

the
futures
company

the coming together of
Henley Centre HeadlightVision
and Yankelovich

Investigating reasons for sport drop-out amongst 16-19 year old girls

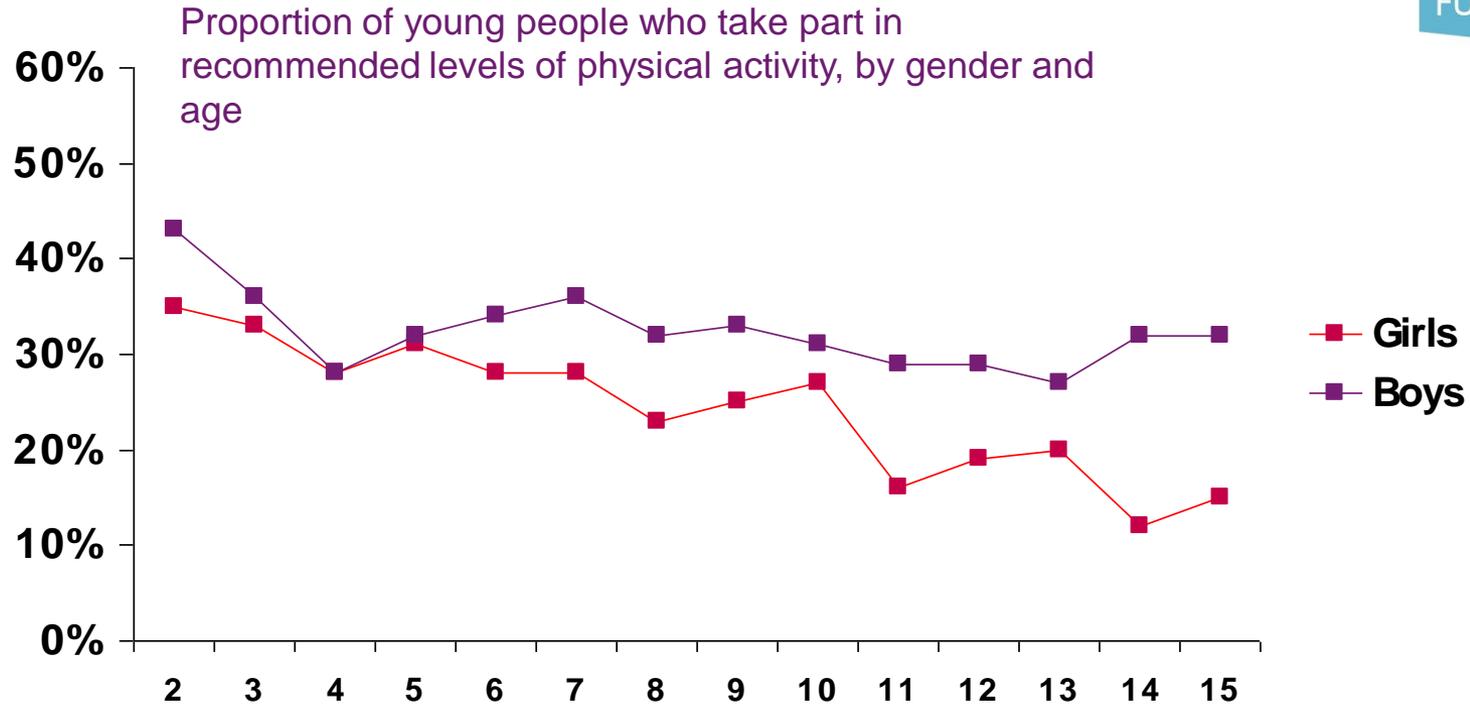
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Background, objectives, and research methods

Teenage drop-off – the problem



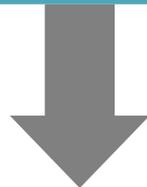
In all sports, almost half as many 16 – 24 year old women take part in sport as men of the same age

Background

In all sports, almost half as many 16 – 24 year old women take part in sport as men of the same age

Many sports notice a significant drop out or withdrawal from their sport among female participants in their teenage years

9 National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs), have identified retention as a target and want to gain a deeper insight around drivers and barriers to participation as well as sport-specific motivations.



WSFF and Sport England commissioned the Futures Company to carry out a definitive piece of research to identify key reasons (practical, psycho-social and individual sport specific) for young women dropping out of sport, and identify further interventions to shape a new future.

