

THE GREATEST GIFT



*How your teenage daughter (and
you) can thrive within the LGFA*





Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Good for the Body	5
Chapter 2: Good for the Mind	8
Chapter 3: Teenage Kicks	11
Chapter 4: Common Ground (and the Subtle Art of Sideways Conversation)	15
Chapter 5: You Don't Know Everything	18
Chapter 6: Some Days, It's Just A Nope.....	22
Chapter 7: Pressure Makes Diamonds (But Also Cracks)	25
Chapter 8: Encouraging by Example	28
Chapter 9: Wrapping up the Greatest Gift.....	31

One of the oddest things about being a parent or a guardian is that your beautiful new baby daughter doesn't come with an instruction manual – and yet somehow we all manage to get through the early years of their life (relatively) unscathed.

There are loads of reasons for this. Of course, we all have a lot of built in common sense. Some of it is innate, and some of it is learned. Then we have people who've already been through it and can lend their experience and 'expertise'.

One thing's for sure, there's never any shortage of people willing to give advice on how you should parent your daughter – no matter what age she might be.

This is not one of those books, you'll be pleased to hear.

The LGFA strives to be a modern, innovative and well run organisation that provides a quality service and support system for all members, from an 8 year old girl kicking her first ball in her local club to a high-performance athlete scoring her first point in Croke Park.

That is the spirit this book is produced in – it's about the positive impact that sport can have on your daughter's life. Particularly the positive aspect of being involved with a sporting organisation such as the LGFA.



Why we created this ebook – and how we believe it's going to help you, as parents and guardians

It's not rocket science, but we do have an expert in child psychology in the esteemed shape of Dr Malie Coyne on board to offer some helpful hints on how best to deal with some common issues.

The book is intended to be useful for every parent/guardian. Most of us will encounter the same issues along the way in our daughter's sporting life and being aware of them in advance can help us

deal with them a little better, for all of us.

Similarly this is not some secret recipe for success, hopefully you'll find Dr Malie's tips useful, but we're not suggesting you play mind games with your daughter – you should feel free to share anything in the book with them if you think it will help them.

Finally, there's a reason we've called this book "The Greatest Gift", and it's simply this:

getting and keeping your child involved in sport will benefit them in any number of ways throughout their entire life.

From being aware of the importance of health to, in the case of the LGFA, providing them with lifelong friendships and a community that will always be there to support them.

But most of all, well ... it's great craic.



DR MALIE:

Hi parents and guardians. This is Dr Malie Coyne, call me Malie for short.

It can be hard to talk to your teenage girl can't it? Rolling eyes anyone? My eldest is 10 going on 15! I'm delighted to have been asked to offer some tips for this ebook and hopefully something will resonate with you.

I'm a Clinical Psychologist, Author, and NUIG Lecturer.

I'm also very passionate about promoting a compassionate and evidence based approach to infant and child development. I've explored issues around parenting children with anxiety in my book "Love In Love Out" and deal with them every day in my role as a Clinical Psychologist.



CHAPTER ONE:

Good For The Body

“

Fitness is not about being better than someone else...It's about being better than you used to be

- Khloe Kardashian

There aren't many people out there who don't understand the link between physical activity and health. It's so obvious that it almost doesn't bear mentioning and yet...

Staying physically active is vital for any growing body. As your daughter develops, she will naturally go through peaks and troughs of activity. There will be changes to be dealt with.

Growth spurts. Metabolic shifts. The onset of puberty. Physical developments, both internally and externally. And yet, just as for all of us, physical activity and team sports like Gaelic football can help overcome all of those difficulties.



We're designed to be active, it's our natural state. Our legs have developed to create the perfect springboard for running. Our hearts provide the ideal engine for converting the fuel of food and oxygen into energy to power our muscles.

Our bodies know how to heal themselves after

pushing to the limit, know where those limits are and are canny enough to reward us with a rush of endorphins to keep us going that little bit longer.

That much we all know. And that much is common to every human on the planet (whether they choose to exercise or not).

But what might not be as widely known is the particular physical benefits that girls can get out of playing football with the LGFA, benefits that stretch far beyond childhood.

There's a reason we call it fit *and* healthy . . .

First off, football in particular and sport in general is one of the best possible ways of boosting your daughter's immune system. That's great for warding off those everyday illnesses that can cause absenteeism from school, limit the likelihood of them spreading infection within or beyond the family, and generally ensuring that they're not feeling miserable a lot of the time.

But it goes deeper than that.

That boosted immune system means that your daughter is less likely to suffer from chronic illness in later life. And that's serious. That means a reduced likelihood of them suffering from heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, endometrial, colonic and breast cancer.

Just 4 hours' regular exercise a week can reduce a teenage girl's risk of breast cancer by up to 60%





Yes, getting your daughter involved in sport can reduce her chance of developing breast cancer in later life.

Regular physical exercise, playing matches and training with the LGFA, has also been shown to reduce the symptoms of PMS and, in addition, may help with more regular periods and a reduction in physical discomfort and cramping.

BUILDING BONES

Any sort of weight bearing exercise (even if that's your own weight) such as playing and training with the LGFA can help build bone mass in children. If that habit is brought through into adulthood it can have profoundly beneficial effects in reducing the likelihood of osteoporosis.

