.

Why it worked

- The sessions were delivered at no cost to the participant, immediately removing this barrier.
- The participants met at the children's centre and walked across to the sports centre together meaning that they were more confident entering an environment they had previously not been comfortable with.
- Having staff from the children's centre available to supervise the children made a big difference as the young mums could exercise, while their children were looked after.
- The sessions were delivered in an enjoyable way and within a relaxed atmosphere, participants could choose which activity they wanted to do and swap over at any time.
- The project was delivered in partnership with Chorley Council Sports Development and the Primary Care Trust.

Top tips

- Make good strong links with services that engage with young mums and consult with the target group to find out to what extent childcare is needed.
- Take time to talk to the young mums to fully understand their exercise concerns and aspirations as well as their childcare issues – ensure the instructor/coach has appropriate experience/soft skills in working with this client group.
- Think about structuring activities for young mums in different ways: in a space where childcare is provided, mums and children together, separate activities for mums and children at the same time.
- Consider informal exercise options such as walks in a local park with babies in buggies as a way of getting the group started.
- Promote carefully using attractive flyers and word of mouth to spread the message.

Further information

Download the 'Make Sport Fun' resource in the 'Branding And Resources' section on our Us Girls Website:

www.usgirls.org.uk

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