THE PROBLEM: 9 National Governing Bodies of Sport (NGBs), have identified retention as a target and want to gain a deeper insight around drivers and barriers to participation as well as sport-specific motivations.

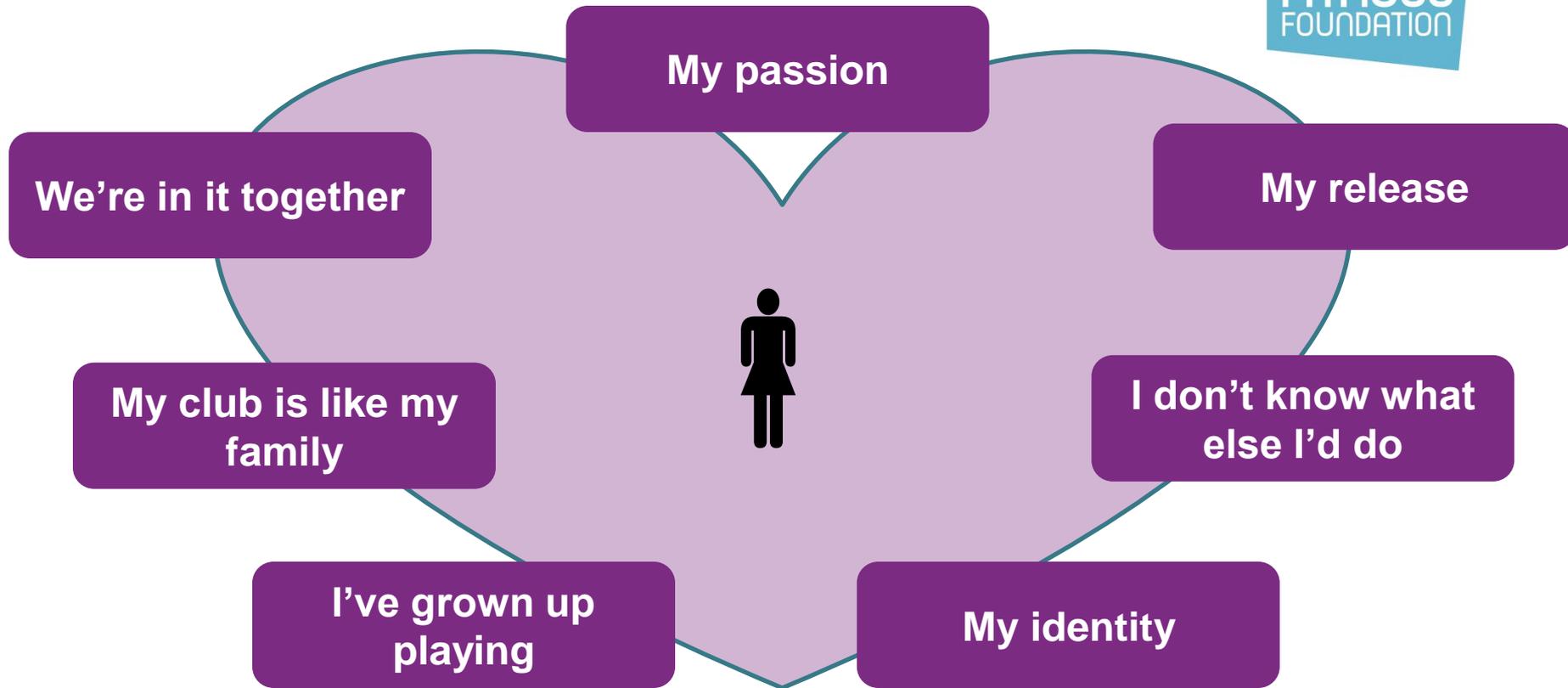
OBJECTIVE: identify key reasons (practical, psycho-social and individual sport specific) for young women dropping out of sport, and identify further interventions to shape a new future

WHO: WSFF commissioned the Futures Company to carry out the bespoke research

HOW: Paired interviews and focus groups with 16-19 year-old current participants and non participants from each of the 8 participating sports (badminton, tennis, basketball, hockey, football, rugby union, rugby league, netball)

What do girls love about sport?

