



SPÓRT
ÉIREANN
CÓITSEÁIL

SPORT
IRELAND
COACHING

Coaching Teenage Girls in Camogie

Top Tips and Case Studies

#Women
InSportIRE



ciste na
gcuntas díomhaoin
the dormant
accounts fund



THE
CAMOGIE
ASSOCIATION
An Cumann Camógaíochta

COACHING TEENAGE GIRLS

TOP TIPS

FROM CAMOGIE
CLUB COACHES



TOP TIPS THAT CAMOGIE COACHES HAVE IMPLEMENTED AND SHARED FOLLOWING THEIR ATTENDANCE AT THE SPORT IRELAND 'COACHING TEENAGE GIRLS' WORKSHOP

1

CREATE SESSIONS THAT REFLECT THINGS THAT GIRLS VALUE IN THEIR DAILY LIVES

Allow time for them to chat and connect socially. This will give them more from the coaching sessions, bond them better as a team, and strengthen relationships, an important motivator for girls to take part in sport.

2

ENSURE SESSIONS ARE WELL PLANNED TO GIVE GIRLS THE OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE AND FEEL GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES AT EVERY SESSION

We know that moments of pride are a fundamental anchor for teenage girls. Helping every girl feel valued can also help to offset the difficult navigation of team selection for competitions.

3

USE POSITIVE AND APPROPRIATE LANGUAGE AND TONE

Language and tone plays a big role in making sure girls feel like they belong. Girls engage more positively with coaches who incorporate more 1-1 time, act more encouraging, and reduce the amount of shouting (even if not 'angry' shouting).

4

GIVE GIRLS MORE VOICE AND CHOICE.

Whether through a team survey, or just by regular and focussed engagement with each girl, it is so important to ensure that teenage girls' voices are listened to. Asking girls for their thoughts gives them a greater sense of empowerment and ownership of their sporting experience. When girls are more engaged, the coaches job is easier too.

5

TAKE TIME OUT FROM TRAINING TO JUST HAVE FUN.

Girls really value social time, not just as extra time to chat before or after training, but as time away from the pitch. Team away days and activities give an even greater opportunity for bonding, and to build a sense of community and belonging around their sport.

6

PROVIDE CLEAN TOILETS WITH SANITARY PRODUCTS.

Dirty or inaccessible toilets and a lack of sanitary products and sanitary bins are a sure fire way of telling teenage girls that they don't belong there. Making small changes to support girls during puberty can make a BIG difference to their experience and shows that you value their needs.

7

PROVIDE APPROPRIATE CLOTHING.

During the teenage years, girls develop physically at very different rates and will likely feel self conscious about their changing bodies. Well fitting clothing and kit helps them to feel more comfortable and confident to better navigate this difficult time. Ensure bibs and jerseys cater to girls of all sizes. Consider whether skorts are a necessary part of the club kit. Remember – ask girls what they think and want.

8

BE GREAT ALLIES.

Whether a man or a woman, every coach can be a great ally for camogie and an important influencer for girls sport in general. Wider societal factors mean that girls don't always feel valued for playing sport. Coaches can ensure that girls feel that they belong by consistently demonstrating their commitment to and belief in the girls and their abilities.

CASE STUDY

Coaching teenage girls Ballyhale Shamrocks Camogie Club

Ballyhale Shamrocks Hurling Club was established in Kilkenny in 1972, with the Camogie Club following just 3 years later in 1975.

The small club serves a parish of only about 350 households. However, hurling is an important sport in Kilkenny and there are many local families involved in the club.

Catherine O'Mahoney became part of the Camogie Club in 2021, helping out with the U14 girls who needed a female coach to join the ranks. Catherine, whose daughters play at the club, had no hurling background but recognised the need for softer skills to support the girls.



RECENT PICTURE

In recent years, the club started to recognise the need to better support the girls at the club. They were aware of the number of girls dropping out, particularly at 15 and 16 years old. Not only did this mean fewer girls were getting the benefit of playing camogie, but also meant they were increasingly fielding a minors' team (Under 18s) that contained players from under 14 and under 16 age groups: a situation that makes a team fragmented and exposes younger girls to playing opponents much stronger and more experienced than them.

