

SESSION  
**01**

# BODY TALK IN SPORT





This session sets the scene for athletes by introducing them to body talk, and how these conversations can reinforce gender stereotypes, appearance and athletic ideals, and negatively impact girls' sporting experience.

**The session will also build a foundation for session two, where athletes will learn a new way of thinking and speaking about their bodies from a functionality perspective (e.g., what the body can do and perhaps do differently to others).**

# KEY TERMS FOR TODAY

## APPEARANCE IDEAL

What society considers the ideal or 'best way' to look (e.g., girls and women should be able-bodied, thin, have a flat stomach and clear skin).

## ATHLETIC IDEAL

What society considers the ideal or 'best way' to look as an athlete (e.g., lean, toned muscles, able-bodied)

## BODY TALK

Positive and/or negative comments that reinforce appearance and athletic ideals. Whether a comment or conversation is intended as negative (e.g., "My thighs are too big") or positive (e.g., "You look good – have you lost weight?"), all body talk has the potential to be harmful. This is because these comments place greater importance on appearance, at the expense of valuing more intrinsic qualities such as someone's values (e.g., they are kind), interests (e.g., they enjoy kayaking) or actions (e.g., they support their friends).

## BODY TALK FREE ZONE

A commitment between teammates and teams to create a space where people avoid engaging in body talk and/or challenge this behavior when it occurs.

# SESSION OVERVIEW

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# SESSION OVERVIEW

## Key information you need to know before delivering Session One

### Who: Team players

- ▶ Remember, the same coach should lead all three sessions of the program.
- ▶ Athletes will benefit most from the program if they attend all three sessions!

### What: Body talk in sport

- ▶ In today's session, athletes will learn about body talk in sport and how this type of conversation can negatively impact their body image and sports participation, and offers strategies for challenging these conversations.

### When: Session length and schedule

- ▶ Today's session will take approximately 60 minutes.
- ▶ It is the first session of a three-session program.
- ▶ Ideally, coaches and athletes will participate in one session a week, over a three-week period.

### Where: The physical space & vibe

- ▶ Today's session will involve group discussions and writing activities.
- ▶ You will need a quiet, private space for discussions and writing.
- ▶ Athletes will have the opportunity to write their thoughts and reflections about these discussions and activities in their personal workbooks.

### Why: The learning outcomes

By participating in today's session, athletes will:

- ▶ Understand what is meant by body talk, who engages in it and where.
- ▶ Recognize the negative impact that body talk can have on athletes' body image and sports participation.
- ▶ Develop strategies for challenging body talk and creating a Body Talk Free Zone.

# SESSION OVERVIEW

How: The structure, content and materials

## 01 THE GAME PLAN 5 MINS

## 02 THE KNOWLEDGE 20 MINS

## 03 THE SKILLS 20 MINS

## 04 THE FINAL SCORE 15 MINS

## RESOURCES YOU'LL NEED

### Session materials

- Coaches' guide
- Program slide deck
- Athletes' personal workbooks

### From your sports club or school

- Electronic device to display slide deck
- Whiteboard/recording surface/markers or pens



LET'S GO

# THE GAME PLAN



# THE GAME PLAN

15  
MINS

## Introduce the Program

- ▶ "Research shows that girls often worry about their appearance when playing sports."
- ▶ "These worries can take girls' attention away from playing and enjoying sport."
- ▶ "Today's the first of three sessions that will help you to feel more comfortable and confident in your bodies while playing sports."
- ▶ "During the sessions, we will participate in individual and group activities."
- ▶ "These activities will offer new and helpful ways to shift your focus from how you look when playing sports back to enjoying the game."

## Establish commitment and ground rules

- ▶ Ask the athletes for their verbal and/or non-verbal (e.g., raising hand) commitment to participate and support one another during the three sessions.
- ▶ Ask athletes to establish 3-5 ground rules.
- ▶ Record these rules on a large piece of paper that you can bring to each session as a reminder.

## **DESIRED RESPONSES**

- ▶ Confidentiality
- ▶ Judgment-free zone
- ▶ Listening and paying attention when others are speaking
- ▶ Open-mindedness

## **COACHES' NOTES**

- Establishing and sharing rules among a team is a useful way to create a different feel from normal team sessions.
- It is worth taking time to ensure these rules feel collaborative and, if necessary, adjusting them to suit the needs of your team.