Girls who don't drop out of sport tell us they feel a powerful sense of belonging



**Safety and
Escape**

**Friends &
Socialising**

**Challenges &
Achievements**

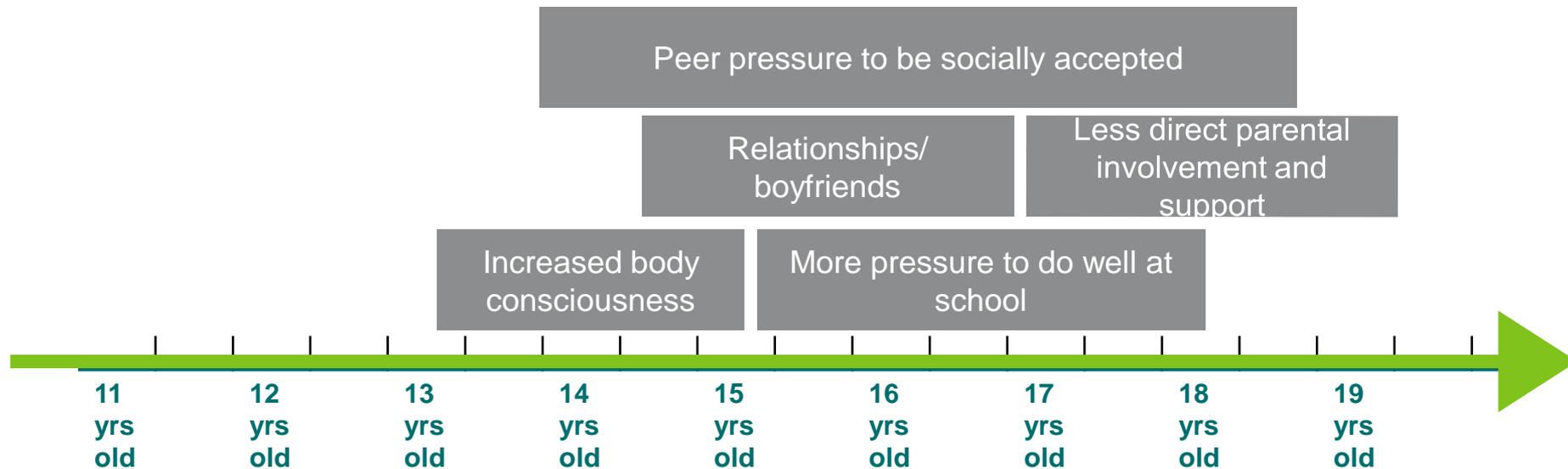
Enjoyment

**Fitness &
Opportunities**

**Team spirit
and support**

Context to teenage years – challenges and changes

Teenage years can be challenging as girls experience a number of competing pressures and go through many personal and lifestyle changes



Understanding the pressures and demands of being a teenager is critical to understanding the role of sport in their lives.

Body consciousness starts becoming an issue

Looking sweaty and red-faced is something teenage girls can become concerned about.

For some, this can be a big enough reason to purposely avoid situations where they may feel exposed and embarrassed – they may stop playing



There are some girls at school who purposely don't exert themselves in matches because they don't want to get sweaty and ruin their make-up!"

"I get really red-faced when I play sport and it's embarrassing if people see me".