Between the ages of 20 and 80 (that's a big stretch obviously) women lose up to one

third of the bone mass from their hip –and 20% of women over the age of 50 suffer from osteoporosis.

Bigger bone mass from an earlier age can help minimise all these effects. Not bad for kicking a football around with your friends.

You can find some useful information on the importance of maintaining a healthy approach to both diet and exercise at: [Player Health Check Programme - Top of Your Game: Caitriona Cormican.](#)



Actions speak louder than words – if you want your daughter to buy into an active lifestyle, show her what exercise adds to *your* life!

TASK: Get your daughter in on the action (and have a chance to chat)

How about you ask your daughter to go for a regular walk, that way you can both motivate each other and have a little chat on the way?

Tell her that you'd like her help to give

you that much needed kick up the bum – that way it's a shared experience instead of an order.

Besides, apart from the many health benefits, it just FEELS so good!

CHAPTER TWO:

Good For The Mind

“

Talent wins games.
Teamwork and
intelligence win
Championships.

- Michael Jordan

Okay, so the physical benefits of getting your daughter involved in playing football are probably pretty obvious. And of course being generally active can go some of the way to delivering those benefits but not necessarily all of them.

It is maybe in the area of mental health that sports, and particularly team sports, really come into their own.

Thankfully today we live in a world where mental health is not just taken seriously, but is treated similarly to physical health. Phenomenal female athletes like Simone Biles and Naomi Osaka have openly discussed their own mental health and the struggles that they have overcome.

All this is massively positive, from the point of view of understanding that, well, everyone can struggle from time to time. In this chapter we're going to look at how sport can play a really positive role in keeping your daughter's mind as well as her body in good shape.





We can't all be goalscorers – so it's important to learn that goalscorers alone can't win matches

One of the key ways that team sport plays its part here is in the promotion of a positive body image for young girls.

We all understand the pressures that young girls feel to look a certain way. The perils of social media mean that our daughters can hold themselves to impossible to achieve standards. The Instagram 'pout' may seem innocent enough but it belies a culture where young girls can become not just obsessed, but obsessive about their appearance.

Gaelic football, indeed all sports, offer a counterbalance to this 21st-Century fixation. It allows our daughters to delight, not in what the media might suggest their body might look like, but rather what it can do for them. How it can produce the most amazing solos. How a strong core allows for the power to beat an opponent at just the right time.

And, how, in the heat of competition, your daughter's body can step up and be counted. Sure it takes a lot more effort than a carefully posed selfie – but the reward is much greater too.

One of the greatest aspects of playing with

the LGFA is simply the 'team' aspect of it. It's an antidote to loneliness.

Humans are social animals. It's how we do everything – from family to community, we like to stick together – there is, after all, strength in numbers!



According to research, the 'ideal' looks depicted on social media are only possessed naturally by 5% of the population. Vulnerable teens can be affected by this false reality.

Being part of a team from an early stage of life does so much to prepare you for adulthood. 15 players, working as one with a collective goal in mind. It teaches you how to rely on others. It teaches you the importance of teamwork. It teaches you the value of friendship.

Some of those lessons may be hard learned

– it might take the shouts of your daughter’s teammates – or indeed their fury – to learn that it’s better to pass the ball rather than do everything yourself.

But those lessons are all the more valuable for the way in which we learn them.

In the midst of an LGFA team, as the team develops, players learn that not everybody has the same strengths and weaknesses as everybody else. You learn to value others skills in a particular set of circumstances.

You learn that we can’t all be goalscorers, but that it’s not just goalscorers that win matches.

And all this delivers one of the most important benefits of team sports for girls. Confidence. Teenage girls, in particular, can be almost paralysed by a lack of confidence. The LGFA can give that to them in spades.

It doesn’t just come from winning – it comes from understanding that your teammates are relying on you and you on them. Yup, we’ll all make dreadful mistakes from time to time, that’s life, but all any team will ever ask of someone is their best.

Give that and your daughter will always be able to hold her head up high.

DR MALIE:

Let’s shift the focus away from what the body looks like – and towards the incredible things it can do

Being a teen girl nowadays is hard. Not only is she dealing with a changing body, mood-changing hormones, figuring out who she is and what she’s going to do with her life, but it is likely she is also exposed to everyone else’s highlight reels on social media and the supposed ‘perfect body’.

Did you know that US research suggests that ‘ideal looks’ typically depicted on social media are only possessed naturally by 5 % of females? Vulnerable teens who feel insecure about their looks or body shape can withdraw into the online world to compare, invalidate or validate their views; which is where they will a myriad of insta-celebrities all looking fabulous.

By contrast, being involved with a team sport can counterbalance this tremendous pressure placed on our teen girls.

I once sat in on a panel for Electric Ireland called ‘Why do teenage girls drop out of sport?’, and I was so taken by what one of the young sports women said. Eliza Downey is a former All Ireland winning Gaelic football player and International Rugby athlete and she said something to the effect of “Being part of a team sport does wonders for your confidence.

“It shifts the focus from how your body looks to what your body can do for you. Everyone has different strengths and you are all working together without judgement”

TASK: Develop a sense of how your daughter perceives her body image

Ask her who she follows on social media and use the opportunity to talk about unrealistic beauty ideals, and what LGFA, Lidl One Good Club Initiative and LGFA Talk Project accounts portray real bodies.