LET'S GO

THE  
KNOWLEDGE

# THE KNOWLEDGE

## Introducing body talk in sport

### Introduce Session 1

- ▶ "As a group, we will explore how 'body talk' encourages gender stereotypes, appearance and athletic ideals. We will also discuss how this type of conversation can negatively impact athletes' body image and participation in sport."
- ▶ "We will also explore ways that we can challenge this conversation and create a 'Body Talk Free Zone'. We will do this through a mixture of group discussions and written exercises."

### Group discussion and activity

- ▶ Ask athletes to have their personal workbooks (digital or hardcopy) ready for recording their thoughts/answers.



### What is body talk?

- ▶ "Who would like to read aloud the definition for body talk from their workbook?"
- ▶ If you have access to a digital device, show Slides 3 and 4 of the presentation deck and play the 2 x Body Talk videos ('with friends' and 'with the team').
- ▶ "What do these two videos teach us about body talk?"



### DESIRED RESPONSES

#### Definition & videos:

- ▶ Society (e.g., our friends, family and the media), can put pressure on us to look a certain way. For example, in some countries, the 'ideal' girl or woman is able-bodied, thin, has clear skin and white teeth. Body talk refers to any comment, positive or negative, that reinforces the idea that there is one right way to look.
- ▶ The first video demonstrates how body talk shows up when giving friends compliments about their appearance. This type of conversation can still be harmful. By saying her friend's haircut makes her face look thinner, suggests that having a round face is a bad thing. These comments suggest that there's one ideal way to look, which in this case is to have a thin face.
- ▶ The second video demonstrates how body talk is used to tease other people. The first boy is teased about being too small (e.g., 'light as a feather'), which is not in line with the muscular ideal that society promotes for boys and men. The boy responds to teasing by calling his teammate fat. In both instances, being small or fat are considered bad things, and reinforce that boys shouldn't be either.

# THE KNOWLEDGE

## Introducing body talk in sport



### How do we speak about ours and other people's bodies when playing sports?

- ▶ "Let's brainstorm the different ways we often talk about our bodies when playing sports."
- ▶ Invite an athlete to record the group's responses on a whiteboard/surface area.

#### DESIRED RESPONSES

##### Answers could include:

- ▶ Complimenting others based on their appearance (e.g., "I wish I had your legs. They're so thin"); Commenting on our own appearance to others (e.g., "I look so fat today; I think I'll run a few extra miles after training"); Comparing ourselves to others (e.g., "Brittany has the perfect body. I bet she never worries about how she looks"); Teasing people based on appearance (e.g., "You're too fat to be wearing those shorts.", "You can't join in, you're in a wheelchair!").

### Who engages in this body talk and where?

- ▶ "When it comes to playing sport, **who** have you heard engage in this body talk and **where** do these conversations tend to take place?"
- ▶ Invite another athlete to record the responses.

#### DESIRED RESPONSES

##### Answers could include:

- ▶ **Who** - ourselves, parents or family, friends, other young people, bullies, advertisements, magazines, websites, social media platforms, fashion industry, celebrity culture, diet industry, social media, influencers.
- ▶ **Where** - in the locker room, getting changed or trying on uniforms, during warm-up/cool-down, on the commute to training/games, over text-message, on social media.

# THE KNOWLEDGE

## Introducing body talk in sport



### How might body talk (positive or negative) impact girls when they play sports?

- ▶ "How do these conversations, both positive (i.e., a compliment) and negative (i.e., a teasing comment from a sibling) impact us when playing sport or in sport-related environments (e.g., in the locker room; warming up)?"
- ▶ Invite another athlete to record the responses.

