

[MAKE SPACE FOR GIRLS]

**The research
supporting the
case for change
in our parks and
green spaces**

Autumn 2026



Contents

Introduction	Page 3
Why look at parks through a gender lens?	Page 4
The importance of teenage play	Page 7
Why do parks matter for teenage play?	Page 9
Why do parks need to change?	Page 14
Girls' use of teen play provision: skateparks and MUGAs	Page 17
Pitches and their relevance to play	Page 22
Feeling safe and experiencing sexual harassment	Page 23
How being "judged" affects girls' use of parks	Page 26
The legal and policy framework for teen play in Great Britain	Page 28
Empowering and engaging with teenage girls to shape parks	Page 32
What do teenage girls tell us would make parks work better	Page 34
Thanks	Page 37
References	Page 38

Introduction

“It’s not that we don’t want to be in parks. There are reasons why we don’t feel welcome” teenage girl, summer 2026

Make Space for Girls was founded as a campaigning charity in 2021 to reduce the inequality suffered by teenage girls in parks and similar spaces. Our vision is a simple one: a world where all parks and public spaces are designed to make teenage girls feel valued and included, and where everyone feels welcome. Our strategy is to: listen to teenage girls; collaborate with local communities to make change happen; raise awareness of the issues; and promote changes in policy and practice. You can read more about our strategy [here](#).

When the charity was set up five years ago, we knew from what we saw every day in parks that play facilities intended for teenagers, such as skateparks and fenced pitches (also referred to as multi-use games areas or MUGAs), were used much more by boys than by girls. Research showed that countries like Austria and Sweden had recognised the issue and were starting to look for solutions. But here in the UK, it didn’t appear that decision makers had noticed the problem and no-one was addressing it. The great news is that this is starting to change.

Make Space for Girls is the only English charity focussed exclusively on this issue: and over the last 5 years we are excited to have been part

of a growing movement, seeking to raise the profile of the gender inequality in teen park provision, researching the issues, placing the voices of teenage girls at the heart of seeking solutions and campaigning for change.

This research report aims to bring together a selection of UK and international research to shine a light on:

- why parks and green spaces matter for teenage girls and gender diverse young people;
- the experience of teenage girls and gender diverse young people in parks and green spaces; and
- what teenage girls and gender diverse young people tell us would make parks and green spaces work better for them.

In preparing this third iteration of our research report, we noticed how much more work has been done in this area, compared to our first report in 2021 and our second in 2023. We are grateful to everyone who has done this work. This summary is not intended to be a full literature review, and as such we have not sought to capture all relevant research. And we always want to hear about research in this area.

If you have additional relevant research that we haven’t referenced, please send us an email to admin@makespaceforgirls.co.uk.

Why look at parks through a gender lens?

***"This is an equality issue. Is our right to feel welcome and included in public space too much to ask?"
teenage girl, summer 2026***

There are about 7 million 10-19 year olds in England in 2025¹. This report focusses on the role of gender in teenagers' use of parks and similar spaces for play and relaxation.

Make Space for Girls explores this through a gendered lens because this reveals issues that have previously remained hidden. For many decades, organisations like Fields In Trust and Sports England have been providing well researched and authoritative guidance for local authorities, developers and other built environment professionals to support them to create parks and open spaces that work well for their local communities. And yet, the data shows that these spaces are much less welcoming for women and girls than they are for men and boys.

This is not intentional. Part of the problem is that gender has not been viewed as a sufficiently relevant consideration. This remains an ongoing barrier to making spaces more inclusive. For example, in February 2026 the House of Lord Built Environment Committee published its report Into New Towns looking at "what it takes to create thriving communities: vision, placemaking, design, and creating environments that are accessible, age-friendly and safe"². It overlooked the role of gender.

But over the last five years we have started to see change: Natural England's Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide³ specifically references the need to provide places that work better for teenage girls; Sports England's Active Design Guidance has now recognised that women and girls often have different experiences of the built environment compared to that of men and boys.⁴ And in August 2026 the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) recognised, for the first time since it was created in March 2012, the role that gender plays in creating safe and accessible public places⁵.

There are multiple and complex reasons why parks and green spaces work less well for women and girls: the type of facility provided; the implicit and explicit rules that govern the use of those facilities; the different way in which boys and girls are watched and judged while in public space; how safe spaces are and are perceived to be; the sense of entitlement to use spaces; who receives a message that they belong; and the role of design; and the mechanisms that support the funding of public spaces.

¹ Policy Paper: 2025/26 [Youth Matters: State of the Nation - GOV.UK](#)

² [House of Lords - New Towns: Creating Communities - Built Environment Committee](#)

³ Natural England Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide

⁴ Sports England Active Design Guidelines

⁵ National Planning Policy Framework 2026

In the last five years there has been an increased recognition of the role of gender in the use of public spaces. A selection of some of the notable contributions to the research and guidance in this area include:

- London Legacy Development Corporation, 2024: Creating places that work for Women and Girls Handbook for Local Authorities, Developers and Designers⁶
- Mayor of London, 2024: Good Growth By Design: Safety in Public Space: Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People⁷
- Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport, 2022: Make Space for Us⁸
- Leeds University, 2022: What Makes A Park Feel Safe Or Unsafe? The views of women, girls and professionals in West Yorkshire⁹
- Leeds University, 2022: What Do Teenage Girls Like And Dislike About Park Play Spaces And Multi-Use Games Areas?¹⁰
- Urban Minded: Henning Larsen, 2023 How can the design of urban spaces contribute to the mental well-being of teenage girls?¹¹
- Fall Incubator, 2023: Girls Just Wanna Have Fun: How do we design a better public realm for adolescent and teenage girls;¹²
- Make Space for Girls & Social Place, 2025: Exploring Essex Parks: Gendering Green Spaces for Young People¹³
- Leeds University, WYCA, Green Flag and Make Space for Girls, 2025: Safer Parks: Improving Access for Women and Girls¹⁴

- Centre for Civic Innovation (CCI), 2025: Places for Play Handbook: A practical guide to creating play spaces shaped by girls and young people's voices¹⁵.

There are of course many considerations, in addition to age and gender, that contribute to who feels welcome and included in parks. Intersectionality is crucial: the interaction between gender/age and race, national heritage, religion, culture, socio-economic class, geography and disability all affect girls' access to public spaces.

These factors affect both access to parks and activity levels in girls – for example research showed that in some areas during the Covid Pandemic, white British girls were more active than those from a South Asian background¹⁶.

6 [Creating places that work for Women and Girls Handbook FINAL 1.pdf](#)

7 [Safety in Public Space: Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People](#)

8 Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport 2022: Make-Space-for-Us.

9 Barker & others: What Makes a Park Feel Safe or Unsafe? The views of women, girls and professionals in West Yorkshire 2022

10 [Addendum - What do teenage girls like and dislike about park play spaces and MUGAs.pdf](#)

11 [Urban Mind: How can design of urban spaces contribute to the mental health and well-being of teenage girls? | Henning Larsen](#)

12 [20240724-Incubator_Girls-Just-Wanna-Have-Fun_v3.pdf](#)

13 [Exploring Essex Parks Making Space for Girls 2025](#)

14 [Safer Parks Guidance 2025](#)

15 [Play Handbook](#)

16 Bingham & others, 2021. Ethnic differences in children's self-reported physical activity, Born in Bradford Cohort

Sports England Active Lives Research also gives an up to date snapshot each year of how ethnicity and family affluence impacts on activity levels, with children and young people from the least affluent families falling 13% behind their peers from more affluent families¹⁷. Additional research from The Girls Active Report 2025 showed that:

“girls with two or more characteristics of inequality, such as being from a low-income family, a non-majority ethnicity, or having Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), are significantly more likely to not be active every day, not feel confident doing physical activity and less likely to like PE than those without further characteristics of inequality.”¹⁸

A detailed exploration of the role that different intersectional characteristics plays in teenage girls’ access to teen play facilities in parks is outside the scope of this research summary. But Make Space for Girls would welcome further relevant research into the role of intersectionality.

In line with the approach taken by many researchers in the field of gender and the public realm, Make Space for Girls takes an inclusive approach. While much of the existing research uses binary concepts of sex when analysing the difference between boys and girls, Make Space for Girls recognises that the concept of gender is not binary nor invariable or biologically determined, but, rather, socially constructed. Our work aims to be inclusive of non-binary and gender-diverse young people and where we work with girls, boys, young men and young women we include cis, trans and non-binary young people.



¹⁷ Sports England Active Lives Survey: Children and Young people 2024/25 [Active Lives Children and Young People Survey - Academic year 2024-25](#)

¹⁸ [Girls Active National Reports 2025 - Youth Sport Trust](#)

The importance of teenage play

“Girls experience barriers to their right to play from birth to 18. This includes restrictive gender roles and stereotyping that limit choice of play, sexism in the design of play space, and lack of safety. Adequate attention to girls’ specific needs is required if girls are to exercise their right to play.”

Girls Rights are Human Rights, 2024¹⁹

Play is important for all children and young people. Many councils limit their consideration of play to young children e.g. up to the age of 10 or 12. And there is considerable stigmatisation of teenage play:

“The stigmatisation of adolescent play has been a recurring theme in our inquiry. We have heard how teenagers “get a lot of bad press”, with adult expectations placed upon a group of people who aren’t adults and still have a lot of development to do.”²⁰

However the UN Convention on the rights of the child is clear that children and young people have the right to play up to the age of 18.

“Play shouldn’t stop when you become a teenager” teenage girl, summer 2026

When teen play is considered, it is often conflated in the minds of policy makers and youth service providers with provision for teenage sport. Sport and play both have an important role to play in teenagers’ lives but they are different.

Sport is goal orientated, with goals achieved within predetermined rules. Sport is frequently skills based, with judgements based on whether a person is “good” or “bad” determined by their skill level. Sports is about winners and losers. Physical attributes, such as body size and shape, coordination and confidence, often play a significant role in a young person being “good” or “bad” at sport; internal and external influences lead to young people being categorised (by themselves and/or others) as “sporty” or “not sporty”. Taking part in sports often requires a young person to wear specific clothing that places their bodies on display. A great deal of teenage sporting activity takes place under the guidance of a coach or other competent adult who monitors compliance with rules and whose presence modifies the participants’ behaviour.

