



The issue of girls and boys wanting to play in each other's teams may arise occasionally. This isn't a concern when children are young, but it can become more complex as players approach adolescence and differences in physiology and ability begin to emerge.

Information to help you understand the issue

- Generally girls and boys prefer to play in same sex teams.
- Some girls want to compete with boys (and vice versa), especially if there is not an equivalent same sex team available.
- Girls and boys do play in mixed teams, particularly when sports are modified or a team could not otherwise be fielded.
- Age and gender are not always good indicators of ability e.g., there are strong, agile girls and weak, poorly coordinated boys and vice versa.
- Each situation is different and there are no easy answers.

Australian women's cricket captain Jodie Fields and BMX world champion Caroline Buchanan are among many elite female athletes who had to "mix it up with the boys" in their formative years because there was no girls' competition in their respective sports.

Would they still have reached elite levels if clubs had turned them away?

The debate doesn't just hinge on whether the next crop of female "stars" has access to appropriate competition. Many sports advocates believe that even at a grassroots level, mixed training and competition can foster mutual respect; improve both boys' and girls' social skills; enhance resilience; and provide experiences that will help them in their broader lives.

When they are of primary school age it is not uncommon for girls to play in boys' teams. Yet when girls enter their secondary years, questions are often asked about their physiological make up compared with male participants.

When weighing up the situation, there can be no "one size fits all" solution. Age and gender are not always the best indicators of ability. Each case needs to be considered on its merits.

In deliberating whether a girl should play in a boys' team, parents, administrators and coaches all need to assess a number of factors.

Parents need to weigh up not only their child's physiological capabilities, but her motivation for playing, skill level, competitiveness, and whether there is support from within the club. They also need to know how to support their child's confidence and resilience in the face of any direct or indirect criticism.

Coaches need to foster and encourage the skills that girls need to play and ensure they get as many opportunities as boys. This includes managing safety issues for all participants and making fair decisions on selection.

Administrators need to be open-minded. A good point to start from is to explore ways to support a girl's participation before making any decision. Administrators must also understand that preventing a girl playing in a boys' team may be discriminatory. However there is no definitive answer with courts making different rulings over the years.

Although the law allows for sports to have separate teams, if you prevent a girl playing in a boy's team (and vice versa) it may be unlawful discrimination. The area is not clear cut and has been tested in court with different results.

To explore some of the issues associated with having girls playing with boys, read and listen to the [interactive scenario](https://www.playbytherules.net.au/resources/interactive-scenarios/girls-playing-in-boys-teams) ([/resources/interactive-scenarios/girls-playing-in-boys-teams](https://www.playbytherules.net.au/resources/interactive-scenarios/girls-playing-in-boys-teams)). The scenario also includes links to interviews with an Australian and New Zealand Sports Law Association lawyer discussing clubs' duty of care and what clubs should consider when deciding whether to allow a girl to play on a boys' team.