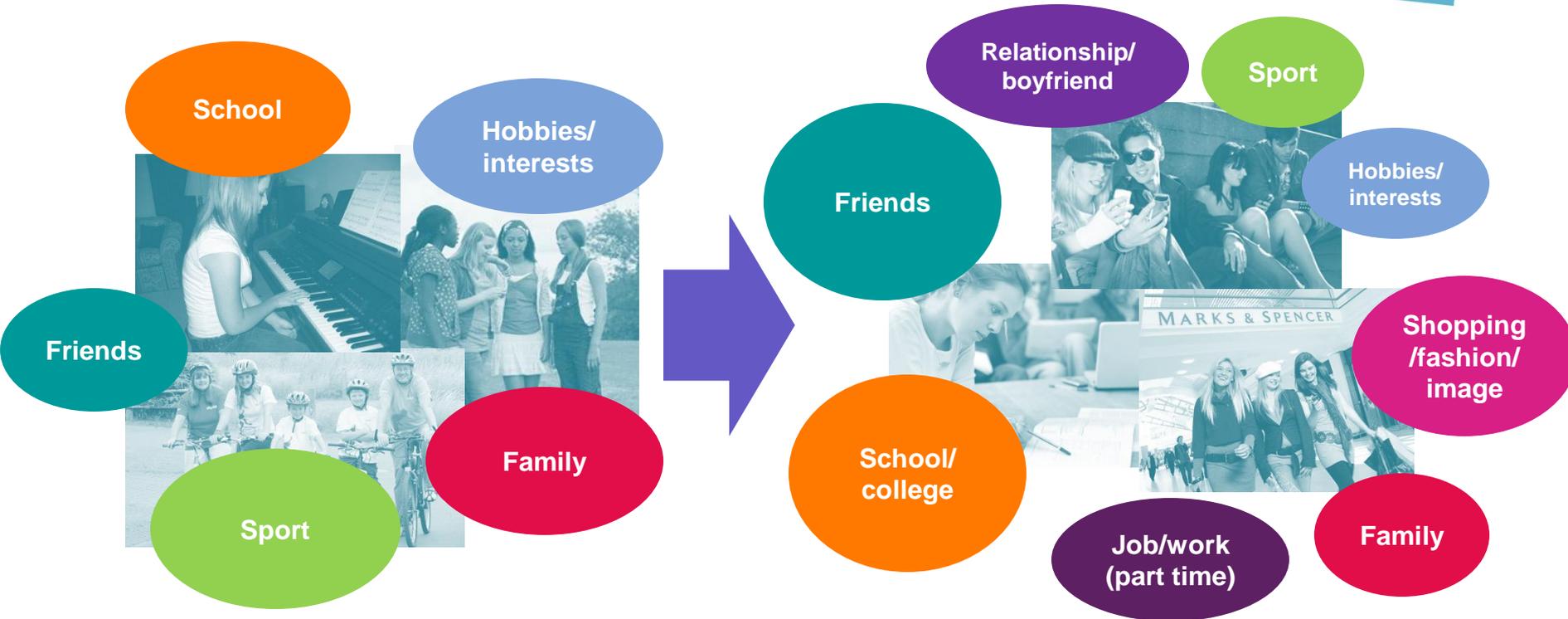
Psychological issues start becoming significant influencing factors as teenagers become more concerned about their image and being accepted by

peers

Their interests change and their priorities shift and expand as they get older

Young teenage girl (13 yrs)

Older teenage girl (16 yrs)



Suddenly girls have other interests and pressures in their life to contend with – from boyfriends, jobs and school/college work to keeping up with the latest trends and fashion

With so many interests and limited time, sport has a lot to compete with

There is a point where teenagers (typically aged 16) evaluate their interests.

“There comes a time when you have to decide what to give up and what to pursue – you can’t fit everything in!”