Have a conversation with your daughter about what she feels her body does for her. What influences her aim about her body? Does engaging in team sports help?

The **Lidl One Good Club Initiative** and **LGFA Talk Project** aim to help young players maintain positive mental health



CHAPTER THREE:

Teenage Kicks

“

I am not sure that the inner world of teenage girls has changed. What's most important to kids today is still the same stuff.

- Judy Blume

There are few creatures in the world as unpredictable as a teenager.

For girls, particularly, the teenage years represent a moment in time where they are most likely to turn their back on organised sport. It's a tough spot for a parent or guardian, we all know that. Your lovely, polite, adoring daughter is turning into someone that, well, may not be all that nice to be around sometimes!

They pull out of it, like we all do, so it's important to stick with them, encourage them and be prepared to give them a little 'space'.

Ticket to hide: the pressures that force teens to lock themselves away (and how we can help them)

Up until the 1950's the notion of being a teenager didn't really exist. You simply went from being a child to being an adult – and it's tempting to blame society for allowing the monster to be unleashed, but it's not the case.

Teenage girls are under an enormous amount of pressure, and it's not just peer pressure or the pressure to look a certain way – there's the pressure that comes from their own bodies as well. The average age for girls to get their first period is 12. It's a massive change for a young body.

Physically their bodies are flushed with levels of hormones that would knock us all out of kilter.

DISTRACTIONS

Their bodies begin to change, they may develop acne, they can feel as if they're not in control. There aren't many of us who would put their hands up and volunteer to go through puberty again!

On top of that there are the other pressures that can pile in, turning their heads away from sport. You can call them distractions. Or a shift of interest.

Whatever we choose to call it, it's a fact that by the age of 14, most girls drop out of sports



at twice the rate of boys. And by the age of 17 – 51 % of girls will have quit sports altogether. That's a pretty scary statistic but it's worth taking a moment to consider exactly why that's the case.

It's easy to put this down to a single root cause – but in fact, it's a lot more complicated than it may seem on first glance.

There are any number of reasons that girls begin to quit

sports around this time. Many of our daughters may begin to feel a little uncomfortable about the way they look. Everyone's body develops in a different way and at a different pace – which, of course is a fact that most teenage girls overlook.

So it can be tough if you're with a group of your friends who have raced ahead of you in the maturity stakes – and this tends to be highlighted on the playing

field as much as in any other field they might be hanging around in.

There's the pressure that comes from just being a teenager and doing things that teenagers do. We've all been through it – and most of us can't hold our hands up and claim to have been complete angels all the way through our teenage years.

There's budding relationships. Yeah, sorry, but there's no denying the fact. There's hanging out. There's lying in bed. There's endlessly listening to music.

But also for girls there's the pressure of having to perform at school. The statistics are there to show that girls outperform boys in 35 out of 40 higher level subjects in the Leaving Certificate.



Teens can calm down their nervous systems by increasing activities they enjoy – these, in turn, help them to focus better on challenges they encounter elsewhere

This is not down to some innate higher intelligence in girls, but comes from the fact that – for a variety of social and cultural reasons – they are under pressure to work harder.

But that effort requires time and that time is unlikely to be taken out of the things that they deem to be more fun. It may well come from their

sporting activities.

It is, of course, counterproductive, as studies have shown that intense physical exercise fires up the neurons in your brain, promoting cell growth, particularly in the hippocampus.

Which is a fancy way of saying that football can actually help concentration and, by extension, learning.

Who knew!

The simple fact is, that from the age of 13 or so, your daughter will be more inclined than ever to give up playing football.

And, while it may seem like teenagers are the most unreasonable creatures in the universe, it's important to try and steer them through this rocky patch, because – as we've said before – the benefits are undeniable.



By the age of 14, girls drop out of sports at twice the rate of boys.



By the age of 17 – 51% of girls will have quit sports altogether.

Girls outperform boys in 35 out of 40 higher level subjects in the Leaving Certificate.





DR MALIE:

Embrace the ‘soothing’ circle to help ease your teen’s pressures

I remember speaking to one of my teen clients about the importance of exercise during her Leaving Cert year. She had told me that she loved running in the gym and exercising in the company of others.

Whilst she could hear what I was saying about how important regular exercise was during her LC year, she kept saying “But I can’t spend time away from my study”.

It was only when I explained that exercise would actually help her with her exam performance that her ears suddenly perked

up: “What do you mean?” she said.

I told her that we have three emotional circles, Threat, Drive and Soothing.

The three circles are all needed in life, no one circle is good or bad. We need a helpful balance between the three. The balance changes often in life. Exploring the three-circles model helps us build awareness of what’s happening in our lives and see what could be helpful.

Commonly when people are struggling with exam pressure, their Threat circle gets bigger which feeds their Drive circle (e.g. cramming

out of fear), which stops them doing the things they enjoy to feed their Soothing circle (e.g. exercising), leading them to feel even more overwhelmed.

Teens can calm their nervous systems down by increasing activities which stimulate their Soothing circles, so they are driven from a place of nurturance rather than fear. I told my teen client that running a few times a week would shrink her Threat circle, feed her Soothing circle, which would magically help her to focus better on her exam study.

It was a hard sell, but you know what, it worked!