¹⁹ Nevens and Hutchinson; Girls Rights are Human Rights 2024

²⁰ Centre for Young Lives, 2025: Everything to Play For A Plan to Ensure Every Child in England Can Play [Everything to Play For — Raising the Nation Play Commission.pdf - Google Drive](#)

In contrast, as explained in general comment 17 to The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child General, “play” is²¹

“... any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves; it takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise. Caregivers may contribute to the creation of environments in which play takes place, but play itself is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake, rather than as a means to an end. Play involves the exercise of autonomy, physical, mental or emotional activity, and has the potential to take infinite forms, either in groups or alone. These forms will change and be adapted throughout the course of childhood. The key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity.”

Thus, in contrast with sport, play is self-determined by those who are engaging in it. It does not have predetermined rules and specific skills are less central. It is very unusual for children and young people to be judged (by themselves or others) as being “good” or “bad” at play. The ability to be an effective participant in play is seldom dictated by physical size or shape, and teenagers do not require special clothes to take part in play. Teenagers engage in play for enjoyment, social connection and creative expression. It is unstructured and spontaneous, and it is part of the activity that teenagers undertake when not under adult supervision.

All teenagers need to play as part of their development. When they are asked to think about play and asked what they want to find in parks “play and adventure equipment for people my age” is often high up the list for

both sexes²². 2018 research in Wales talked to 13 focus groups from 7 secondary schools asked teenagers what would make them become more active and a leading answer for teenage girls was to provide activities that teenage girls enjoy (e.g. fun, sociable and not competitive sport).²³

Teenage play is frequently not referred to by teenagers themselves as play: it is referred to as hanging out, having a laugh, being with friends, chilling. And its unproductive nature means that it is often misunderstood by adults.

In England in 2025, the Centre for Young Lives produced a report looking at play, drawing on focus groups with children and young people, and experts in the field of play; this report highlighted some of the barriers to and contradictions around teenage play.²⁴

“We heard in our focus groups how children, particularly teenagers, want to play but don’t feel comfortable doing so because of social pressures to ‘grow-up’ and act more like an adult.”

And teenagers were also seen as a barrier to younger children playing:

“It [graffiti] doesn’t stop us going, but it does younger kids. The teenagers stop us going. There’s even vapes there.”

This sentiment, from younger children and their parents, reinforces the negative attributes associated with teenage play, especially if it is taking place somewhere that is not seen as a legitimate place for teenage play. Which is why having legitimate places for teenage play is so vital, and why parks are so important.

21 General Comment 17, UN Convention on Rights of the Child

22 Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport 2022: Make-Space-for-Us.

23 Todd & other BMC Public Health 2018; Teenage recommendations to improve physical activity for their age group: A qualitative study

24 Centre for Young Lives, 2025: Everything to Play For A Plan to Ensure Every Child in England Can Play [Everything to Play For — Raising the Nation Play Commission.pdf - Google Drive](#)

Why do parks matter for teenage play?

Across the UK, there are an estimated 27,000 parks and green spaces.²⁵ And for urban populations, they may represent the closest green space. Nearly 83% of England's population lives in urban areas and cities hold a much larger share of 16–24-year-olds than other areas.²⁶

Physical activity

“We want to move, play and be active, but not always through competitive sport” teenage girl, summer 2026

International research shows that in many countries levels of physical activity declines as children move through adolescence²⁷ and in 2024/25 Sports England Active Lives Survey shows this decline is prevalent in England²⁸. Research also supports the proposition that a teenager's level of physical activity can set the pattern for activity in later life²⁹. Being active as a teenager matters.

Parks are one of the last remaining places where teenagers can be physically active for free and this is important for teenagers who are financially reliant on others. For example, teenage girls in Essex identified affordability as a key criterion against which they assessed whether a public space was “for them”³⁰.

²⁵ Figure from Safer Parks Guidance 2025. [Safer Parks2025](#)

²⁶ Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2021a. Population estimates for the UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: mid-2020.

²⁷ Corder K, & others. 2016

²⁸ Sports England; Active Lives Survey 2024/25.

²⁹ Tammelin & Other: Physical activity and social status in adolescence as predictors of physical inactivity in adulthood, Preventive Medicine, Volume 37, Issue 4, 2003, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0091-7435\(03\)00162-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0091-7435(03)00162-2); and Telema & Others Physical activity from childhood to adulthood: A 21-year tracking study, American Journal of Preventive Medicine, Volume 28, Issue 3, 2005, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2004.12.003>

³⁰ Exploring Angel Meadow, Broomfield: What Would Make Angel Meadow More Welcoming To Girls And Young Women 2024

Access to space that is free to use for physical activity is important for teenage girls who consistently show lower levels of physical activity and physical confidence than their male peers.

- Girls are over 3.4 times more likely than boys to not feel confident when taking part in physical activity³¹
- Girls age 13-16 are 16% less likely to have a positive and meaningful relationship with movement and physical activity than their male peers³²
- Girls age 13-16 are 7.9% less likely than their male peers to average 60+ minutes of being active a day³³

Girls recognise the value of exercise and time spent being active outdoors. In a survey by Women in Sport, looking at the impact of the Covid pandemic on teenage girls, over 80% of girls surveyed said that they would put more effort into being active when lockdowns finally ended³⁴.

But sport, an obvious route to physical activity, feels less accessible to teenage girls than teenage boys, with only 30% of teenage girls considering themselves “sporty” compared to 57% of their male peers³⁵. And girls have much less access to outdoor community sports facilities, with 90% of community pitches being used for teams for boys and men³⁶.

The Make Space for Us research by Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport³⁷ makes the following key recommendations for increasing teenage girls’ physical activity in parks:

- parks need to provide a clean, cared for and attractive space with at least basic facilities for girls to feel comfortable;
- promoting physical and emotional safety in parks is particularly important for girls as engaging in physical activity significantly increases their emotional vulnerability;
- developing spaces in which harassment, scrutiny and judgement are minimised will support more girls to feel comfortable when exercising in parks
- promoting usage of specific exercise spaces (e.g. MUGAs) for girls will create a more inclusive environment where both girls and boys feel they are welcome.
- actively promoting purposeful activity and organised opportunities for girls to exercise in parks, with more guidance on how space/equipment can be used is essential to encourage girls.
- creating more playful, exciting and adventurous ways to get active, and involving girls in shaping activities and designing spaces will increase relevance and appeal.

31 Youth Sport Trust: Girls Active National Reports 2025

32 Sports England Active Lives Children and Young People Survey Academic year 2024-25; physical literacy data: 84% of teen boys age 13-16 have a positive and meaningful relationship compared to 68% of girls the same age

33 Sports England Active Lives Children and Young People Survey Academic year 2024-25; levels of activity: gender.

34 Women in Sport Life in Lock Down: the impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic

35 Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport 2022: Make-Space-for-Us.

36 Make Space for Girls: Pitches, planning and equal access to public space, 2024

37 Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport 2022: Make-Space-for-Us.

Mental Health

There is an increasing body of research showing the benefits of parks and other green spaces in supporting mental health. The NHS recognises that being active matters not only to physical health but to mental health: regular physical activity and exercise can make people of all ages healthier and happier³⁸.

In the field of adolescent mental health, a 2020 review concluded that overall the research:

suggests beneficial associations between green space exposure and reduced stress, positive mood, less depressive symptoms, better emotional well-being, improved mental health and behaviour, and decreased psychological distress in adolescents³⁹

There is an excellent review of the relevant academic literature in London Parks' Report "Young Green and Well" which can be found at this link: [The Young, Green, and Well report - Parks for London](#)

2018 Canadian research showed how important being in parks and green spaces can be to teenage girls: this research found that for girls, spending more time outdoors was associated with a 24% lower prevalence of stress exacerbated physical symptoms, compared to those who averaged no time playing outdoors. Interestingly no such relationship was observed among boys in that particular study⁴⁰.

Teenagers also know about the positive impact on their mental health of green space, with 64% believing that spending time in green space is important⁴¹.

The ability to feel welcome and safe in a local park or green space thus has an important role to play for teenage girls, who show higher levels of mental health difficulties than their male peers. From early adolescence, girls experience greater risk of low mood and anxiety relative to boys, and from mid adolescence onwards are twice as likely as boys to report depression⁴² and teenage girls are over twice as likely as boys to not be happy⁴³.

Being part of your community

Parks are crucial in establishing a sense of community. As a teenage girl in Basildon explained, a good park or public space is

"a place that helps the community be a community."⁴⁴

In research done as part of the National Youth Survey for England in 2025, young men (54%) were more likely than young women (48%) to agree that they felt that they belonged with people in their local area⁴⁵. The same research reported that the biggest problem for young people when talking about community was the gradual erosion of place based community belonging.

38 Be active for your mental health - Every Mind Matters - NHS

39 Zhang & others: The Association between Green Space and Adolescents' Mental Well-Being: A Systematic Review. Int J Environ Res Public Health; see also Bray & others, 2022

40 Piccininni, C, et al., Outdoor play and nature connectedness in Canadian Adolescents Preventative Medicine 112, 2018

41 London Parks Report: Young Green and Well

42 Demkowicz et al. BMC Women's Health (2025) 25:49 Adolescent girls' explanations of high rates of low mood and anxiety in their population: a co-produced qualitative study | BMC Women's Health | Springer Nature Link

43 Youth Sport Trust Girls Active Survey 2025

44 Social Place and Make Space for Girls: Believe in Basildon 2025

45 Policy Paper: 2025/26 [Youth Matters: State of the Nation - GOV.UK](#)

And when teenage girls see parks that provide only MUGAs and skateparks, consistently dominated by boys and young men, they are given the message that teen play spaces in parks are not a place where they are welcome to be part of their community.

“To walk past a skatepark and see that it’s filled with men and boys deters and intimidates me from using that space, even though I skate.”
teenage girl, winter 2024⁴⁶

A place to build confidence

Girls are designed out of parks at an important life stage, when they should be increasing their autonomy and developing confidence and an independent life.

Research shows that levels of confidence decrease significantly as girls move into and through their teenage years: in a 2024 survey by Girlguiding:

- when girls were aged 7-10 only 6% said they were not confident in their lives; and 43% said they were very confident; but
- by age 17-21, 30% of girls were not confident in their lives (a 5 fold Increase) and only 30% of girls were very confident⁴⁷.

Connection with nature

There is a wealth of academic research exploring the benefits of connectedness with nature for adolescence⁴⁸. Being connected with nature is important for wellbeing. Natural England’s research in 2020 showed that people with high nature connectedness are 1.7 times more likely to feel that their lives are worthwhile than those with low nature connectedness⁴⁹. In the same research Natural England also noted that while younger children showed high levels of being connected to nature, this dropped during the teenage years, showing life time lowest levels between 13 and 18.