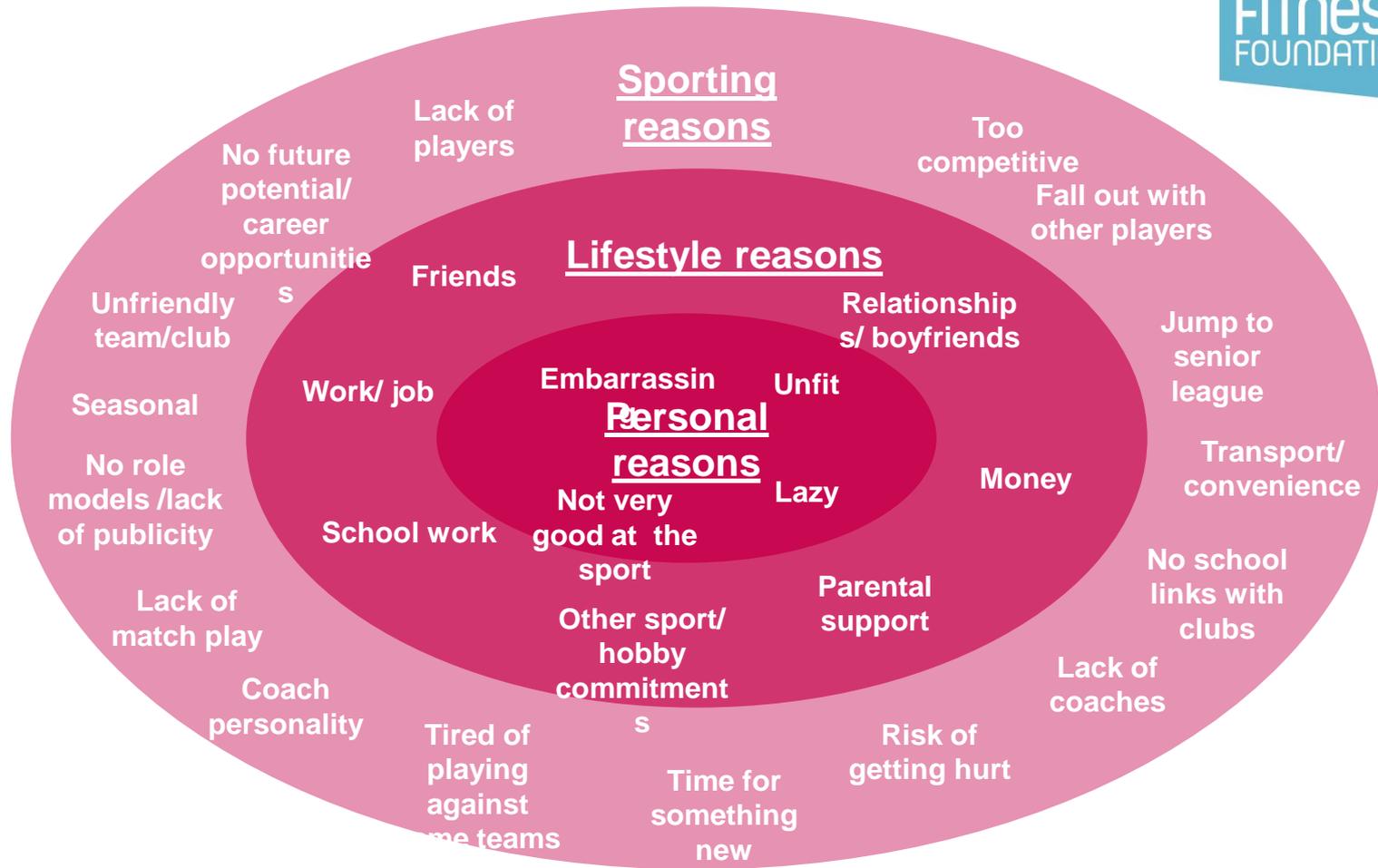
“What do I enjoy most?”

“What am I going to benefit from most?”

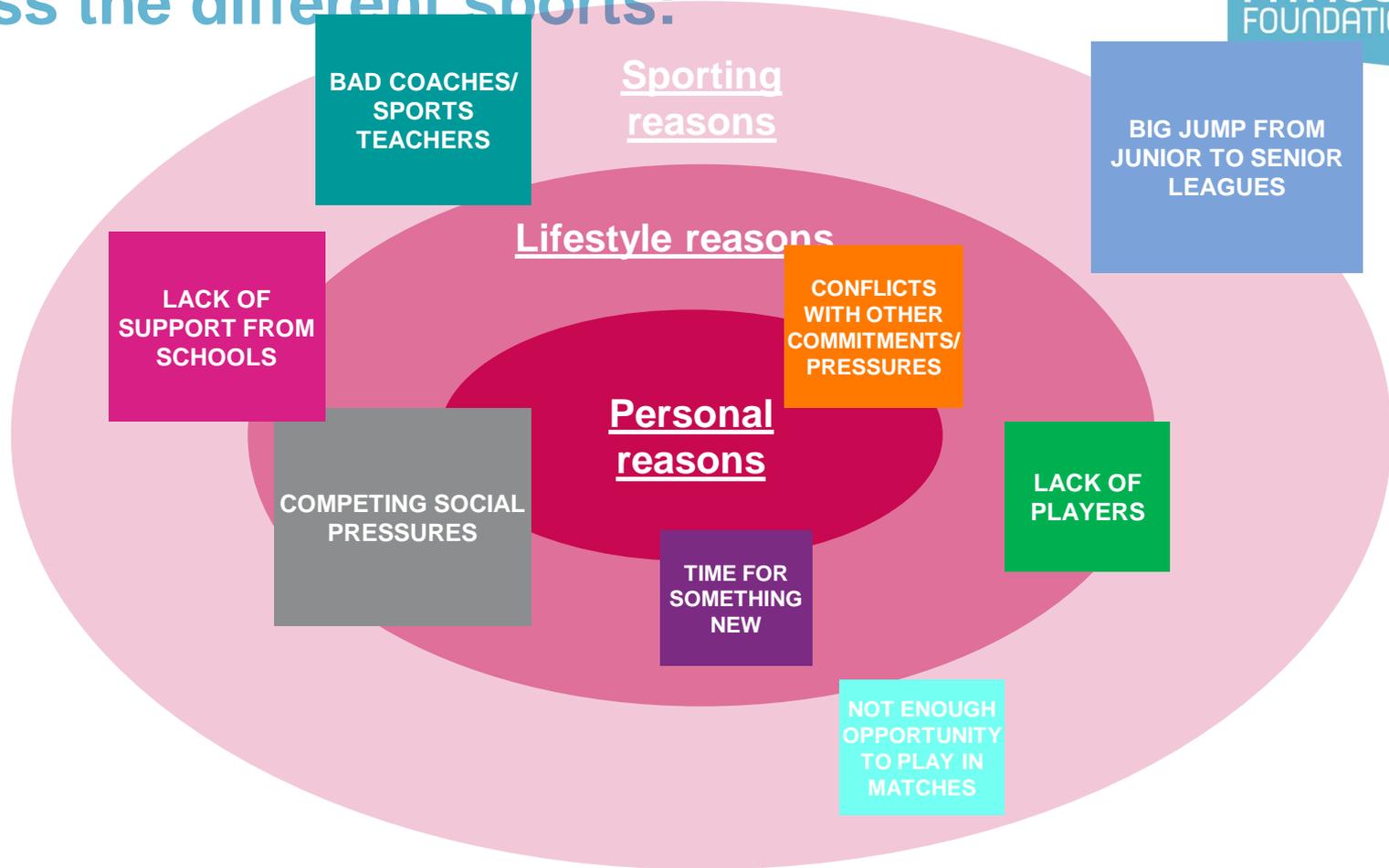
“What will I get further in?”