Drive

Motivation and resource seeking

CFT Emotion regulation systems

Soothing

Affiliating and reassuring

Threat

Threat detection and protection

TASK: Explore what lives in your daughter’s ‘soothing circle’

Explore with your teenage girl what types of activities are in her Soothing circle and how can she incorporate them more into her daily life? Going to LGFA practice and games would be a great one for instance!



CHAPTER FOUR:

Common Ground (And The Subtle Art Of Sideways Conversation)

“

Conversation should touch everything, but should concentrate itself on nothing

- Oscar Wilde

Painful as this may be for most of us to admit, your teenage daughter probably thinks that on your best days you're an embarrassment and on your worst you're...we'll presume she's wrong, but that doesn't change the way she might feel.

It's hard as a parent or guardian keeping open the lines of communication through this stage of their lives. It may feel like you can't do anything right.

You'll suffer an endless stream of mascaraed eyes being raised to heaven (behind your back if you're lucky!).



You'll make attempts to engage them in conversation on things you think they're interested in only to discover that that was last week and things have moved on already. Then there's the fact that, to their teenage point of view, you are just hopelessly out-of-date, unfashionable, square and, well, straight up embarrassing.

That is your job as a parent of a teenage girl. There's no getting away from it.

But it's also your job to make sure that this doesn't become the pattern for the rest of your lives. It may seem that endless petty (in your view) arguments, sulks, and strops just become the status quo – and they may do, but it's only for a, relatively brief, period of time.

You can't take them on at their own game. You have no chance really of keeping up with



Due to the amount of brain development teens are experiencing, research has found that they are less able to accurately read facial expressions

what they're interested in because it changes so quickly, what you need to do is find some sort of common ground – a neutral patch where you can chat about something that you both have in common.

Of course, this is where football comes back into the picture. If you can maintain your daughter's interest in the sport, you have the

Almost three quarters (75%) of younger kids felt their parents were proud of them. But that number dropped to 58% after the age of 14.



75%



58%

perfect neutral subject for conversations that aren't going to become heated.

It allows you the opportunity to ask about how a game went, find out how they're getting on with the team – allowing them to take the lead – and keeping those lines of communication open.

The LGFA in many ways is uniquely placed to do this. As a community based organisation it means that you and your daughter don't just have a shared interest with each other, but with the other parents and daughters in the club. It means that you have that most elusive of things for a teenage girl –

something in common!

That can extend beyond the context of the team that your daughter's involved in. You might get to go to county matches together. Sit side by side with a shared enthusiasm and a shared passion. It gives you something to talk about that is effectively neutral territory. No giving out.

No asking her to clean up her room. Just an actual conversation about something that you both care about.

No amount of pretending you know exactly what's going on on TikTok can replicate that!

DR MALIE:

Just because they tell you to 'go away' doesn't mean they don't need you – quite the opposite, in fact

Teens are a special breed of humans who don't like to feel they're on the spot with anyone – least of all their parents.

Due to the tremendous amount of brain development teens are experiencing, research has found that they are less able to accurately read facial expressions, as they are using the emotional part of their brains rather than the reasoning part of their brain.

This is precisely why

'sideways listening' can work so well for parents to communicate with them and show them genuine interest.

Sideways listening is about grabbing small moments to have an informal chat with your teen, where you're not looking at them face to face, but rather engaged in another activity like walking, driving, or travelling to or from a match.

I have heard it said that "*Parents over-parent under*

10s and under-parent their over 10s" and I have to agree to an extent. Just because teens might tell parents to go away in an emotional moment doesn't mean that they don't need you now more than ever.

They just need you in a different way, which is where these sideways conversations, where you are mutually engaged in something, can be so valuable in building on your relationship.

TASK: Take a moment to uncover the power of the 'sideways chat'

Grab a moment today to have a 'sideways chat' with your child, either on a walk, in the car, or whilst engaged in a joint activity.

You don't have to be up to date with the latest trends to show them genuine interest in what they like doing. Remember,



even though your teenage girl might pretend otherwise, she still needs you to delight in her existence and show her that you like her for who she is.

What role can sport play in your relationship with your teen and how can you build on this?



CHAPTER FIVE

You Don't Know Everything

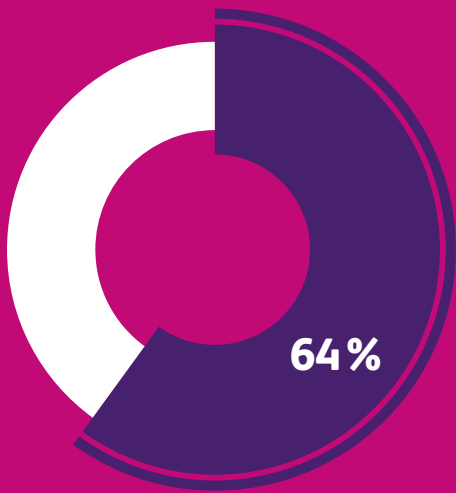
“

I have no need for Google. I have teenagers who know everything

- Anon

There's a point in every parent-child relationship where you cease to be the font of all knowledge. Where the mistakes you inevitably make become all too apparent to your teenage child. Every teenager is permanently a milli-second away from being embarrassed, upset or angry, and nowhere is this more apparent than when you think you're offering them support.

While you're standing on the sidelines of the football pitch shouting your lungs out at the team, getting excited or maybe even just a little carried away, your daughter may be seething with frustration, emotion or even close to tears at your behaviour.