When Catherine joined the Camogie Club, she immediately made sure there were sanitary products in her team's kit bag and ensured she had keys to the toilets, so that no girl was ever in a position of not being able to access a toilet during training. She raised the importance of cleanliness standards in the toilets as well.

There have been some challenges at times with equal access to main pitches. There is appetite to change this, however, and the Chair is working with the Hurling Club to ensure equal access for all. Also, there is currently major development in the Club with new facilities being planned. This should help alleviate any access issues.

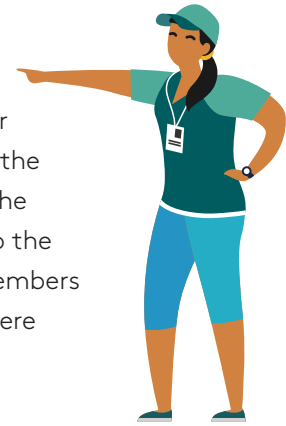
Catherine heard about the workshop from the camogie club secretary. Fairly new into the club, and working with the U14 girls, Catherine understood the importance of attending the workshop.

“

*The girls don't
feel there is
equality*

”

Catherine describes feeling nervous at the beginning of the workshop due to her lack of camogie background; however, she quickly realised that it wasn't about the coaching at all, and she had a lot of value to add in supporting the girls. After the workshop, Catherine created a presentation and 'brought the workshop back to the club'. This meant she could share all that she had learnt with the committee members and set out her suggestions for the changes that could be made at the club. There was a positive reception to this shared learning.



POST WORKSHOP

Since the workshop, a number of new ideas have been introduced at the club, particularly at U16 level where this is currently being piloted. With the club being small, it was important to recognise that there wasn't a huge budget for lots of big ideas. Any new ideas would need to be relatively inexpensive to implement.

Time to talk

Coaches ensure that before and after training sessions, the girls have time to talk to their friends and have a good catch up. There has to be a social outlet to ensure sport is about more than just health or winning and to ensure girls own their experience, ensuring it reflects their existing behaviours in other spheres.

Up the fun!

Training sessions have to be fun. The coaches now periodically run sessions where they play music throughout to up the energy and enjoyment factor for the girls.

Taking Control

Ahead of the annual Féile, the Camogie Club made funds available to cover any costs associated with the event for the U15 team. However, the girls were supported to raise funds for the tournament. They each gained sponsorship to do a 5km run during one of their training sessions. There were 22 girls and between them they raised €1,200. In preparation for the tournament, the girls used the money to design their own jerseys, aiding their sense of belonging in the team.

“
They were delighted with the jerseys, they were so proud of themselves.
”

The girls saw great success at the county competition and progressed to the regional finals. Unfortunately, they weren't as successful at the regional competition, but the coaches were passionate about maintaining the team camaraderie, ensuring they all were together at the end of the day to eat, laugh and shake off the defeat. They recognised the importance of the opportunity to build the girls' resilience.

Sharing the leadership

One of the most effective changes has been rotating the captaincy in the U16 Team. Traditionally the oldest girl was captain and the second oldest was vice-captain. Now each girl takes a turn to captain a match. It makes them much more invested in the match and gives a voice to the quieter players. They all want to be captain and are very happy when it's their turn.

“
They feel really good about themselves. You can almost see them getting taller!
”

Guest coaches

In order to keep training fun and interesting, guest coaches have started making appearances at sessions. Currently it's just club coaches from different age groups but there are plans to bring in external coaches. The girls responded especially well to one of the players from the intermediates. Having a current player that they look up to coaching them made them really commit to their training. They clearly admired her and listened to all she was telling them and took it on board.

FUTURE PLANS

Whilst there have already been quite a lot of changes made to the way they engage girls at the club, there are still more ideas to come:

Education

There are several physiotherapists playing at the club, and the coaches have asked them to come in and do a talk for the girls in the 'at risk' age bracket about how to look after their bodies. They will talk about warming up and warming down, preventing sprains and strains, and injuries to watch out for. The coaches will be present at the session to encourage the girls not to feel shy about the conversation. The hope is that girls are more empowered by having a deeper understanding about how their bodies work. Also, that they feel it's ok to talk about things that affect their bodies.

After the talk, there will be light refreshments and a chance for the girls to just hang out. Following the session, the club is then going to fund a physio session for any of the girls struggling with an injury or in need of some physio. This will be with full parental consent.



