

Girls, Sports and Self-Esteem

By Linda Muehlbronner | Tue, 04/19/2011

In the April issue of **kidSPORTSMAGAZINE**, Linda Muehlbronner wrote an article: “Girls, Sports and Self-Esteem”. In her article she says,

“It must be frustrating for a parent... your daughter, who at age six or seven was active, self-assured and confident, now at age ten seems to be more self-conscious and is constantly comparing how she looks to other girls.



Studies show that as girls move from grade school to middle school, their self-esteem drops significantly.

Generally, boys are not affected as dramatically as girls in this loss of self-esteem as they mature. Why does this happen? What can parents do to help their daughters make the transition to the pre-teen and teen years while keeping their self-esteem in tact?

A 1998 study by the Women’s Sports Foundation shows that girls drop out of sports at a rate six times higher than boys as they move from grade school to middle school. Could participating in athletics help young girls maintain their self-esteem?

As it turns out – yes.

“Playing sports allows girls to have a presence and a voice,” says Agnus Berenato, head women’s basketball coach at the University of Pittsburgh. “It makes them competitors. Being surrounded by a team, a coach, a mentor all working for the same goal helps girls learn to take charge and feel successful.”

The lessons in teamwork and leadership, and the social network a team provides all positively impact self-esteem.

“When you surround yourself with people who have the same interests as you, and you’re all willing to come together several afternoons a week to practice, you just have to be more productive than girls sitting inside in front of the television or on the computer,” Berenato continues. “Playing sports helps girls develop better social skills and makes them more determined to succeed.”

Dr. Paul Friday, Chief of Clinical Psychology at University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, Shadyside, says, "Participating on a sports team can help to balance the cruelty of school for girls. It helps balance the natural tendency girls that age have to include and exclude other girls. The team becomes the girls' social group, something to anchor themselves to."



Berenato adds, "For me, one of the most important parts of practice is when we stretch and warm up. It's a time when the girls can gab and chat and find out what's happening with each other. It helps them feel connected to each other."

As girls get older, they appear to tie self-esteem to not only physical appearance but physical competence as well. Athletics can be a way to put the emphasis more on physical ability and not appearance."