Research in 2025 by Girlguiding showed that⁵⁰

- 80% of 7-21-year-olds say spending time in nature helps them to feel happy, with
- 72% saying they wanted more opportunities to be outdoors and with nature .

Plan UK’s report on The State of Girls Rights in the UK 2024⁵¹ found:

- Only 36% of girls take part in activities in nature as much as they like
- 41% of girls would like to do this more
- Interest in activities in nature increases with age from 34% of 12- to 16-year olds to nearly half (47%) of 17 to 21 year olds.
- More than one in ten girls (13%) say they don’t have regular access to nature and green spaces.

46 Social Place and Make Space for Girls: 2024 Exploring Central Park in Chelmsford 2024

47 Girlguiding Attitude Survey 2024

48 Nature doesn’t judge you – how urban nature supports young people’s mental health and wellbeing in a diverse UK city Jo Birch, Clare Rishbeth a , Sarah R. Payne; Health and Nature

49 Natural England, 2020: Nature Connectedness among adults and children Nature connectedness among adults and children in England - JP032

50 Girlguiding Girls’ Attitude Survey 2025.

51 Plan UK State of Girls Right 2024

For urban and suburban populations, parks and green spaces may provide the most practical way to connect with nature, particularly for teenagers who don't drive and may have limited access to public transport that is affordable for them.

Integration with the 2025 National Youth Strategy for England⁵²

The 2025 National Youth Strategy for England, produced in December 2025, following consultation with 14,000 young people contains the following:

“You’ve told us it’s hard to find somewhere to go. There aren’t enough good spaces that are welcoming to you and where you can just spend time with friends and have fun. And when those spaces do exist, they’re often expensive – or you feel judged for being there. That’s not fair. You deserve places in your community where you feel safe, valued and free to connect with others.”

Parks and green spaces provide a great opportunity to fulfil these needs.

But it is vital that the response to this need is not to simply provide more of the current teen play provision in parks. Implementing the National Youth Strategy should be done in a way that recognises the role that gender plays in whether spaces feel welcoming, fun, safe, valued and a place where teenage girls and gender diverse young people feel free to connect with others.

As a counterbalance to the on-line world

At the time of writing this report, the UK Government has announced significant restrictions on teenagers’ access to some aspects of the on-line world via its social media ban for under 16s, to come into effect from 2027. This ban has the stated intention that:⁵³

Children will be given back their childhoods thanks to government action to ban social media platforms from offering services to under-16s, with less time for scrolling and more time for play.

In a BBC News clip, asking teenagers their views on this announcement one teenage girl asked what she would do with her additional time replied with deadpan humour:

‘Stare at a wall.’

If the UK Government wants all teenagers, including girls, to spend less time on line and more time playing in real life, it needs to invest time and money in creating more places where teenage girls feel welcome to play.

52 DCMS National Youth Strategy 2025. [DCMS Youth Strategy accessible final](#)

53 UK Government Press Release 15 June 2026: Social Media to be Banned for under 16s. [Social media to be banned for under-16s in landmark government move to give kids their childhood back - GOV.UK](#)

Why do parks need to change?

***“Parks seem to offer two kinds of spaces. Play equipment for young children and sports spaces often dominated by boys and young men”
teenage girl, summer 2026***

Most local authorities recognise that parks and green spaces should provide play equipment for younger children. But the need for play spaces and equipment for teenagers is under-recognised and frequently conflated with the need for community based sport.

The fact that teenage play (in common with the play of younger children) is unproductive and (in common with the play of younger children) involves shouting, laughing and messing about, can lead to teenage play being miscategorised by adults as antisocial behaviour. Especially if it is taking place somewhere that is not seen as a legitimate place for teenage play.

Where provision is made in parks for teenage play, in 90% of cases⁵⁴, the provision consists of:

- Skateparks
- Multi use games areas (MUGAs) or fenced pitches
- BMX/Pump/cycle facilities.

The impact of gender on play changes as children get older. Boys and girls up to the age of 8- 10 or so tend to use parks equally. While a gender divide in the use of school playground space appears at primary school age⁵⁵ the gender divide in parks tends to emerge when children get older and start to go to parks on their own. Once this happens, parks are used much more by boys than girls,⁵⁶ and girls use them with less confidence⁵⁷.

Research in Belgium found that boys were more than twice as likely to play outside than girls⁵⁸. In research from the Netherlands⁵⁹ in 2021 it was revealed that the percentage of girls playing outside decreases from 45% in the age group of 0-4 to 23% in the age group of 13 and older, while the corresponding percentage for boys increases from 55% in the age group of 0-4 to 77% in the age group of 13 and older. US research also shows that while all teens use parks less the older they get, the drop off is more pronounced in girls⁶⁰.

⁵⁴ Make Space for Girls Parkwatch 2023.

⁵⁵ Amilburu and others: The Impact of school yard design on children's physical activity, 2026

⁵⁶ Baran & others: Park Use Among Youth and Adults: Examination of Individual, Social, and Urban Form Factors, Environment and Behavior 46 (6) 2013

⁵⁷ Cohen & others, Gender Differences in Physical Activity Associated with Urban Neighborhood Parks: Findings from the National Study of Neighborhood Parks, Women's Health Issues, Volume 31, Issue 3, 2021, Pages 236-244,.

⁵⁸ Kind und Samleving, Girls and Public Space, 2020.

⁵⁹ Urban Springtime 2021, University of the Hague

⁶⁰ Baran & others, 2013.

The patterns seen in this international research have also been seen here in the UK. Working with the London School of Economics, using a peer research approach, Make Space for Girls Researcher in Residence Report⁶¹ found that:

- Only 31% of teenage girls and young women used parks regularly, compared to 63% of their male peers
- Only 26% of teenage girls and young women felt their local green space had something for them, compared to 63% of their male peers;
- Only 5% of teenage girls and young women had used their local fenced pitch, compared to 50% of their male peers.

In the Make Space for Us research by Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport ⁶²teenage girls age 13-15 in Yorkshire reported feeling less safe and welcome using their local parks for exercise compared to their male peers:

- Only 34% of girls enjoyed exercising in their local park compared to 63% of boys;
- 59% of girls felt unwelcome in the park because the spaces were dominated by boys; and
- Nearly twice as many girls as boys feel unsafe exercising in their local park (49% cf. 26%).

The gendered divide in wider park use is amplified when it comes to the gendered use of play provision in parks designed for teenagers.

Make Space for Girl's Parkwatch⁶³ conducted a national survey looking at who was using teen play provision in parks by gender. The survey involved 265 counts and covered 91 council areas. It looked at the activity of 1,858 teenagers. The survey included 117 counts on 87 different MUGAs and 100 counts on 81 different skate parks (5% of the skate parks in the UK).

This survey showed:

- 92% of teen users of MUGAs/ fenced pitches are boys and young men; and
- 84% of teen users of skateparks are boys and young men.

Dominance of teen play spaces in parks by boys and young men can create a self-reinforcing cycle that is difficult to break. Teen spaces in parks tend to have few explicit rules about how they should be used and who should use them. The absence of explicit rules leaves the users themselves to determine who gets to use the spaces and this in turn allows groups that already dominate a space to determine the implicit rules for use.

'public' space unregulated leaves a heterogeneous urban population to work out for itself who really is going to have the right to be there. All spaces are socially regulated in some way, if not by explicit rules... then by the potentially more competitive ... regulation which exists in the absence of explicit ...controls⁶⁴.

61 LSE & Make Space for Girls 2023: Researchers in Residence

62 Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport 2022: Make-Space-for-Us.

63 Make Space for Girls Parkwatch 2023.

64 Doreen Massey For Space 2005

Skateboarding, football and basketball are all pursuits that are rooted in male-dominated spaces; teenage boys and young men use their dominance to set the rules of use. And it sets up the circumstances under which teenage boys and young men can “territorialise” the space. The idea of “territorialisation” in this context has been defined as:

“the deliberate dominance of a space by one group at the expense of another, to the point where that group’s use of the space is perceived as an embedded “right””⁶⁵

It is difficult for teenage girls to navigate the rules in a way that allows them to feel safe and confident in these spaces⁶⁶. In the Make Space for Us research, by Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport⁶⁷, 68% of teenage girls think there is nothing for them to do in parks.

But active play is important to teenage girls as well as teenage boys: research in Australia using photo elicitation showed that physically challenging play equipment like big slides, swings and zip wires is likely to encourage adolescents to visit and be active in parks. By contrast, rules, graffiti, toilets and skate bowls seemed to discourage teens from visiting parks⁶⁸.

Teenage girls will often avoid using spaces when boys are present, only going to some spaces at times of day when they know they will be empty⁶⁹.

In conversation with teenage girls, Make Space for Girls frequently hears that “sporty” girls who want to use their local fenced pitch for an informal kick about find themselves “moved on” if a group of boys turns up to use the space.

But equally there is research that shows that boys and young men can be strongly verbally supportive and keen to include girls and young women in a space they dominate: for example, this was found to be the case in some skateparks in Nottingham. But the same research showed there was a disconnect between what the boys wanted to happen (the inclusion of girls) and their behaviour, both individually and collectively: which in practice was frequently excluding⁷⁰.

“We’re asking for a space where we can feel safe, confident and where we want to stay.”
teenage girl, summer 2026

This is perhaps the key to why teenage girls don’t use parks. There simply aren’t spaces where they can feel safe, confident and where they want to stay.

⁶⁵ Jacquelyn Collins: The Play Equity Project 2019: [Territorialisation – The Play Equity Project](#)

⁶⁶ Stoodley, Paechter and others 2025.

⁶⁷ Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport 2022: Make-Space-for-Us.

⁶⁸ Veitch et al., Adolescents’ ratings of features of parks that encourage park visitation and physical activity, 2016.

⁶⁹ Tucker and Matthews, 2001.

⁷⁰ Final Report: Girl Skateboarders: active girlhood, alternative sports, and urban space, Nottingham Trent University 2023.

Girls' use of teen play provision: skateparks and MUGAs

Skateparks

The gendered use of skateparks has received much more academic attention than the gendered use of other teen play spaces. For example, there has been little research on the gendered use of MUGAs. This is striking, given skateparks are slightly less exclusionary of teenage girls and young women than MUGAs, and MUGAs are a much more common provision.

As of 2025, there are 1923 open skateable spaces in the UK: 1841 of these are outdoor, and 82 are indoor⁷¹. Skateparks, while intended by the councils that commission them to be places for teenagers generally, often operate in practice in a way that discourages teenage girls⁷².