### DESIRED RESPONSES

#### Answers could include:

- ▶ These comments or conversations can make girls hyper-aware of their bodies which makes it harder to concentrate on playing the sport; girls who overhear the conversation may start to feel insecure and compare their appearance to the person being complimented or teased; girls might start to change their behavior in order to modify their appearance (e.g., running extra laps; skipping meals); it keeps up social pressures to look a certain way; it can reinforce gender stereotypes (e.g., girls don't take sports seriously; girls are only worried about their appearance)

### COACHES' NOTES

- Research shows that girls and women frequently engage in body talk, both as initiators and recipients.
- This dialogue, positive and negative, has been shown to negatively impact girls' body image, self-esteem and overall mental health and well-being, even after just a few minutes.
- Body talk can be very subtle and normalized within many environments, including sports environments.
- By helping your athletes to identify what body talk is as well as how it negatively impacts them and their teammates, it will be easier to create a **Body Talk Free Zone** and hold the athletes and team accountable to upholding this culture.
- If one or more of your athletes lives with a physical disability and/or a visible difference (e.g., a scar, mark or condition on your face or body that makes you look different), sensitively explore how body talk may show up differently for them.



LET'S GO

THE SKILLS

# THE SKILLS

## How to challenge body talk in sport



### Group discussion and activity | 5 mins

#### Overview of pairs activity

- ▶ If you have access to a digital device, show Slide 6 of the presentation deck. This provides an example of a body talk statement and a challenging comeback. If girls struggle to come up with challenges, show Slide 7 which provides general responses.
- ▶ "Research shows that girls and women frequently engage in body talk, including hearing it and saying it."
- ▶ "These conversations, positive and negative, can be harmful for girls' body image, self-esteem and overall mental health and well-being."
- ▶ "Body talk can be very subtle, and normalized within many environments. It can also catch us off guard."
- ▶ "Together, we are going to create a Body Talk Free Zone, as well as commit to one another to stop the body talk culture."
- ▶ "In doing this, we need to be able to challenge or counteract body talk when we hear it."
- ▶ "In this activity, we are going to generate helpful responses to use when we hear body talk."
- ▶ "In pairs you'll receive two body talk statements and you will create a quick comeback response for each statement."
- ▶ "After five minutes, you will share your body talk statements and comebacks with the team."
- ▶ Using the Body Talk Statements on the next page, allocate two statements to a pair.

# THE SKILLS

## How to challenge body talk in sport

### Body Talk Statements

- ▶ You look amazing! Have you lost weight?
- ▶ I feel so guilty. Last night I binged on birthday cake.
- ▶ I look so different to everyone else, I'll never fit in.
- ▶ I just need to lose 5 pounds and then I'll be happy.
- ▶ I ate too much today. I need to run extra laps.
- ▶ I can't keep up with my friends, they're going to stop inviting me to things.
- ▶ I look terrible, I don't want to be in the team photo!
- ▶ I hate my legs, they're covered in stretch marks.
- ▶ My medications change my weight all the time, I just want to be thin/curvy like my friends.
- ▶ Are you sure you should be eating that?
- ▶ I wish my body could do what their bodies do, I'm useless.
- ▶ I look gross. I'm sweaty and all my make-up has rubbed off!
- ▶ She's too fat to be wearing those shorts.
- ▶ Have you gained weight? You might want to start watching what you eat.
- ▶ I wish I had your legs! Mine are so fat and short.
- ▶ I hate my body, it hurts all the time and everyone stares at me.
- ▶ I don't want to lift weights. I'm getting too bulky. Guys hate a bulky girl.



# THE SKILLS

## How to challenge body talk in sport

### DESIRED RESPONSES

#### Examples of body talk statements and challenging comebacks:

- ▶ **Body talk statement:**  
"I look so fat today".
- ▶ **Challenging comeback:**  
"I wish we weren't all so hard on ourselves! Bodies come in all different shapes and sizes. A healthy body is one that has good mental and physical health. It's important that we take care of our bodies and appreciate them."
- ▶ **Body talk statement:**  
"I hate my legs, they're covered in stretch marks".
- ▶ **Challenging come-back:**  
"Really? When I see your legs, I'm reminded how strong they are – not about your stretchmarks. Besides, stretchmarks are completely normal! No one has 'perfect' skin."
- ▶ **Body talk statement:**  
"I look gross. I'm sweaty and all my make-up has rubbed off!"