Whilst this does not necessarily mean that sport is given up completely – in many cases the number of sports they participate in is reduced or levels of participation drop.

Across three main areas, there are a vast array of reasons for drop out:



There are some key reasons that jump out in particular as common across the different sports:



These reasons correspondingly fall into personal, lifestyle and sporting areas, although they are often interlinked.

Key reasons for drop-out

**LACK OF
SUPPORT FROM
SCHOOLS**

**COACHES/
SPORTS
TEACHERS**

**CONFLICTS
WITH OTHER
COMMITMENTS/
PRESSURES**

**BIG JUMP FROM
JUNIOR TO
SENIOR
COMPETITION**

**TIME FOR
SOMETHING
NEW**

**COMPETING
SOCIAL
PRESSURES**

**NOT ENOUGH
OPPORTUNITY
TO PLAY IN
MATCHES**

**LACK OF
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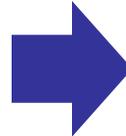
**LACK OF
PLAYERS**

**TIME FOR
SOMETHING
NEW**

Dedication and commitment to a sport can, after while, become something of a burden

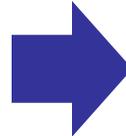
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Playing a sport from a young age can get boring after so many years



Girls who have played a particular sport for a long time can reach a point where they become tired and bored and yearn for something new – either another sport or a non-sport interest.

Playing sport at a high level requires a lot of commitment and dedication



Having to commit and dedicate a lot of time to play at a high level can become too much for some girls. They can become resentful of the sport and leave to regain some freedom.

“There is too much training at a high level and if you started young you may get bored by a certain age – that happened with me with rowing”.

“People can get bored of playing and stop. I swam loads when I was younger but when I was 16 I started going less – it can take its toll and I wanted to take up the opportunity to try dancing or rowing”.

Sometimes girls just want to try something new – it bears no reflection on the sport experience itself.

VOX POP (1)

Played for so long I'm now bored of it



New interests in socialising and increased focus on studies mean that sport may have to take a back seat

Increasing independence/freedom



Girls start to discover **new interests** (socialising, shopping, going out) and as a result drop other past-times including sport.

Greater emphasis on education and academic success



From the age of 15 girls start focussing more on studying, and feel under pressure to do well in exams (GCSEs and A-levels). As such, more time is spent studying leaving less time to spend on hobbies/interests.

“When everyone gets to 15-16yrs that’s when you start drinking and going out and developing a social life – it takes over and becomes a **priority**”.

“People get boyfriends and would rather spend time with them”.

“School work and exams get in the way of playing”.

“You have to work – your parents can't support you forever!”