Make Space for Girls' Parkwatch⁷³ research showed that 84% of the teen users of skateparks are boys and young men. This finding is broadly consistent with 2021 Skateboard GB estimates on the gendered use of skateparks which showed that 85% of skateboarders are male⁷⁴. The gendered nature of skatepark use is not unique to the UK. In Australian research, 95% of those who attended a skate park were male, and those females who did were either spectators or parents⁷⁵. Even in Sweden, which

is generally viewed as progressive in terms of gender equality skateboarding was found to be male dominated⁷⁶.

Professor Carrie Paechter and her team at Nottingham Trent University have carried out detailed research into the experiences of girl skaters in the UK⁷⁷ and observed in one paper:

"It is notable that generally young women did not feel able to just get hold of a board and try to use it, or to go independently to a public skatepark to find help. This seems to be different from young men's approaches; those we interviewed had often felt comfortable either to teach themselves or to join an established group at their local skatepark, learning to skate as legitimate peripheral participants in a local community of skateboarding practice."⁷⁸

A consequence of this seems to be that girls who skate have often been introduced to the activity and to their local skate space by a male friend, brother or boyfriend, with these men and boys legitimatising the girl's presence in the space. It is great that there are such male allies: but teenage girls should not have to rely on a boy to gain access to a teen play space.

71 Skateboard GB: 2025 UK Skateable Spaces Audit.

72 Barker & others: What Makes a Park Feel Safe or Unsafe? The views of women, girls and professionals in West Yorkshire 2022

73 Make Space for Girls Parkwatch 2023.

74 Data from Cognosis which Skateboard GB shared with Make Space for Girls in 2021.

75 Bradley 2010 "None of the females was riding a skateboard; most were spectators; ten were parenting."

76 Backström, 2013

77 Blog for Make Space for Girls: 2022 Making Space for Girl Skateboarders

78 Paechter & others 2023: What's it like to be a girl skateboarder? Identity, participation and exclusion for young women in skateboarding spaces and communities

One of the obvious consequences of 84% of the teen users of skateparks being boys and young men, is that the teenage girl who uses the skatepark really stands out:

"It is not uncommon for a young woman to be the only non-male in the space, with a concomitant increase of individual scrutiny as, in effect, a solo and spotlight performer. Our respondents were clear that, alongside direct intimidation, this was something they were constantly aware of:

"I think it's just the general atmosphere . . . it can be really intimidating because you're the only, like you'll be the only girl. And you can tell that they don't really want you there. (Icantshuvit, 16)"⁷⁹

Skateboarding relies heavily on performance and one of the findings of the Nottingham research related to the immediate pressure on performance: to be accepted, girl skaters had to prove their expertise immediately on arrival on the park or be labelled a "poser".

The gendered implications of this performance element and the impact on teenage girls is described as follows in one of the Nottingham research papers:⁸⁰

"In local, male-dominated, skateboarding communities, what is judged is an individual's right to participation as a skateboarder in a particular skateboarding space, and the judgements made come from the young men who usually constitute the lead actors in that space (Atencio and Beal, 2016; Carr, 2017)

While most young male skateboarders can make themselves and their performances relatively invisible within a busy skateboarding space, allowing

them choice about whether they are the focus of others' attention, this is not usually possible for young women, who are often the only girl in a male-dominated arena. In these circumstances they become hyper-visible, unable to avoid the dominant and often judgemental male gaze. Furthermore, because it is assumed that they are unable to skate, they have overtly to perform skateboarder immediately on, or soon after, arrival, to claim a skateboarder identity and avoid the 'poser' label"

Professor Peachter's research also found that a major deterrent for girls and young women was feeling uncomfortable in skate spaces:

"One very obvious factor is male dominance of skate spaces and the communities within them. All the spaces we observed were dominated by men and boys, both in terms of sheer numbers and regarding how the space was used... Male users also tended to take up more of the space available. Individual men and boys clearly felt able to use the entire space, while girls and young women tended to stick to the margins, unless the park was otherwise empty."⁸¹

Social media also plays a part. Skateboarding is a social media dense activity with filming and posting forming a core part of skateboarding culture, with posts often reinforcing a core association between skateboarding and masculinity⁸².

Skateparks can also have a "negative halo" effect: this was demonstrated by US research, which showed that parks overall were beneficial to teenage girls – the closer they lived to one, the more active they were likely to be. However,

⁷⁹ Paechter & Others, 2024 It Feels Like a Big Performance': Space, Performativity and Young Woman Skateboarders" 2023

⁸⁰ Paechter & Others, 2024 It Feels Like a Big Performance'

⁸¹ What's it like to be a girl skateboarder? Identity, participation and exclusion for young women in skateboarding spaces and communities; 2023; Peachter & others

⁸² Bridgid McCarthy, 'Who unlocked the kitchen?', 2021

if that park was a skatepark, this actually lowered the amount of exercise taken by girls⁸³.

It is clearly wrong however to write off skateparks as irredeemably male and as places that can never welcome girls. Research published in 2025, looking at the way a group of teenage girls used a skatepark in London during the Covid pandemic lock down period, showed how positive skateboarding can be for teenage girls and non-binary young people⁸⁴ and the Nottingham research reveals how much girls who can break through the barriers can benefit from skateboarding.

The Nottingham research identified the following steps as crucial in shifting the gender balance on skateparks⁸⁵:

- skateboard-parks need to be designed so that there are quiet places for beginners to practice, relatively undisturbed by more expert skateboarders. This would make it easier for teenage girls to get started in the first place;
- there should be more woman and girl sessions in managed skateparks, while remaining clear that these should not be seen as the only safe times that girls can skateboard.
- skateboard coaches need to more aware about girls' fear of being in the way and what they can do about it when teaching skateboarding
- more culture change: the Nottingham research suggests that young men generally welcome young women skateboarders – but they need support from leaders in the skateboarding community in understanding how to put this into practice.

83 Cohen * others, 2006.

84 Clark & Sayers (2025) Skateparks as communities of care: the role of skateboarding in girls' and non-binary youth's mental health recovery during lockdown, Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 33:2, 613-632, DOI: 10.1080/14681366.2023.2258382

85 Blog for Make Space for Girls: 2022 Making Space for Girl Skateboarders

MUGAs (multi use games areas).

“[MUGAs] are seen as ‘legitimate’ places for young people to gather (muf 2004: 14) – especially young men. This sense of legitimacy is hugely positive... But if this sense of legitimacy is too narrow and exclusive, it can contribute to the segregation of space by age, gender and use – it can seem that cages are only for young men, and only for sport. It is thus important to broaden this sense of legitimacy to include other users and other activities...”

Billingham: Sports Cages & Multi-Use Games Areas, 2020⁸⁶

“MUGAs are a rare example of a play space being designed specifically with teenagers in mind, even if they end up being dominated by teenage boys. Play remains vitally important in adolescence, yet few other spaces exist for teenagers...” ⁸⁷Centre for Young Lives, **Everything to Play For, 2025**

MUGAs, fenced pitches or cages are the facility most frequently provided for teenage play. Unlike skateparks, there seems to be no national data on the numbers of MUGAs in the UK. And there has been very little research into who uses them.

The term “MUGA” or fenced pitch is used to cover a number of different types of outdoor provision. Many newer MUGAs have higher quality playing surfaces and are available on a bookable basis; this means they are often locked between bookings and are available only to organised sports teams or community groups. For example, the Football Foundation “Playzone” scheme, which aimed to invest

86 Billingham, L, 2020 Sports Cages & Multi-Use Games Areas: Places of safety, places of harm, places of potential: [sports-cages-mugas-places-of-safety-places-of-harm-places-of-potential-final.pdf](#)

87 Centre for Young Lives, 2025: Everything to Play For A Plan to Ensure Every Child in England Can Play

£92 million to build or refurbish 330 MUGAs, required any facility funded by this scheme to be bookable⁸⁸.

We would suggest that MUGAs that are frequently locked and require booking to be used, form part of a local community's sport infrastructure rather than part of its teen play infrastructure. This is because it is unlikely that teenagers who want to play (as opposed to engage with sport) will have pre-determined their desire to play sufficiently in advance or attached sufficient importance to the act of playing to prebook a space to do so.

In contrast, unlocked MUGAs that are available for anyone to turn up and hang out, kick a ball around, throw a few hoops etc. form part of the local teen play infrastructure.

When we conducted our Parkwatch survey we watched these "open access" MUGAs, rather than assessing the gender breakdown of teams playing on a fenced pitch as part of an organised sports session (but see section below on Pitches for the gendered use of bookable community sports pitches).

The only research into the gender break-down of the use of MUGAs that Make Space for Girls is aware of is our own Parkwatch research⁸⁹. This showed that 92% of the teen users of MUGAs were boys and young men.

This fits with other research into the use of MUGAs, which, while not expressly considering the presence of girls, shows that these fenced pitches are used mostly by boys and young men⁹⁰.

Studies outside the UK have shown that hard surfaced play areas generally are more used by boys than girls,⁹¹ and that where one is provided, it seemed to deter girls, who played more actively in playgrounds which did not have such an area⁹².

Part of the issue may lie in design: high fencing, combined with narrow entrances make them feel intrinsically unsafe for teenage girls wary of being trapped⁹³. Some councils are trialling MUGAs with much lower fencing to encourage more gender balanced use: for example, in Dane Valley Margate⁹⁴, a new youth zone was opened in 2026 with low-level fencing, a specific design choice championed by local young women, who highlighted that lower fences make the area more inclusive and welcoming than traditional designs.

Make Space for Girls' engagement with teenage girls and boys also highlights that there are deeply embedded beliefs held by boys and girls that these spaces are "for boys", suggesting that in addition to design the question of "territorialisation" and entitlement to occupy a space may be in play⁹⁵. One teenage boy explained he would not invite a girl to play football with him on the MUGA because that would make him seem like a "weirdo". A teenage girl commented "Even if I know some of the boys it still feels uncomfortable going into the MUGA." And a group of teenage girls from Manchester explained how a male teacher had told them to "go home" when they were trying to play on the MUGA, because the teacher thought they were distracting the boys.

88 Play Zones technical guidance 2022

89 Make Space for Girls Parkwatch 2023

90 GLA, 2020; City of Vienna, 2013.

91 Reimers, A and Knapp G, Playground usage and physical activity levels of children based on playground spatial features, Journal of Public Health (Germany) 25 (6) 2017

92 Reimers and Knapp, 2017.

93 Barker & others: What Makes a Park Feel Safe or Unsafe? The views of women, girls and professionals in West Yorkshire 2022

94 [Community-led youth zone unveiled in Dane Valley, Margate - Thanet](#)

95 Jacquelyn Collins: The Play Equity Project 2019: [Territorialisation](#)

It's worth noting that MUGAs are not universally appealing for teenage boys. In the 2022 Make Space for Us research by Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport boys, when asked what facilities would encourage them to be active in the park, ranked MUGAs seventh out of eleven options with swings, gym equipment and trampolines all ranking higher⁹⁶.