64% of kids say that they would not be affected by the competitive element being removed from sports

None of us like to think that we're doing any sort of emotional harm to our children and yet every week many of us are doing exactly that. Support is the most important thing we can give our daughters – but it's important to understand the nature of that support – and the manner in which we give it.

Beware 'destructive criticism' – and know the subtle differences between support and encouragement

Sometimes we can all veer into the realm of criticism when we think we're being constructive, it's only natural. Standing on the sidelines it's easy to see where you think things may be going wrong.

It's easy to criticise the performance of the team, the Bainisteoir, the referee or the

umpire. You may have a point. But it's a point that you need to consider very carefully how you make.

None of us take what we perceive as unfair criticism very well. Certainly in the heat of the moment any criticism can be taken as just that – criticism for the sake of it.

And that's likely the case. Supporting from the sidelines can be a difficult thing to do but it's really important to always bear in mind that what you're supposed to be doing is supporting – not demolishing.

It's the reason that the word support often comes attached to another word –



encouragement – and it's the more important of the two words.

Encouragement may take a little more discipline on your behalf. It may mean biting your tongue a little as you stand on the sidelines. It certainly means chatting with your daughter after the match about how she feels the game went.

Rather than offering what you may intend to be constructive criticism, simply talk to her.

Teenagers aren't stupid. They understand when they've made a mistake – and that's the reason that they may react in a more extreme



The more positive their self-esteem, the better they will be at dealing with life, and the more confident and proud they will be.

way when they think you're criticising them.

Of all the chapters in the book, this is in many ways the most important. The way you react on the side of the pitch and on the journey home will have a major impact on your

daughter. Too much criticism and you risk turning her away from the game – too little interest or too much "Well I think you're fantastic" may, oddly, have the same effect.

It's a delicate balancing act, that you'll just have to find the point of pivot for. Always bear in mind that, as much as you may think you know, you haven't been on the pitch, you haven't experienced the ebb and flow of a game first hand, in short, you don't know everything.

And one thing's for sure, no child ever walked off the pitch thinking – I love the way my parents were hurling abuse at the ref!

ALERT!
You are entering a



PLAYER ZONE

WHY AM I HERE!

Reminder from The Players

- I am a **PERSON**
- It's just a **GAME**
- **ENJOYMENT, IMPROVING AS A PLAYER** and being with my **FRIENDS** – not winning – Are more important to me **TODAY!**
- I am **DEVELOPING** my skills
- I will try and be **CREATIVE!**
- I possibly will make mistakes!
- I want you to **PRAISE** my good efforts despite the outcome of the game
- I want you to **SUPPORT** me with **aboue!**
- Supporters only cheer, and Coaches only **COACH**



DR MALIE:

10 actionable tips to boost your daughter's self-esteem

As a parent or guardian, you have huge influence your teenage daughter's self-esteem. Self-esteem is all about how you feel about yourself.

It includes self-confidence, self-respect, and pride in yourself, your independence and your self-reliance. All the ways you feel about yourself and your abilities are wrapped up in the term "self-esteem".

The more positive their self-esteem, the better they will be at dealing with life, and the more confident and proud they will be. They will try harder, be happier and have greater self-respect. They will make friends easier and be more giving.

Here are 10 tips for building your teen's self-esteem and encouraging them:

1 Say "I love you" and mean it, everyday and show them plenty of affection in your greetings and goodbyes.

2 Take the time to let them know what it is you really like about them. This can really build your teen's self-esteem and strengthen your connection together.

3 Spend time with them on the things they enjoy and show real interest in them and the things that are important to them. It gives them the message "You are worth my time. You are a valuable person".

4 Honest praise is the quickest way to build your teen's self-esteem. Find ways to offer realistic and honest praise to your teen as often as you can.

5 Try to focus on the positive aspects of your teen's behaviour. Because there is such a strong parallel between how a child feels about themselves and how they behave, helping your teen build self-confidence is vital to discipline.

6 Communicate with your teen and listen to their feelings without judging them. Your role is to organise their often chaotic feelings and to help them make sense of them. Remind them that feelings change. If there is a rupture in your relationship, try to repair it.

7 Keep criticism to a minimum - it doesn't produce positive behaviour. Praise does. When it comes to the game they have just played, ask them how they think it went, and really follow their lead. Only offer suggestions if they are asking you for guidance.

8 Do not compare your teen with their siblings or anyone else. They are making enough negative comparisons themselves believe me!

9 Recognise your teen's special talents and help them to build on them, and remind them that not everyone is good at everything.

10 Be a good role model. Start by building your own self-confidence and thinking of ways to nurture your own wellbeing. Model self-compassion (e.g. "That was hard and I tried my best") The more positive the parents' self-esteem, the more positive your teen's will be, as you are a mirror to their feelings about themselves.





CHAPTER SIX:

Some Days, It's Just A 'Nope'

None of us are 'on it' 100 % of the time. It's just not possible. You only need to look at yourself to understand that sometimes things just aren't flowing the way they should.

There may be days where you have to drag yourself out of bed to get ready for work. You may find it difficult to concentrate. You may just, for no particular reason, just be in bad form.

We all know this. But sometimes we forget.