The coaches will put together some short factsheets to share with parents. They are keen to share vital information with parents about what to look out for as the girls' bodies change through puberty. The Club Health and Wellbeing Officer also ran a mental health talk in the summer for the whole Club – both boys and girls.

The coaches also plan to run some weekend breakfast sessions, where they will use a local community tearoom to provide breakfast for the girls after training for a small fee (€5 pp).

Team building

The coaches have recognised the challenge of having 3 different age groups in one team – the girls are all in different years at school, and sometimes in different cliques. The need to pull them together has been recognised. Having asked the girls what they'd love to do, they are all going to a water obstacle course in the summer, followed by a pizza out afterwards. This will help the team bond and reduce the chance of girls dropping out.

SUMMARY

- It doesn't need to be an experienced coach to change the environment for girls in a club – all it needs is some passion, consideration and some freedom to give ideas a try.
- Creating a better experience for teenage girls doesn't have to be expensive – the best ideas can be free.
- Empowering the girls by listening to them has a big impact on their enjoyment and sense of belonging.

CASE STUDY

Coaching teenage girls

Mungret St. Pauls Camogie Club

Mungret St. Pauls is a large Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) club based in Limerick. The camogie club was founded in 2009.

Alan and Annie Browne got involved in the camogie club in 2018 when Alan took their daughter to a coaching session. Alan was already involved in coaching his son's teams in hurling at Mungret.

Alan recognised that the experience the girls were being given was not going to keep them engaged in the sport, and he wanted to assist in creating an environment and culture that would give them a positive and fun experience of playing camogie.



RECENT PICTURE

There are currently over 200 girls playing camogie at the club, from under 6s through to under 16s.

In the under 12s alone, the number of girls has increased from 14 to 64 in 4 years. New players are still joining nearly every month.

'The U6, U8, U10, U12, U14 girls train 2 to 3 days a week now, but Thursday night, we have all age groups training at the same time. We have christened it "Takeover Thursdays"! The pitches are full of girls and camogie is out in front for all to see!'

By doing this, a buzz has been created at the club. There is also now a sports shop and coffee shop on site which means parents often visit there to browse the kit or get a coffee, staying just to enjoy the atmosphere.

Positioning the girls on the juvenile pitch ensures that they are in a prominent place, and means that people see how much fun the sessions are from the busy foot fall of passers by, which also supports player recruitment.

There is a very open culture where parents and girls are encouraged to talk to the coaches. Some of the proudest moments for the coaches have been when they receive messages from parents saying what a difference they see in their girls - from confidence, to ability to cope with anxiety - all because of playing camogie at the club.

“

We saw that kids were queueing for up to 20 minutes to get one touch of the ball.

The concern was how are they going to keep the girls engaged when they're standing for large parts of the session in the cold with little structure to the training.

”



“

Thursday night is now camogie Takeover Thursday night!

”

WHAT ARE THE SUCCESS FACTORS?

Building the team

Building the right coaching team and setting a positive culture were extremely important parts of the camogie club's success.

Alan knew he would need to build a strong coaching panel in order to cater for the huge influx of girls to the club and appealed to some of the boys' hurling coaches who he knew were great coaches. He challenged them to come onboard with coaching the girls as well as the boys! The number of coaches has gradually increased as the number of girls has increased.

Now there are 16 coaches in the U10–14 bracket alone, with a mix of men and women. It's important for the girls to have female coaches too who serve as role models. Some of the coaches are experienced, some are still developing their skills, but every one of them is encouraged to display the positive culture that the club is striving for.

Beyond the coaching, there is acknowledgement that the organisation, communication and promotion, are all crucial to a successful club. As PRO of the Camogie club, Annie has taken the lead in these areas, enabling the coaches to concentrate their efforts on planning and delivering great sessions on the pitch.

Planning

The most important thing about training is to have it planned in advance to ensure that you meet the needs of the players. There needs to be a clear structure with a warm-up, some skills, strength and conditioning and always have a game. The juvenile club has an annual plan, broken down into sessions. The plan is designed and communicated to the coaches. The coaches come to training knowing what they're doing, and this makes all the difference.

Fun

Training must be fun for the girls. If we want girls to keep coming back to training, they've got to enjoy it.