⁹⁶ Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport 2022: Make-Space-for-Us.

Pitches and their relevance to play

Open grass pitches are another significant feature of many parks and green spaces. They form a crucial part of a local community's sports provision and sport use is prioritised. For example, in most places if a group were sitting on a grass pitch in a park, having a picnic and a group turned up wanting to play football, the picnickers would be expected to move, even though they were there first.

As with MUGAs, there appears to be almost no UK research on the gendered use of community sports pitches. Make Space for Girls therefore undertook its own research into this type of provision and the results can be found in our report here: [Pitches, planning and equal access to the park](#).

The key findings of this research are:

- across all surveyed pitch uses, men and boys make up at least 90% of the organised teams who use pitches.
- pitches used for football and cricket are the most male dominated (91% and 95% male users respectively)
- pitches used for hockey were the most equal (53% male users vs. 47% female users) although there were far fewer hockey teams than football and cricket teams.

We are not aware of any research that specifically analyses the impact of this gendered imbalance on the wider use of parks as a whole.

But in places where the available land for outdoor play, leisure and sports facilities is heavily restricted (for example urban settings), prioritising pitches dominated by sports teams for boys and men will leave less land for areas in which teenage girls can claim space for play.

Feeling safe and experiencing sexual harassment

International research⁹⁷ and research in the UK⁹⁸ show that gender plays a significant role in whether a person feels safe in a park. Not feeling safe is a key barrier which stops teenage girls using parks; in the 2022 Make Space for Us research by Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport just under a third of teenage girls said not feeling safe stopped them using the park; and not feeling safe impacts activity level with 49% of teenage girls saying they felt unsafe to exercise in the park compared to 26% of their male peers⁹⁹.

Research also shows the importance of recognising that feelings of safety are not simply about demonstrating there are low reported crime statistics around a park, because feeling safe is a subjective experience¹⁰⁰.

Different people may have different feelings of safety in the same place, based on their experience, their expectations and their judgement of their ability to keep themselves safe. Specifically on the subject of gender and parks, research by Leeds University in 2022

showed that while 89% of park professionals felt that their local parks were safe, only 22% of teenage girls felt the same about the same parks¹⁰¹. Both perceptions were valid assessments of the feeling of safety: but one was more likely to have a greater impact on the extent to which teenage girls used the parks than the other.

There is plenty of survey data that reveals the safety concerns of teenage girls. Work in Glasgow during the pandemic found that only 20% of girls and young women felt very comfortable in the park that they had chosen to use¹⁰². Plan UK's key research: The State of Girls Rights in the UK 2024 found that 93% of girls and young women do not feel "completely safe" in public places¹⁰³.

There are many factors that feed into whether teenagers feel safe in public space. Each year for the last seven years, the Essex Violence and Vulnerability Unit (VVU) has carried out a survey into what makes teenagers in Essex feel unsafe, with nearly 6,000 young people taking part in the 2026 survey. This showed that nearly 18% of young people thought that knife crime was the biggest concern, and that gender-based harassment appearing to be a growing concern¹⁰⁴.

97 Derose, The Mediating Role of Perceived Crime in Gender 2019

98 Barker & others: What Makes a Park Feel Safe or Unsafe? The views of women, girls and professionals in West Yorkshire 2022

99 Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport 2022: Make-Space-for-Us.

100 See for example: Syropoulos, & others How safe are we? 2024

101 Barker & others What Makes a Park Feel Safe or Unsafe? The views of women, girls and professionals in West Yorkshire 2022

102 YWCA Scotland, 2021

103 Plan UK State of Girls Rights report-2024

104 Essex VVU/ECVYS Youth Voice Listening Project 2026

Gender based sexual harassment of teenage girls and young women ubiquitous. In a 2021 Girlguiding survey¹⁰⁵:

- 60% of girls across all age groups have experienced unwanted attention, such as being whistled at in the street. This increases from 37% aged 13 and 14 to 57% aged 15 and 16, and 83% aged 17 and 18.
- 19% of all girls who have experienced this say this type of unwanted attention happens often or most of the time, increasing to 39% for the older age group.
- Girls of colour were more likely to experience street harassment (67% compared to 57% of white girls) and to suffer it more often.
- LGBTQ girls were also more likely to have experienced street harassment and more often (72% compared to 57% of straight girls).
- 60% of all girls and young women have been intimidated by a group of boys. This rises from 46% aged 13 and 14 to 55% aged 15 and 16, and 78% aged 17 and 18
- Girls of colour were more likely to experience this type of intimidation most of the time (18% compared to 8% of white girls) and LGBTQ girls were more likely to have experienced this at all (78% compared to 57% of straight girls).

Research shows that teenage girls experience sexual harassment more than older women and that these teenage experiences play a role in shaping how women assess risk in public spaces¹⁰⁶.

In 2022 Dr Anna Barker and her team at Leeds University conducted detailed research into teenage girls feelings of safety in parks. This can be found In section 5 of the wider report on Women and Girls Safety In Parks¹⁰⁷. Key findings were:

- the presence of groups of male teenagers in parks creates an air of intimidation; girls thought that authorities are not doing enough about harassment and violence against women and girls: 'I just feel the boys need to... see what they're doing to girls, we feel really unsafe and try to avoid boys because of how they act.'
- going to familiar parks with familiar people is important to feeling safe, and that lots can be done to design parks to make them busier and feel safer for girls throughout the day; 'You need to feel comfortable and relaxed and familiarity brings that...'
- public spaces are perceived as scary and dangerous places for girls due to predatory male behaviour; a girl explained that the one thing that affects her sense of safety in local parks is 'just men' suggesting that 'they just need to like get a grip and just behave'.

¹⁰⁵ Girlguiding Survey: It Happens All the Time 2021

¹⁰⁶ Transport for London 2026: Ending violence against women and girls on London's transport network: Evidence, insight and action

¹⁰⁷ Barker & others What Makes a Park Feel Safe or Unsafe? The views of women, girls and professionals in West Yorkshire 2022

This research showed that the single factor most often cited by women and girls in making parks feel safer was the presence of other women and girls. This means that if authorities want to make their parks feel safer for teenage girls, those authorities need to do things that will bring more women and girls into the park. The data is clear: as things currently stand, installing a new MUGA or refurbishing the skate park will bring proportionately more boys and young men into the park than girls and young women; such actions are therefore highly unlikely to make teenage girls feel safer in the park.

This same research has led to detailed guidance of steps that can be taken to make parks feel safer for women and girls, updated in 2025. This can be found at: [Safer Parks Improving Access for Women and Girls](#) and an online training course based on the principles launched in autumn 2026.

How being “judged” affects girls’ use of parks

*“older people see teenagers in a group and think ‘oh they’re a bit dodge’ but the majority of teenagers aren’t like that... and families with kids keep their kids away from the teenagers. It makes you think: ‘what have I done wrong?’
teenage girl, summer 2022*

Listening to teenage girls and gender-diverse young people talk about their experience of parks, the concept of “being judged” is a recurring theme.

*“They look at us like we’re going there for attention...to be looked at and stuff because there’s so many boys in that area all the time.”
teenage girl, 2022*

The theme of judgement came up repeatedly in Make Space for Girls/LSE Researcher in Residence work in 2023¹⁰⁸, with one peer researcher commenting in relation to teen spaces in parks

¹⁰⁸ Researchers in Residence; LSE, Countryside and Make Space for Girls.

"It is mainly boys [...] that seem to use these spaces as they don't seem to have the same worries of judgement or catcalling that girls can have in these public spaces."

teenage girl, 2023

Working with a group of teenage girls in Basildon in the summer of 2025, a number of the participants noted the prevalence of judgement of young women and girls in the public realm including based on their appearance, being called "sluts" and "slags" based on their clothing and body shape; one teenage girl noted she felt that, while all teenagers were judged for their behaviour, there was a gendered difference in that judgement, with girls being judged in public space in a sexual way, when teenage boys were not¹⁰⁹. There is also research that indicates that boys judge girls who are active in a negative way, and that this in turn influences how girls behave¹¹⁰.

The role that judgement plays in making teenage girls and gender-diverse young people feel unwelcome in parks has started to gain more academic attention¹¹¹. In a 2026 paper looking at girls' rights to claim the park, Dr Anna Barker, Leeds University noted:

"Using playground equipment also attracted adult disapproval, rooted in assumptions that teenagers were inappropriate or threatening users: 'If you see a teenager in a playground, you'd get stared at... adults get scared of us being there' "¹¹²

The 2022 Make Space for Us Research by Yorkshire Sport and Women In Sport commented:¹¹³

"Girls feel highly monitored and judged in outdoor spaces by boys, girls and adults in the wider community. Judgement is rooted in:

Socio-cultural expectations of the behaviour of young women and girls (e.g. staying indoors is being a 'good girl').

Gender stereotypes around sport and exercise (e.g. girls are less capable/ shouldn't be doing it, and notions of femininity/masculinity associated with being active).

Lack of clear, purposeful physical activity leads to judgements around why girls are in park spaces (e.g. loitering, attention seeking, antisocial behaviour). 37% of girls feel judged for hanging around in parks, compared to 25% of boys."

The creation and design of teen play spaces in parks cannot directly change socio-cultural expectations or gender stereotypes.

But the creation and design of spaces where teenage girls are clearly supposed to play, spaces where the wider public legitimately expects teenage girls to be in the park, could clearly reduce judgement about why teenage girls might be in a park.

We are starting to see some designs that are specifically trying to do this. For example: a heart shaped social seating area in Ontario which "boldly celebrates a stereotypical teenage girl aesthetic and says "You are welcome here – this is a space for you!"¹¹⁴

109 Social Place and Make Space for Girls: Believe in Basildon 2025

110 Maihan Vu & others Listening to Girls and Boys Talk About Girls' Physical Activity Behaviours, Health Educ Behav, 2006. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16397161/>

111 Theodorides-Feldman, O., & King, J. (2024). 'There's nowhere for us': spatial and scalar experiences of judgement amongst young women in the UK. Gender & Development, 32(1–2), 223–244. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2024.2348402>

112 Barker & others (2026). Claiming the Right to the Park: Teenage Girls, Safety and Belonging in Public Green Spaces. CrimRxiv. <https://doi.org/10.21428/cb6ab371.6cc81345>

113 Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport 2022: Make-Space-for-Us.