“

Sometimes we
need a few bad
days, in order to
keep the good ones
in perspective

- Colleen Hoover



Decoding apathy: why teens quit, and what they're trying to tell us

When it comes to your daughter and football, it's important to recognise this as well. They've a lot going on. We've already discussed the social pressures they're under as young adults and the physical pressure that puberty brings with it. There are going to be days when your daughter just isn't up to it.

The last thing they need is additional pressure from you.

There's a whole pile of reasons why your daughter may be out of sorts and there's a huge difference between having an off day and deciding that she's going to throw in the towel on her sporting life.

How you deal with that



30% of teenage girls suffer from anxiety.

could decide whether she keeps playing or walks away from the team and the game altogether.

There will always be those among us who are exceptional athletes – those with the natural skills and affinity for the game, those who seem driven to succeed.

That's not most of us however – most of us play sport because it's something that we enjoy doing, something that gives us a lift, provides a bit of excitement.

It's really important to understand – and constantly remember – that football is something to be enjoyed, not endured.

To that end you need to be open to the fact that there will be days when your daughter just doesn't feel like it. When training on a wet and cold Wednesday night simply doesn't feel like the best option. That's fine, it happens to us all.

Again the key here is to be

supportive. Skipping a single training session doesn't mean that your daughter is on her way to quitting altogether, it may simply mean she doesn't feel like it today.

Take her lead. You can explain the importance of not letting the team down – but it's

her team, she understands that all too well. Don't put her under pressure, but be aware that, while it's natural not to feel like it some days – if it becomes a regular occurrence you may want to have a chat with her to understand what lies behind her waning motivation.

And, unfortunately, sometimes it may just be the right time to let her call an end to it – the important thing then is to encourage her to find another activity to take its place.

But here's hoping it's just an off day!



DR MALIE:

Just because they tell you to 'go away' doesn't mean they don't need you – quite the opposite, in fact

In my book "Love in, Love out: A compassionate approach to parenting your anxious child", I talk about the rise in anxiety for children and teens being due to our threat-focused brains meeting

the many pressures of the modern world, where doing, doing, doing is often seen as a badge of honour, and rest takes a back seat. In addition to that, anxiety is fuelled by the avoidance of things we

fear, so we don't want them to avoid things either.

Your role as parent is to find the balance between helping your teen feel safe and encouraging her to face any fears.

TASK: Channel your inner Miss Marple to work out what's going on

The next time your teen says they don't feel like training, your role is that of 'detective' to figure out "Is this simply an off day?", or "Is this part of a pattern

where my teen is avoiding things for some reason"? In both scenarios, grab a moment for a 'sideways chat' and make sure she knows you are there for her.





CHAPTER SEVEN:

Pressure Makes Diamonds (But Also Cracks)

“

A trophy carries dust. Memories last forever.

- Mary Lou Retton

The sporting world is full of stories of child geniuses. Those rare gifted people who have a natural affinity for their particular sport. The ones who excelled from a very early age. The groundbreaking geniuses. And all too often what lies behind those prodigies is a parent who pushed to the point of obsession.

There'd be no Tiger Woods without Earl Woods. No Venus and Serena Williams without Richard Williams.

But they're the exceptions. Most of our children won't grow up to be world champions, Grand Slam winners or All Ireland medalists, that's just a simple fact. And it's something we should all embrace.

Asking the million-dollar question: is this really for her, or is it for you?

There's no denying that winning is a key part of sport. It's the culmination of the competition, the moment of triumph. But it's not the be all and end all of it.

We've already discussed the massive positive impact that sport can have for girls in particular – both in early life and for long term development. We all know the kick we can get out of being a member of a team – that's true regardless of how successful that team is. It's a win-win

All parenting begins with you. How you see yourself as a parent has a huge bearing on how your child will see you and how they view themselves, as you are a mirror to their feelings about themselves.

TAKING PART

If we want children to love and accept who they are, we need to work on loving and accepting who we are. This isn't easy for many of us, myself included.

It's a cliché, but the notion of "it's not the winning, it's the taking part" still holds true. It's the enjoyment, the fun, the sense of togetherness that's important in sport, not just the silverware.

As the parent of a playing



Our children often force us to take a long hard look at ourselves – but that also affords us an incredible opportunity to grow as parents and as human beings

daughter, it's really important to be able to take that on board. Your daughter is her own person, she's not there to live out your fantasies of sporting greatness.

We all want our kids to do well, but it's vitally important to understand the line where encouragement turns into pressure. The point where

silverware become the mission, not the reward.

It's true that there's no success without endeavour. That everything worth having is worth working for. But it's the level of work and the level of striving that is different for every child.

There are some people who are born with natural talent, and that natural talent can blossom with the right kind of guidance. But that is guidance, not coercion. That is taking the natural enthusiasm that your child may have for the sport, encouraging it, nurturing it and sharing in it with them. It's not about pushing them until they break, then pushing them harder again.

The very best thing you can encourage in your daughter is a love for the sport in all its many different aspects – the individual, the team, the community around it. The very worst thing you can do is push them so hard that they begin to resent you, resent the sport and turn their back on it entirely.

If your child is naturally gifted, fantastic, encourage them. But if, like most of us, your child is in it for the enjoyment, then recognise that as well – in many ways it's a much more valuable commodity.