- ▶ **Challenging come-back:**  
"Did you see what you did out there? Sweating shows how hard you played. How about we focus on that and not what we look like?"
- ▶ **Body talk statement:**  
"She's too fat to be wearing those shorts".
- ▶ **Challenging come-back:**  
"Wouldn't you hate having someone judge how you look when playing? Let's talk about how we played, not about how we look."
- ▶ **Body talk statement:**  
"I wish my body could do what their bodies do, I'm useless."
- ▶ **Challenging come-back:**  
"Every body has value and is worthy. Each of us have special talents that make us perfectly us."





# THE SKILLS

## How to challenge body talk in sport

### COACHES' NOTES

- Remember to avoid comebacks that reinforce unrealistic appearance and athletic ideals. These include comments such as "You're not fat!/"If you're fat, so am I!", etc.
- It is important to consider how body talk may uniquely impact girls with a physical disability or visible difference. For example, an added challenge for this group of girls is that body talk promotes ableism, by suggesting that the 'ideal' body does not have a physical disability or visible difference. Alternatively, girls with similar disabilities might engage in body talk that is disability-related or specific (e.g., wheelchair users may unhelpfully compare and comment on their upper body strength and size).
- To help create and maintain a Body Talk Free Zone, you can encourage your athletes to create posters that list the body talk statements and possible come-back responses.
- These prompts can be helpful reminders in spaces where body talk is most common (e.g., locker rooms, etc.).

### Group discussion and activity | 5 mins

#### Overview of group discussion

- ▶ "In your pairs, Person One read aloud the body talk statement and Person Two read the comeback."
- ▶ "Feel free to write down the comebacks you hear and find helpful."
- ▶ Once the pairs have shared their statements and comebacks, reiterate the potential harm of body talk statements, and ask the athletes for their verbal and/or non-verbal (e.g., raising hand) commitment to creating a Body Talk Free Zone.

### **BODY TALK FREE ZONE**

A commitment between teammates and teams to create a space where people avoid engaging in body talk and/or challenge this behavior when it occurs.



LET'S GO

# THE FINAL SCORE

# THE FINAL SCORE

15  
MINS

## What have we learned today?

- ▶ "Can someone briefly describe what we learned today?"
- ▶ Remind athletes to challenge body talk over the next week.



## Introduce the Three-Step Sense Check

- ▶ If you have access to a digital device, show (Slide 8 & 9) of the presentation deck; this provides an infographic of how to use the Three-Step Sense Check.
- ▶ "Taking a moment to connect with your body and listening to its needs can help you feel calmer and more confident."
- ▶ "The Three-Step Sense Check can be used anywhere, anytime. It's designed to be a simple way for athletes to check-in with what their body needs."
- ▶ "Sometimes your body may need nothing. Other times it may need a small act of self-care (e.g., taking a deep breath; an extra five minutes of stretching)."
- ▶ "The Three-Step Sense Check goes as follows:"

## **01. SLOW DOWN**

- ▶ "Pause and take three deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth."
- ▶ "If you feel comfortable, close your eyes."

## **02. CHECK-IN**

- ▶ "Scan your body, from top to bottom. Pay attention to what your body is feeling. What sensations are you noticing? For example, are you cold? Are you hungry?"
- ▶ "Does your body need something? For example, do you have tension in your shoulders? Do you need to get a snack?"

## **03. MOVE-FORWARD**

- ▶ "Now that you've checked in with your body, act in a way that meets your body's needs. For example, stretch parts of your body that feel tension. Go and get a quick snack."
- ▶ "You can use this exercise anytime, anywhere. For example, before you start practice, or while you're traveling to your game!"
- ▶ "This is a brief act of self-care that helps you to connect with your body."

## That's the end of the session!

- ▶ "Now we're going to practice quietly on our own."
- ▶ "Over the next week, practice the sense check before, during or after a practice or game."

# THE FINAL SCORE

15  
MINS

## COACHES' NOTES

- Athletes are more likely to engage in the sense check if they are prompted and encouraged. Create a space where sense checks are normalized, encouraged and modelled by people in influential positions (e.g., coaches, team captains).
- Creating visual prompts in sporting environments (e.g., locker rooms) is a valuable strategy for embedding the sense check into athletes' routine.
- Coaches can use the infographic provided in the slide deck (Slide 9), to guide athletes through the three steps.



# SESSION COMPLETE!