114 [Gaukel Street Parkette - Earthscape Play Inc.](#)

The legal and policy framework for teen play in Great Britain

The Legal Framework

The Equality Act 2010

A basic legal framework to support more inclusive play provision for teenage girls is found in the Equality Act 2010, and the obligations in that Act that relate to:

- direct and indirect discrimination; and
- the Public Sector Equality Duty.

The Equality Act 2010 imposes obligations on certain type of organisations and people (for example, employers, landlords, service providers) prohibiting them from acts of “direct” and “indirect” discrimination. For example, if a local authority fixed a notice to a council funded MUGA that stated “No Girls Allowed”, this would likely amount to unlawful direct discrimination contrary to the Equality Act. But as discussed in this paper, it isn’t explicit signs that stop teenage girls feeling welcome on MUGAs or in skateparks.

Discrimination contrary to the Equality Act can, however, manifest itself in less obvious ways, via the concept of indirect discrimination. Indirect discrimination on grounds of sex can arises in certain circumstances if an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice in fact disadvantages one sex more than the other and the provision, criterion or practice cannot be “objectively justified”.

Applying the concept of indirect discrimination to teen play provision, it could be argued that the provision of a skate park and MUGA as teen play provision is apparently “neutral”: there is no sign attached saying “GIRLS KEEP OUT”. It is also, however, clear that limiting teen play provision to these facilities disadvantages teenage girls. This raises the interesting (and as far as we are aware) untested question of whether the provision of teen play provision by a local authority would fall within the ambit of these provisions in the Act, and if so, where that provisions comprised 90% MUGAs and skateparks, whether the provision could be “objectively justified”.

In practice, however, it must be recognised that the provisions of the Equality Act relating to direct and indirect discrimination have to date offered little practical support to teenage girls who do not feel welcome in parks.

The Public Sector Equality Duty

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a suite of specific legal obligations (usually referred to by the umbrella term as “the Public Sector Equality Duty” or “PSED”) intended to create a culture in which promoting equality becomes part of the authority’s core business. The broad aim of the PSED is to integrate consideration of the advancement of equality into the day-to-day business of authorities.

One of the things that the PSED requires a local authority to consider is the need to: advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic (eg boys who share the protected characteristic of “male sex”) and those who do not (eg girls, who do not share the protected characteristic of “male sex”) by removing/reducing disadvantage, meeting differing needs, and encouraging people to participate in activities where their participation is low¹¹⁵.

Hence the PSED requires local authorities to consider:

- (1) removing/reducing the disadvantage that girls suffer in teen play provision- for example changing a design to make a space more welcoming;
- (2) meet differing needs eg providing a hang out space where teenage girls want to play as well as a MUGA; and
- (3) encouraging teenage girls to use their local MUGA eg by running sessions where they can occupy the space.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission have published a 10 step guide for public bodies on how to comply with the PSED when setting or revising a policy (for example a parks, play or similar policy/strategy) explaining the importance of collecting evidence as part of this process. The evidence around the gendered use of teen play provision should form part of this evidence when setting or revising a parks, play or similar policy/strategy¹¹⁶.

The child’s right to play under United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

Article 31 of the UNCRC requires the recognition of the right of the child (defined as any person under 18, thus including teenagers) to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child; and to encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities.

Article 31 does not create directly enforceable rights for children. The right can only be enforced if there is country specific legislation. Within Great Britain, the devolved administrations have taken different approaches to creating an environment that support the UN Convention right to play.

The Welsh Government led the way in recognising the importance of play, introducing legislation to support local authorities to provide play opportunities, including play sufficiency legislation¹¹⁷.

¹¹⁶ The Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2024: Guide to the PSED for public sector organisations: [How to consider equality in policy making: A 10-step guide for public bodies in England | EHRC](#)

¹¹⁷ Llywodraeth Cymru/Welsh Government 2025: Wales a Play Friendly Country

¹¹⁵ Section 149 (3) Equality Act 2010

The 2019 Planning (Scotland) Act and associated 2023 Regulations brought play sufficiency legislation into Scottish law¹¹⁸. The Scottish Government has also recognised the role that gender plays in teenage play. The action plan supporting the Scottish National Play Strategy¹¹⁹ includes the following goal:

“Working with our partners in local government, share effective practice on maintenance and development of free, accessible and inclusive public spaces, including principles for design and maintenance of public spaces to create an environment where girls feel safe and welcome in public play spaces. (by end of 2026)”

England lags significantly behind Wales and Scotland in this area. It has been suggested by some that the UN Convention Right to Play for teenagers is supported in England by section 507B Education Act 1996, introduced in 2007, which imposes on Local Authorities obligations to provide “recreational leisure-time activities” for young people aged 13-19, although there is little to support this suggestion.

Between 2005 and 2010 there was a recognition at an English Government level that play was important, leading to the 2008 National Play Strategy for England¹²⁰. This initiative was abandoned in 2010.

Attempts to introduce a play sufficiency duty into English law via the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 did not succeed. Although in response to attempts to introduce amendments to this effect, the Minister for Housing and Planning made a statement in support of play provision:

“...we do not believe that it is necessary to add the sort of legislative requirements the amendments would entail. However, I recognise the importance of what the amendments seek to achieve, and the provision of play space is one of the areas we are considering as we prepare a new set of national planning policies for decision making, on which we will consult this year.”¹²¹

We recognise that, for now, the opportunity for the legal framework in England to catch up with the approach of the Scottish and Welsh Governments has passed. However we hope that, in due course, national play policy in England will recognise the importance of teenage play, and the role that gender plays in this.

¹¹⁸ Scottish Government Play Sufficiency Guidance 2023

¹¹⁹ Scotland Play Strategy 2025

¹²⁰ Play England 2025: Briefing: History and Impact of the First APPG on Play (c.2005–2010)

¹²¹ Hansard: Planning and Infrastructure Bill, Volume 768: debated on Monday 9 June 2025

The Policy Framework

National and local policy and guidance have an important role in changing the narrative around creating teen play spaces that are welcoming to teenage girls and gender diverse young people.

Within Scotland's National Planning Framework 4 (2023),¹²² Policy 14 (Liveable Places) highlights the need to prioritise women's safety and improving physical and mental health. And Scotland's action plan on play strategy references the particular needs of teenage girls for play spaces¹²³.

In Wales, Planning Policy Wales, Edition 12, (2024) does not reference the particular needs of women and girls¹²⁴ and the Welsh Government Play Sufficiency Assessment toolkit (2024)¹²⁵ does not reference the gendered nature of teenage play.

In 2026, for the first time, the National Planning Policy Framework for England included gender as a relevant consideration in the design of public space. Specifically in DP3 there is now a requirements that:

"To create well-designed places, development proposals should also reflect relevant aspects of the following principles, as appropriate to the nature of the development and its location:

Public Space: include spaces that are safe, secure, inclusive, and accessible for all ages and abilities, including for groups such as women and girls; and which facilitate and encourage social interaction, play and healthy lifestyles (for example by providing high quality, clear and legible pedestrian and cycle routes, a variety of recreational spaces and places to meet, integrating

lighting and making building entrances and windows face onto streets and other public spaces to provide natural surveillance);"¹²⁶

The inclusion of the reference to women and girls prompts local authorities to create local plans that will encourage more inclusive new parks and green spaces; and gives them the scope to use conditions and reserved matters within planning to encourage developers to think creatively about gender inclusive places.

National policy does not however dictate how this should be done. Local plans need to reflect these principles, and we are aware of a number that do.

NPPF and local plans are for the most part concerned with new developments: and it is vital that these get it right for teenage girls and gender diverse young people from the outset. But it is also important to have policies that support changes to the approximately 27,000 existing parks and green spaces.

Local authority policies that cover parks and green spaces, play, active design and similar are all appropriate places to include relevant provisions. A more detailed consideration of the policy issues and some examples of policy wording are available in the Make Space for Girls & Social Place report: Making Space in Chelmsford and Maldon 2024-2026¹²⁷.

There is currently no National Play Policy for England, although there are encouraging developments in this area. We hope that when one is developed, it will recognise the importance of teenage play; the highly gendered nature of the limited play provision made for teenagers in parks currently; and the need to provide teen play spaces in parks that reflect what teenage girls tell us would make parks work better.

¹²² Scottish Government, 2023: [National Planning Framework 4 - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/pages/122.aspx)

¹²³ Scotland Play Strategy 2025

¹²⁴ [Planning Policy Wales - Edition 12](https://www.gov.wales/planning-policy-wales-edition-12)

¹²⁵ [Play Sufficiency Assessment toolkit \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](https://www.gov.wales/play-sufficiency-assessment-toolkit)

¹²⁶ National Planning Policy Framework (England) 2026

¹²⁷ Making Space in Chelmsford and Maldon 2024-2026

Empowering and engaging with teenage girls to shape parks

It is a fundamental part of Make Space for Girls' Strategy that decision makers listen to the voices of teenage girls when they design parks and green spaces.

In research cited as part of the National Youth Survey for England in 2025, young women and non-binary young people were less likely to think there are enough opportunities available to share their views than young men: 24% of young men in the UK (11 to 30) thought there are enough opportunities to share their views, compared to only 16% of young women and 9% of non-binary young people¹²⁸.

The same research revealed that Black, African, Black British or Caribbean backgrounds were most likely to say they had no opportunities to share their views (46%) compared to all other ethnic groups; and young Muslims (16 to 25 in urban England) feel constrained by systemic Islamophobia, exclusionary narratives in public life, and limited access to decision-making platforms.

Consultation and engagement have been a feature of urban planning and design for many decades. But it is clear that much of this engagement, especially with young people, can be tokenistic or extractive. It is often undertaken to comply with planning requirements, is short

term (for example a one-off workshop);¹²⁹ it does not address the power imbalance between the decision makers (who commission and design a teen play space) and the teenagers who are the intended end users; and is often disconnected from the eventual outcomes.

Two methodologies can address these shortcomings: peer research, where young people with relevant lived experience research the issues; and co-production of spaces in which the traditional power holders in the design process share power about those decisions with the end users of the space.