DR MALIE:

Just because they tell you to ‘go away’ doesn’t mean they don’t need you – quite the opposite, in fact

All parenting begins with you. How you see yourself as a parent has a huge bearing on how your child will see you and how they view themselves, as you are a mirror to their feelings about themselves. If we want children to love and accept who they are, we need to work on loving and accepting who we are. This isn’t easy for many of us, myself included.

Each of us comes into our parenting roles with emotional baggage we may not have processed. Sometimes it’s only when we become parents that our old family scripts re-emerge and we’re suddenly faced with seeing them repeated, especially in charged interactions with teenagers!

Having children pushes us to take a long hard look at

ourselves, but also affords us an incredible opportunity to grow as parents and as human beings. Working on yourself is one of the best investments you can make for you AND for them.

How you reflect on yourself as a parent and make sense of your experiences growing up has a profound impact on how you parent your teen. A parent’s capacity for understanding and reflecting on their own thoughts, feelings, behaviour and intentions, as well as those of their teen, is crucial in nurturing the quality of the child-parent attachment bond.

As parents,



growing and understanding ourselves frees up our emotional space so we are better able to interpret and respond to our teen’s needs.

For example, during a really difficult moment, if I am aware that my teen isn’t intentionally trying to push my buttons, and can consider that their behaviour may be due to them being tired or lonely, then I’m more likely to respond to them in a more understanding and calm way.

Furthermore, if we are aware that we can act from a place of insecurity with our teens or try to compensate for something we may have missed out on growing up, we become a calmer and safer pair of hands for them to express their needs, no matter how chaotic they may appear at times.

TASK: Reflect on your motivations and experiences as a parent – and as a person – to connect with your teen

To help you in practising ‘reflective parenting’, you might like to ask yourself

“What are my motivations for keeping my teen engaged in sports?”

“How did each of my parents respond to me achieving and not achieving in sports or other competitive activities?”

“Were there important aspects I feel I missed out on growing up that I am

desperate for my teen not to miss out on? Could this be driving me putting on pressure?”

“Do I value effort over achievement? If not, why not?”

“How can I model for my teen the importance of enjoying games rather than trying to be the best? How can I show my teen encouragement without pressure?”



CHAPTER EIGHT:

Encouraging By Example

There are few worse sentiments in the world than the idea of ‘do what I say, not what I do’. All children learn by example and it’s the example you set that will have the most impact on them and how they approach their sporting life.

Turning up to games, dropping them off, then coming back to pick them up might feel like you’ve done your parental duty, but in fact what you’re doing is suggesting that what they’re playing doesn’t matter.

Become a leader in more ways than one – help out with the LGFA!

The LGFA is a community. It's also a volunteer organisation. There are things that your daughter's team will always need help with. Training sessions to be organised. Teams to be taken to away games. Funds to be raised. Tea to be made. Kits to be washed. In short it takes a lot to keep a team going and everybody has some skill that can be used.

What this will do for your daughter is to show that the team itself and the club

are important. You have the opportunity to instil a lifelong love, not just of the game, but of the community of the LGFA within your daughter. That's a dividend that will pay back all throughout her adult life. She'll make friends that will stick



by her, meet people she may never have met before.

But she'll always look to you for the lead.

Every LGFA Club in the country will always welcome volunteers. The team extends beyond the girls on the pitch – so in every aspect from coaching to fundraising both you and your daughter will benefit from being involved.

You can find more details on how to support your club at www.ladiesgaelic.ie

Be the (step) change you want to see in the home

Encouraging a healthy, sporty lifestyle does, quite literally, begin at home. It begins with your daughter seeing you as an active, sporty person – whatever that level of activity may be.

It begins with the food you eat. It begins with the encouragement you give her. It begins with her seeing you, not just as a parent or guardian but as part of her team, helping out as you can, encouraging always.

And most of all as her biggest supporter.



Parental self-care is about achieving balance and filling your cup so you have something to give in the many roles you play in your life – mother, father, spouse, partner, child, friend, worker or carer





DR MALIE:

There's no glory in self-sacrifice as a parent or guardian – make sure you have the strength to do your job!

To be a calm, loving and empathetic parent, you need to take good care of yourself. You are your best resource, so it's imperative that you look after yourself. You can't give to your teen if you don't have the capacity to give, nor can you contain their big emotions if you feel emotionally overwhelmed or lacking crucial support yourself.

Parental self-care is about achieving balance and filling your cup so you have something to give in each of the many roles you play in your life, be it mother, father, spouse, partner, child, friend, worker or carer. Self-care means recognising your feelings and taking the time you need to restore physical,



mental, emotional, spiritual and social balance.

When we as parents neglect our own self-care, we're teaching our teens that it's OK to put everyone else first, that it's OK to disregard our own needs and that it's OK

to ignore other important relationships in our lives. Parenting can then become an even greater challenge than it already is, as we're not getting the energy we need to do the job well, nor are we availing ourselves of the supports we need to fill our emotional cups.

Engaging in self-care is a really important life skill that is not only vital for you but also for your teen. By feeding our own Soothing circle, we're showing them how best to manage stress and be resilient.

We are modelling for them that adults have self-care needs that are worthy of being met – and teens have them too.

TASK: Define your recovery routines so that you can be your best self

Your teen is your greatest admirer and is constantly on the lookout for how you manage situations. Consider for a moment the following questions:

"What happens to my teen when I neglect self-care?"

"What tone would I like to set in my everyday interactions with my teen? Calm? Nervous?"