The aim of the club is to make it more fun to come to camogie than to go to any other activity, even if it means sacrificing a small part of training on some nights. The sessions start and end with fun.

Training might start at 6.30pm, however the girls are told to be there for 6.15pm. They arrive, get ready and have the opportunity to bond for 15 minutes before the whistle goes and then the session begins.

“

We're not there to train 64 All-Ireland camogie players, we cater to all different needs.

”

“

People will never see the amount of time you put into planning, but the minute you don't plan, they'll see it straight away.

”

“

Their first memory of the night is the coaches greeting them with a smile.

The second memory is meeting their friends and bonding for 15 minutes.

And the last memory is having fun before they go home.

”

Allyship

Creating a 'Coaching Group' representing the various teams in the club has made a difference. The group ensures that the juvenile camogie club has a voice and that the girls are empowered.

The strength of the 'Coaching Group' and the growth in squad numbers has given the girls more gravitas in the club when fighting the battles for equality, building on the work already put in by the coaches who went before them. It is also hugely important for the girls to know that they have the 'Coaching Group' behind them and standing up for them.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE BEEN OVERCOME?

The biggest challenge is changing people's attitudes towards camogie. The sport was always number four in the order of priority at the club. There is still an undertone that camogie is not as important as hurling. Changing minds, however, has been a focus and there is a real sense that opinions and attitudes are shifting.

The club also runs into challenges in marketing. A recent flyer (at the draft stage) advertising all the juvenile team training times featured a picture of 7 male hurlers of various ages, however no pictures of girls. Whilst the request for female representation on the flyer was well received, and the flyer was changed, it demonstrated the challenge that camogie is not yet front and centre.

“

One night at training, mid session we were approached to move pitches. A boys match was due to be played, but they had forgotten to book a pitch. We were expected to accommodate the fixture by moving.

We pointed out that there was an alternative pitch available, which would cater to the boys needs and most importantly, not disrupt our training which was in full swing! After a little hesitation, they agreed to do so. This shows that the mindset in the club is changing for the better!

The girls could see what had happened and were delighted that they were "front and centre" for a change!

”

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE 'COACHING TEENAGE GIRLS' WORKSHOP FOR YOU?

The workshop played a significant role in continuing to educate the club about what is important for teenage girls. In total, 6 coaches from the juvenile camogie club attended the workshop, showing the commitment to getting this right.

Despite all the exciting changes that have been made at the club already, the team recognise that there is still more to learn and more that can be done, such as:

- Maintaining commitment to strength and conditioning to ensure the higher risk girls face of ACL injuries is mitigated in every way possible.
- Ensuring bibs and uniform are used in a way that doesn't cause distress or discomfort to girls wearing them.
- Making sure the level of competitiveness displayed throughout the club is reflective of the ambitions of the girls, not the coaches.

SUMMARY

- Create a club culture that nurtures girls and provides a sporting experience that is made for them.
- Ensure coaching sessions are well-structured and fun.
- Use male allies alongside strong female leaders to support the drive to offer a better experience for teenage girls.

CASE STUDY

Coaching teenage girls

Valley Rovers Camogie Club

Valley Rovers is a small camogie club with approximately 160 players from under 7s through to the senior team.

Over the last four years, a group of coaches has been building a small but resilient squad of girls. Having started playing together in under 8s, they are now U15/16s.

As a small club in rural Ireland, the aim has been to 'lose no one' and to keep the squad together. With the limited number of players, losing even 1 or 2 girls would mean that the team would no longer have enough girls and it would be difficult to keep it going. The focus has always been on the whole team.

FOCUS ON TEAM

To build the focus on team, the coaches have employed a number of tactics.

Player Profiles

Each year the girls are asked to complete a player profile, to give the coaches the opportunity to get to know their likes and dislikes and so they can find out what makes the girls tick. The questions asked can be seen in the form below:

Valley Rovers Camogie Player Profile
Name:
Address:
School:
Favourite camogie position?
Other sports you play if any?
Favourite food?
Favourite song?
Favourite film or series?
What I find difficult in camogie?
What I enjoy in camogie?
Camogie goals for the year if any?
Name three things that make a good teammate.
Name one thing my coaches should know about me to help them coach me better

Some of the questions, such as favourite food and song etc were used for team bonding, making a game out of getting to know each other after training.