The principles of Peer Research are summarised by the Young Foundation in their paper: *Positioning Peer Research in a Policy Context*¹³⁰. The approach of peer research has formed the foundation of much of the research that Make Space for Girls has been involved with. For example, Make Space for Girls/LSE Researcher in Residence work in 2023¹³¹ and the short film produced by the LSE "Are Girls Being Designed out of public space"¹³²

True co-production with young people is, in our experience, rare in the field of urban design. This may be because of the inherent barriers to sharing decision making power between built environment professionals (who have

128 Policy Paper: 2025/26 Youth Matters: State of the Nation

129 Theocharides-Feldman, O. and King, J. (2024) "Locating Young Women in Public Space: A Feminist Spatial Researcher-in-Residence Model", *The Journal of Public Space*, 9(1), pp. 99- 108. View of Locating Young Women in Public Space

130 Young Foundation 2020: *Positioning Peer Research in Policy Context*.

131 LSE & Make Space for Girls 2023: *Researchers in Residence*

132 LSE short film 2022.

many years of technical training and practical experience, but who don't know the community and are not teenagers) and young people (who are expert in their communities and own lives but do not have that technical training). But there are excellent examples of how it can be done, for example by the London Legacy Development Corporation, in their work at the Waterden Green site in east London in 2024¹³³.

Local authorities can lead the way in developing innovative ways to engage teenage girls and gender diverse young people in the design of spaces in parks. For example, Chelmsford City Council and Maldon District Council's approach in the strategic project: Making Space in Chelmsford and Maldon¹³⁴.

And local community groups and Friends of Parks can also be well placed to engage in a meaningful way in a hyper-local level. For example, Friends of Rowntree Park - Make Space York project¹³⁵.



133 LLDC 2024: Waterden Green: Co-clienting with teenage girls

134 Making Space in Chelmsford and Maldon 2024-2026

135 Friends of Rowntree Park 2025: Make Space York Report:

What do teenage girls tell us would make parks work better?

Make Space for Girls has worked with over 500 teenage girls and gender diverse young people between 2021 and 2026, listening to what would make parks and green spaces work better for them. Like any group of any age or gender, their thoughts and proposals are not homogenous.

But some strong common themes emerged, which can support parks and built environment professionals to develop parks that are more inclusive for more teenagers.

These themes are set out below:¹³⁶

People

The presence of people and particularly women, girls and families in a park made it feel safer, whereas empty spaces or spaces with large groups of men or boys feel intimidating. The regular use of routes through a park for walking and cycling also supported how welcoming a park feels. Park staff and other “official” users (eg Parkrun, yoga classes, personal trainers) were also viewed positively. Some groups of girls welcomed the idea of a visible police presences, but others did not, perhaps reflecting different experiences.

Spaces to socialise

Many teenage girls and gender diverse young people value having spaces where they can be sociable with their friends; when we ask them what would make parks better, a frequent request is for a greater variety of places to hang out. Many parks have a limited number of standard park benches, and the traditional alignment along paths is great for a two people to sit side by side: but not for a group of teenage friends to hang out. Seating designed for groups to hang out together and socialise; and creative, attractive and interesting seating and alternatives like hammocks or tethered swing benches, with places to climb on and hang off can signal that this is a place teenagers are supposed to be.

Shelter

It is important to provide a variety of places to shelter- either from a quick rain shower, or for a bit longer on hot sunny days. But the typical teen shelter, sold by most play equipment manufacturers is usually rejected: “I hate the current shelter and it’s the only one.” “It’s small and awkward”. Instead, they asked that parks provide multiple areas of shelter, that are more welcoming, with comfortable seats, and a decent level of protection from the elements.

¹³⁶ See Social Place and Make Space for Girls: Believe in Basildon 2025; Exploring Essex Parks Making Space for Girls 2025; Natural England 2023: Greenspace & Us Part 2- A community insights co-production project with teenage girls.

Swings

Research consistently shows that swings are very popular with most teenage girls and (perhaps to the surprise of some) with many teenage boys. For example, the Make Space for Us research by Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport showed that 75% of girls aged 13-15 said swings for young people their age would make them more active in the park; as did 39% of teen boys. The swings should be clearly identified as for use by teenagers (not for little kids) and could be part of a wider area in the park for teenagers to hang out, without being judged.

Activity and adventure

Although the MUGA and skatepark usually don't appeal, teenage girls and gender diverse young people do focus on being active. They suggest areas that are adventurous, like a climbing wall, or obstacle course. They proposed a "climbing centre, big climbing frames, large rope park" "Difficult to pin point... but something more exclusive to us [young people]... something too dangerous for [little] kids", with "Somewhere you can borrow sports equipment and give it back."

Lighting

The relevance of lighting will vary depending on whether the park is closed between dusk and dawn or whether it contains through routes, eg promoted for active travel, or an obvious route to and from housing to school or local amenities.

Where lighting is relevant, teenage girls emphasise the importance of lighting that spread light well, minimising dark spots and shadows. Proposals include: lighting the trees and surrounding areas (not just the paths); something more interesting than the standard flood-light in underpasses; festoon and fairy lighting linked where young people are expected to stop and linger.

Colour

Colour in the design of parks is often described as important by teenage girls and gender diverse young people. In our experience, the topic of colour prompts a huge amount of debate about what colours are "best". In practice, equipment manufacturers often dictate the colour palates available for most park equipment. But the general guidance from our engagements over the years is away from standard park green, towards colours that support the purpose of a space: bright/neon/energetic for an active space; cooler/paler/more relaxing for a chill-out space. And don't dismiss pink: it can be a powerful colour. Murals and other art (for example on benches, tables and paths) can be used to send a signal about who is supposed to use a space, show that a space is cared for and create a sense of ownership.

Nature and planting

Trees and path side vegetation in parks need to be managed to prevent obscuring site lines or providing spaces where someone could hide to assault a girl: "There's so many trees round it, and anyone could be there"; "Someone pushed me in a bush like that once." But the need to create a feeling of safety does not equate with taking out nature. Many groups we have engaged with emphasise the value of flowers, greenery and other planting to make the park feel more alive and cared for, especially during the winter months: "more flowers on the outskirts of the main field" "Wild flowers and more flowers". Research in Sweden¹³⁷ on creating more inclusive skateparks has also identified the relevance of nature and planting in the design of skateparks, with greenery in the skatepark creating a "green and cosy" feeling, with skating under trees feeling comforting and helping with focus.

137 Inclusive Skateparks: A workshop-based study together with non-normative skateboarders: Fredrik Angner, Niklas Boström & Rebecca Rubin¹¹⁰⁴²⁴ [Inclusive skateparks.pdf](#)

Finding your way

Knowing where things are, like the toilets, café, nearest exits, way to shops etc. makes a park easier to use. Toilets are important for teenage girls, and while it isn't always possible to have toilets in a park, signage to public toilets and locations in a local community toilet scheme, should be.

Teenage girls and gender diverse young people often propose welcoming and creative signage, showing exits to the road, where facilities are (cafés, toilets), and creative signs intentionally designating young people spaces.

Thanks

We would like to thank the hundreds of teenage girls and gender diverse young people who have given up their time to talk to us about parks, public spaces and what needs to change to make them more inclusive for more teenagers.

We would also like to thank Caroline Criado Perez, whose book, *Invisible Women* highlighted the gendered use of parks by teenagers and provided the spark that led to the creation of Make Space for Girls in the first place.

Finally, there are so many researchers and supporters without whom the progress shown in this report would not have happened. It is impossible to thank them all but we would like to acknowledge and thank: current and former trustees and associates of Make Space for Girls for all their work on various iterations of this report over the last 5 years; Julia King and Olivia Theocharides-Feldman from Social Place; Dr Anna Barker from Leeds University; Helen Foreman from West Yorkshire Combined Authority; Paul Todd from Keep Britain Tidy; Mariam Fargin, Amanda Seims and Dr Sally Barber from Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust; Spencer Clarke and the Community Safety Team at Chelmsford City Council; Kate Ives and Kerry O' Driscoll from Countryside Partnerships; Ruth Lin Wong Holmes, from the London Legacy Development Corporation; Kuljeet Sibia from Diverse Dialogues; Steve Heywood from Yorkshire Sport; Lisa West and Tanya Martin from Women in Sport; Kate Blakemore from Her Place.



References

Policy Paper: 2025/26 [Youth Matters: State of the Nation - GOV.UK](#)

House of Lord Built Environment Committee 2026: [House of Lords - New Towns: Creating Communities - Built Environment Committee](#)

Natural England: Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide
Designing nature-rich, healthy, climate-resilient, and thriving place [GI Design Guide](#)

Sport England Active Design Guidance: [Active Design | Sport England](#)

National Planning Policy Framework 2026 (see DP3): [National Planning Policy Framework - GOV.UK](#)

London Legacy Development Corporation: [Creating places that work for Women and Girls Handbook FINAL 1.pdf](#)

Greater London Authority: [Safety in Public Space: Women, Girls and Gender Diverse People](#)

Yorkshire Sport and Women in Sport; Make Space for Us 2022
[63e66b7fe51bb197f2bdaa5b_Make-Space-for-Us.pdf](#)

Barker, A. Holmes, G. Alam, R. Cape-Davenport, L. Osei-Appiah, S. and Warrington Brown, S. (2022) What Makes a Park Feel Safe or Unsafe? The views of women, girls and professionals in West Yorkshire. University of Leeds, Leeds. DOI: 10.48785/100/108

Barker, A. Holmes, G. Cape-Davenport, L. and Warrington Brown, S. (2022) What do teenage girls like and dislike about park play spaces and multi-use games areas? University of Leeds, Leeds. <https://doi.org/10.48785/100/122>

Henning Larsen: [Urban Mind: How can design of urban spaces contribute to the mental health and well-being of teenage girls? | Henning Larsen](#)

Subramanian & Rice; Fall Incubator 2023 [20240724-Incubator_Girls-Just-Wanna-Have-Fun_v3.pdf](#)

Social Place & Make Space for Girls 2025: Exploring Essex Parks: Gendering green Space for Young People [6825e9d2c89ea2cbfad75aea_Exploring Essex Parks Making Space for Girls \(1\).pdf](#)

Safer Parks Guidance 2025: Safer Parks Improving Access for Women and Girls [6915cb071a05d69e05d3d2bb_250908_Safer Parks2025_compressed.pdf](#)

Places for Play: A practical guide to creating play spaces shaped by girls and young people's voices 2026 [Play Handbook](#)

Bingham DD, Daly-Smith A, Hall J, Seims A, Dogra SA, Fairclough SJ, Ajebon M, Kelly B, Hou B, Shire KA, Crossley KL, Mon-Williams M, Wright J, Pickett K, McEachan R, Dickerson J, Barber SE; Bradford Institute for Health Research COVID-19 Scientific Advisory Group. Covid-19 lockdown: Ethnic differences in children's self-reported physical activity and the importance of leaving the home environment; a longitudinal and cross-sectional study from the Born in Bradford birth cohort study. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act.* 2021 Sep 6;18(1):117. doi: 10.1186/s12966-021-01183-y. PMID: 34488785; PMCID: PMC8419665.