This is a difficult issue to address but sports need to be understanding of competing pressures and help girls find ways to fit sport into their lives.

VOX POP (2)

Other things have to take priority



Time pressures may compromise dedication to sport

Other interests (another sport, job or other) require fixed, regular commitment



- **Scheduling of interests can clash – two things happen to be on the same day at the same time – and one gets dropped.**
- **High level sports require a lot of commitment and it can become hard to juggle other sports as well. As a result, sports tend to get dropped so the girls can focus on just one.**

“I played for a team (Badminton) but it conflicted with rugby training so I had to stop. My friends were in rugby”.

“I was on the first team (hockey), but I prefer dancing, dancing is what I do. It will help with my career- it’s about priorities”.

“I was on a hockey and netball team but I gave up as did a foundation in art which takes up time”.

Whilst a sport can’t be designed to fit around every girl’s schedule, permanent drop out could be reduced by making it easier for girls to come back to a sport once their conflicting interests have ended.

VOX POP (3)

I had to chose between two
sports and prioritise

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VOX POP (4)

Loss of motivation at University



The coach's role is vital in the quality of the sport experience

Some coaches are unenthusiastic



Coaches play a crucial role in enthusing players. Without their enthusiasm and commitment, players can lose interest and leave.

Some coaches have favourites (often the really good players)



Unfair decisions and preferences can mean that girls miss out on match play. This leaves players feeling undervalued and demotivated.

An overly aggressive, critical or serious coaching approach is very off-putting to girls



Girls need to feel supported and understood, as well as be allowed to have fun, otherwise their enjoyment of the experience can be ruined.

Enthusiastic, supportive, committed and fun coaches are key to maintaining teenage girls' interest in and commitment to the sport. Having a female coach is much less important.

What girls have to say...

“I had a bad football manager – he was never around – he was too quiet and didn’t encourage us. He also had favourites”.

“Some of my badminton coaches took it too light-heartedly – they didn’t care whereas in rugby the coaches weren’t like that and with them I wanted to try harder and impress my coaches more”.

“Some coaches shout a lot at you and some people don’t like that and take it personally – it can put them off”.

“A coach makes it for you – if they’re not enthusiastic then you’re not. If you get picked on it makes it a horrible experience for you”.

“Jackie (football coach) was good – she was relaxed about things and if you did something wrong, instead of shouting at you, she would just mention it and tell you how to do it better next time”.

VOX POP (5)

Coaches focus only on the A team

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VOX POP (6)

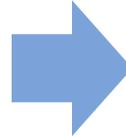
The coach needs to be approachable,
make me want to turn up

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The transition from junior to senior competition is a sudden and significant leap

**Senior players are more experienced/
better players**



Girls are concerned that they won't be as good, they might struggle to keep up and lack confidence playing against senior ladies.

Senior players are at a different life-stage



Senior ladies can be aged from late twenties to fifties and have different interests to teenagers. A lack of common interests makes it harder to socialise and bond (especially in team sports).

Senior players have a different attitude towards the sport



There is a feeling that women either take sport too seriously or too light-heartedly and in either case these girls view the sport differently.

VOX POP (7)

How some clubs are tackling the standards gap

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Drop out myths



Some hypotheses of reasons for drop out were disproved in the research



The training sessions were too rigid



Regular sessions are appealing – they ensure dedication and good turnout .



There were no female coaches



Female coaches are not critical – their attitude is more important.



There was too much focus on competing rather than fitness



Playing matches is 'what it's all about' – not getting enough match play can be a reason for drop out.

“If you didn't have the commitment [to a certain day] then there may not be enough of you turning up.”

“You have to be careful you don't dilute the sport for people who actually enjoy playing it. If you start changing the rules and the game then what is badminton?”

Some hypotheses of reasons for drop out were disproved in the research (cntd...)



There was too much admin and form filling



This is not considered as relevant.



There was no opportunity to participate with boys



Girls like participating with girls – boys can be overly competitive and too rough (as well as off-putting because increases girls' body consciousness)



The facilities were poor



Facilities – even if poor - do not stop girls playing.

“Boys get angry and have a go at you when you get something wrong. They're much more competitive and make you feel rubbish but girls are more motivating and say, “unlucky””.

“We just sign and the secretary fills it all in for us”.

“We don't really have proper facilities, but there are ways round it.”

Any questions?