"What would I like to model to my teen about valuing themselves enough to prioritise their own well-being?"

"How will my attitude and actions impact

on how my teen copes with the inevitable ups and downs of life?"

My advice to you: A few times a day, find ways to rest and allow space to open up to yourself. What do you find nourishing? Going for a walk? Kicking a ball around? Dancing like no one's watching? Having family time? Chatting to a friend? Spirituality? Creativity? Playing music? Volunteering your time safely? Having a good laugh? Keeping up your routines?

Whatever it is, find your own potion and give yourself the gift of soothing and love.



CHAPTER 9:

Wrapping Up The Greatest Gift

And that's pretty much that! Hopefully you've found this book to be helpful. It's not possible to cover every topic that may come up throughout your child's sporting life with the LGFA. There may be some things that you might like to find out more about. You may want to do some further reading on the issues facing young girls when it comes to sport, and we've included some suggested reading at the end.

What's clear is that sport can play a real and very positive role in the life of young girls. It's an outlet, a social circle, a chance to shine, to be part of a team. It's our role as parents and guardians to encourage that as much as we can.

Our role is to give them the greatest gift.



Dr Malie:

It's been a real pleasure contributing to this ebook and I am really grateful for the opportunity to engage with you.

As parents we all want the best for our children from the moment they are born. We read up on all the latest parenting advice, we listen to the opinions of family, friends, professionals, the stranger at the supermarket, often relying on the outside world to set our compass on the do's and don'ts of being a good parent. Whilst we could all use a few tweaks (myself included!), let me say one thing loud and clear: You already have what you need to be a 'good enough' parent.

When I say this, I am talking about the positive intentions you have for your teen, your natural instincts in being able to attune to them, and the incredible power of your child-parent

relationship in modelling for them what it means to be human, compassionate and resilient in a less than perfect world.

Realising the treasure trove of qualities you already have as a parent can help you to develop a lens through which you can filter the advice you're exposed to. It's about learning to listen to your own inner wisdom and nurturing your confidence to make choices about which advice to follow if any, and how it fits it with your own unique situation.

In that spirit, I really hope that you have found something that resonates with you in this ebook which can help you to show yourself compassion, so you are in a good place to encourage your teenager in your mutual love of sport and the LGFA. Big hugs, Malie x





RECOMMENDED BOOKS / RESOURCES:

Here are a few resources which may be of use to you in supporting your teenager:

Coyne, Malie (2020). Love in, Love out: A compassionate approach to parenting your anxious child [My book which helps parents to understand their children / teenager's anxiety and offers practical advice based on my experience, real-life case studies, and key theories].

Siegel, Daniel (2014). Brainstorm: The power and purpose of the teenage brain. UK: Scribe [A guide to the emerging adolescent mind, ages 12-24].

Barnardos 'Parenting positively'. Teenage Wellbeing for parents of teenagers [This free booklet offers support and guidance with the aim to help parents to maintain a positive relationship with their teenage son or daughter]. Free Ebook or hardcopy can be ordered below:

[Ebook - Parenting Positively - Teenage Wellbeing – Barnardos Ireland Online Shop](#)

Stallard, P. (2002). Think Good – Feel Good: A Cognitive Behaviour Therapy Workbook for Children and Young People. West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons. [A great CBT resource for ages 10+]. Available as free PDF below.

[Click here to download the PDF](#)

[www.spunout.ie](#): Youth information site providing health and wellbeing information for those aged 16-25 in Ireland, for young people by young people.

[www.jigsaw.ie](#): The National Centre for Youth Mental Health which offers mental health advice and support, online and in person, to young people across Ireland, aged 12-25 years.

[www.ispcc.ie/teenline](#): A national, confidential active listening service for children / young people up to 18 years. Teens can free call 1800 833 634. 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

[www.parentline.ie](#): A national, confidential helpline that offers parents support, information and guidance on all aspects of being a parent and any parenting. Parents can call 01 873 3500 Monday – Thursday 10am to 9pm and Fridays 10am to 4pm.

[www.solutiontalk.ie](#): Great website by John Sharry, Social Worker and Child and Family Psychotherapist, with blogs, and information on his parenting books and programmes.

[www.anxietycanada.com](#): Brilliant website with lots of self-help and evidence-based resources on anxiety in children, youth, and adults. Also includes the MindShift™ App and 'My Anxiety Plan' online course.

[www.getselfhelp.co.uk](#): Simple CBT (cognitive-behaviour therapy) and DBT (dialectical-behaviour therapy) self-help and therapy resources, including information sheets, worksheets and self-help mp3s.

Smiling Mind App. Developed by psychologists and educators and designed to help children and teenagers with the stresses of everyday life using body-scan meditations, mindfulness, relaxation, breathing and guided imagery. It has different exercises depending on age.

Headspace App. Offers a great array of features, from quality meditations to daily videos, as well as sleep- and exercise-specific content.



Useful Links

National

- [LGFA](#)
- [Sport Ireland](#)
- [GAA](#)
- [Camogie Association](#)
- [GAA eLearning Portal](#)
- [Student Sport Ireland](#)

Provincial Councils

- [Connacht Ladies Gaelic Football](#)
- [Munster Ladies Gaelic Football](#)
- [Ulster Ladies Gaelic Football](#)
- [Leinster Ladies Gaelic Football](#)