The camogie related questions were used by coaches alone to help them understand how they could support the girls. They were very conscious of protecting the privacy of the girls, the forms were just for the coaches.

With a better understanding of what the girls find difficult about Camogie and what they really enjoy, the coaches were better able to tailor the camogie experience for them, and build on their areas of weakness.



The importance of understanding the girls' goals, both collectively and as a team was considered vital to retaining them at the club.

DAYS OUT

Continuing the team building theme, days out and activities have been a regular feature over the years. The girls are always asked what they would like to do and they have been on trips to a water park, out for pizza and on a Halloween trail. They take training to the beach twice a year, to keep it fun and exciting.

This approach ensures that camogie stays fun. The activities build team camaraderie, confidence and support for each other.

One of the members of the team, was in a play and the camogie team all went to watch her perform – she was so proud that all of her team were cheering her on.

The coaches are always conscious of raising money for the team. Whilst parents were asked to contribute something towards the cost of the trips, there was always an amount that had been put in by the club to ensure that the trips were affordable for everyone.

Having money available that they had raised, also helped to build the team spirit. When they got into any final, the girls were given a t-shirt, whether that was county, regional or national. They felt really proud of having the t-shirt.

“

Girls have other things going on and you shouldn't cut them off from that.

I was constantly texting the soccer coach or the football coach to find out what they had going on at the weekend so we weren't competing.

”

CAMOGIE AS PART OF THEIR WIDER LIVES

From the player profiles, coaches were able to pick up on what other commitments the girls have, and this was built into the training and match schedule.

This included working particularly closely with the football coaches, making sure that matches didn't clash. Coaches also coordinated training schedules during the week so that extra emphasis could be placed on the sport that had a match that weekend, without putting increased pressure on the girls.

“

We would work with coaches in other sports and their parents to work around their commitments.

We wouldn't judge girls for missing training, but work around them so that they were able to remain part of the team.

”

A SQUAD NOT A TEAM

Equal opportunity for everyone was a heavy feature, particularly at the younger ages. All the girls got equal game time in league and practice matches. Only in championship matches from U12's up, was emphasis placed on putting out the stronger team as "the committed ones deserved there chance to win + compete at the highest levels also".

This approach was clearly communicated to all the girls and their parents, so there was never any dispute or feeling of unfairness. The coaches held a meeting with the parents at the start of each year to share the plan for the year ahead.

COACH THE BASICS

It is so important to coach the fundamental skills at a young age, so that they start out on the correct footing. If they have the skills from a young age, it is much easier to keep them progressing as they get older. When there are gaps in skills, it becomes more obvious as they get older and it is harder to overcome at that point.

WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE WORKSHOP FOR YOU?

The coaches picked up so much from the workshop, cementing some things that they knew, but also highlighting lots of things that they could do as a result:

- The importance of recognising that coaches have to be aware of what is going on in girls' wider lives, especially as they start getting to 15 or 16 years old, turning into young women.
- The workshop opens a broader picture of everything that affects coaching teenage girls – it just opens eyes.

“

We were planning 5 years ahead from u12s, we want most if not all to be playing senior camogie when they hit 17/18yrs old

You have to have a goal to hold onto the girls. If you just plug along every year and see how you do, you might lose them. The girls have good expectations.

We saw they were so interested and that they enjoy it. It was their goal too.

”

“

I am also involved with the local divisional senior ladies panel "Carrighdoun" aged 17/18 up.

And from what I see it gets a lot more difficult as they get older to get them out training & for matches. But I know every club/ Division in the county is having the same difficulty. Because of covid these young ladies were locked up for 2 years, and now any chance to go out, they're gone, anything that comes up, they're gone. It's very difficult.

You have to make camogie something they want to do.

”

SUMMARY

Factors that contribute to success:

- Coach the basics.
- Focus on building the team – it's not an individual sport.
- Equal opportunity for all – equal game time.
- Meet the parents every year and share the plan, maintain this communication throughout the year so that nothing is hidden.
- Plan in fun days out to keep the team involved and all together.

#Women
InSportIRE



SPÓRT
ÉIREANN
CÓITSEÁIL

SPORT
IRELAND
COACHING

www.sportireland.ie