Sports England Active Lives Survey: Children and Young people 2024/25 [Active Lives Children and Young People Survey - Academic year 2024-25](#)

Youth Sport Trust; Girls Active National Reports 2025 [Girls Active National Reports 2025 - Youth Sport Trust](#)

Kirsten Corder, Stephen J. Sharp, Andrew J. Atkin, Lars B. Andersen, Greet Cardon, Angie Page, Rachel Davey, Anders Grøntved, Pedro C. Hallal, Kathleen F. Janz, Katarzyna Kordas, Susi Kriemler, Jardena J. Puder, Luis B. Sardinha, Ulf Ekelund, Esther M.F. van Sluijs, Age-related patterns of vigorous-intensity physical activity in youth: The International Children's Accelerometry Database, *Preventive Medicine Reports*, Volume 4, 2016, Pages 17-22, ISSN 2211-3355 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmedr.2016.05.006>.

Tammelin & Other: Physical activity and social status in adolescence as predictors of physical inactivity in adulthood, *Preventive Medicine*, Volume 37, Issue 4, 2003, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0091-7435\(03\)00162-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0091-7435(03)00162-2);

Telema & Others Physical activity from childhood to adulthood: A 21-year tracking study, *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, Volume 28, Issue 3, 2005, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2004.12.003>

Social Place & Make Space for Girls 2024: Exploring Angel Meadow, Broomfield What Would Make Angel Meadow More Welcoming To Girls And Young Women 2024 [A Place for Us, Essex | Social Place](#)

Women in Sport Life in Lock Down 2021: the Impact of the Covid 19 Pandemic on Teenage Girls' Lives: [The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Teenage Girls' Lives and Physical Activity - Women in Sport Charity](#)

Make Space for Girls: Pitches, planning and equal access to public space, 2024

[MSFG Pitch-Report 2024](#)

NHS: Be active for your mental health - Every Mind Matters: [Be active for your mental health - Every Mind Matters - NHS](#)

Zhang Y, Mavoa S, Zhao J, Raphael D, Smith M. The Association between Green Space and Adolescents' Mental Well-Being: A Systematic Review. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* 2020, 17(18), 6640; <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17186640>

Bray I, Reece R, Sinnott D, Martin F, Hayward R. Exploring the role of exposure to green and blue spaces in preventing anxiety and depression among young people aged 14-24 years living in urban settings: A systematic review and conceptual framework. *Environ Res.* 2022 Nov;214(Pt 4):114081. doi: 10.1016/j.envres.2022.114081. Epub 2022 Aug 13. PMID: 35973463.. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/35973463/>

Parks for London: Young Green and Well 2022 Parks for London, 2022. "Young, Green, and Well: A research study on young Londoners' green space use and mental wellbeing." Hamida Diriye, Young Persons Health Project Officer; Dr Meredith Whitten, Researcher in Residence; Tony Leach, Chief Executive [The Young, Green, and Well report - Parks for London](#)

Caroline Piccininni, Valerie Michaelson, Ian Janssen, William Pickett, Outdoor play and nature connectedness as potential correlates of internalized mental health symptoms among Canadian adolescents, *Preventive Medicine*, Volume 112, 2018, Pages 168-175, ISSN 0091-7435, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2018.04.020>. (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0091743518301312>)

Demkowicz, O., Jefferson, R., Nanda, P. et al. Adolescent girls' explanations of high rates of low mood and anxiety in their population: a co-produced qualitative study. *BMC Women's Health* 25, 49 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12905-024-03517-x>

Social Place and Make Space for Girls: Believe in Basildon 2025: [Believe in Basildon](#)

- Social Place and Make Space for Girls: 2024 Exploring Central Park in Chelmsford 2024 [Exploring Chelmsford Parks](#)
- Girlguiding Attitude Survey 2024 [girls-attitudes-survey-2024.pdf](#)
- Nature doesn't judge you – how urban nature supports young people's mental health and wellbeing in a diverse UK city Jo Birch, Clare Rishbeth a , Sarah R. Payne; Health and Nature
- Jo Birch, Clare Rishbeth, Sarah R. Payne,
- Nature doesn't judge you – how urban nature supports young people's mental health and wellbeing in a diverse UK city, Health & Place, Volume 62,2020,102296,ISSN 1353-8292, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2020.102296>(<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S135382921931158X>)
- Natural England, 2020: Nature Connectedness among adults and children Nature connectedness among adults and children in England - JP032 [Nature connectedness among adults and children in England - JP032](#)
- Girlguiding Attitude Survey 2025 [Girls' Attitudes Survey | Girlguiding](#)
- Plan UK State of Girls Right 2024 [Plan-UK-State-of-Girls-Rights-report-2024](#)
- DCMS National Youth Strategy 2025. [Youth Matters: National Youth Strategy - GOV.UK](#)
- UK Government Press Release 15 June 2026: Social Media to be Banned for under 16s. [Social media to be banned for under-16s in landmark government move to give kids their childhood back - GOV.UK](#)
- Kate Nevens and Ellie Hutchinson from the collective in collaboration with Zero Tolerance 2024: Girls Rights are Human Rights [Girls-rights-are-human-rights.pdf](#)
- Centre for Young Lives, 2025: Everything to Play For A Plan to Ensure Every Child in England Can Play [Everything to Play For — Raising the Nation Play Commission.pdf - Google Drive](#)
- General Comment 17 UN Convention on Rights of the Child CRC/C/GC/17; Distr.: General 18 March 2013 [General Comment 17 UN Convention on Rights of the Child](#)
- James, M., Todd, C., Scott, S. et al. Teenage recommendations to improve physical activity for their age group: a qualitative study. BMC Public Health 18, 372 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-5274-3>
- Make Space for Girls Park watch 2023 [Make Space for Girls Parkwatch Report](#)
- Amilburu, A., Pérez de Villarreal, M., & Scotton, P. (2026). The impact of schoolyard design on children's physical activity and play preferences through a gender lens: a systematic review. Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning, 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2026.2644352>
- Baran, P. K., Smith, W. R., Moore, R. C., Floyd, M. F., Bocarro, J. N., Cosco, N. G., & Danninger, T. M. (2014). Park Use Among Youth and Adults: Examination of Individual, Social, and Urban Form Factors: Examination of Individual, Social, and Urban Form Factors. Environment and Behavior, 46(6), 768-800. 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013916512470134>
- Deborah A. Cohen, Stephanie Williamson, Bing Han, Gender Differences in Physical Activity Associated with Urban Neighborhood Parks: Findings from the National Study of Neighborhood Parks, Women's Health Issues, Volume 31, Issue 3, 2021,Pages 236-244, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.whi.2020.11.007>
- Kind und Samenlevning, Girls and Public Space, 2020. Girls and public space | Child & Society
- Urban Springtime Blog 2021 University of the Hague: Blog: Playing outside, who what where. [Playing outside: who, where and what?](#)
- LSE & Make Space for Girls 2023: Researchers in Residence: [Researchers in Residence Report](#)
- Doreen Massey, For Space 2005.
- Jacquelyn Collins: The Play Equity Project 2019: [Territorialisation – The Play Equity Project](#)
- Stoodley, L., Paechter, C., Keenan, M., & Lawton, C. (2025). "I don't want to get in anyone's way": mapping girl skateboarders' navigation of place and power in skate spaces. Leisure Studies, 44(3), 412–427. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02614367.2024.2314471>
- Veitch et al., Adolescents' ratings of features of parks that encourage park visitation and physical activity, International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity, 13 (1). <http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s12966-016-0391-9>
- Faith Tucker and Hugh Matthews; They don't like girls hanging around there': conflicts over recreational space in rural Northamptonshire, Area, 2001. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-4762.00019>
- Final Report: Girl Skateboarders: active girlhood, alternative sports, and urban space, Nottingham Trent University 2023. [Girl skateboarders: active girlhood, alternative sports, and urban space: final report June 2023 - IRep - Nottingham Trent University](#)
- Graham L Bradley, Skate Parks as a Context for Adolescent Development, Journal of Adolescent Research, Volume 25, Issue 2, 2010. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0743558409357>
- Asa Backström, Gender Manoeuvring in Swedish Skateboarding: Negotiations of Femininities and the Hierarchical Gender Structure, YOUNG, 21 (1), 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308812467670>
- Paechter, Blog for Make Space for Girls 2022: [Making Space for Girl Skateboarders](#)
- Skateboard GB 2025: UK Skateable Spaces Audit: [2025 UK Skateable Spaces Audit: Full Report | Skateboard GB | Run by skateboarders. For skateboarders.](#)
- Carrie Paechter, Lyndsey Stoodley, Michael Keenan, Chris Lawton, What's it like to be a girl skateboarder? Identity, participation and exclusion for young women in skateboarding spaces and communities, Women's Studies International Forum, Volume 96,2023, 102675,ISSN 0277-5395,<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2023.102675>.
- Paechter, C., Stoodley, L., Keenan, M., & Lawton, C. (2024). 'It Feels Like a Big Performance': Space, Performativity and Young Woman Skateboarders1. Sociological Research Online, 29(4), 947-964.
- Bridgid McCarthy, 'Who unlocked the kitchen?': Online misogyny, YouTube comments and women's professional street skateboarding, International Review for the Sociology of Sport, Vol 57, Issue 3, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10126902211021509>
- Clark & Sayers (2025) Skateparks as communities of care: the role of skateboarding in girls' and non-binary youth's mental health recovery during lockdown,Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 33:2, 613-632, DOI: 10.1080/14681366.2023.2258382

Deborah A. Cohen et al, Public Parks and Physical Activity Among Adolescent Girls, Paediatrics 118, November 2006. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17079539/>

The Football Foundation; Playzones technical guidance 2022. [n03u5hp2hhzptwm4.pdf](https://www.footballfoundation.org.uk/media/1033/n03u5hp2hhzptwm4.pdf)

Billingham, L, 2020 Sports Cages & Multi-Use Games Areas: Places of safety, places of harm, places of potential: [sports-cages-mugas-places-of-safety-places-of-harm-places-of-potential-final.pdf](https://www.billingham.co.uk/media/1033/sports-cages-mugas-places-of-safety-places-of-harm-places-of-potential-final.pdf)

Greater London Authority, Making London Child Friendly, 2020 [ggbd-making-london-child-friendly.pdf](https://www.gla.gov.uk/media/1033/ggbd-making-london-child-friendly.pdf)

City of Vienna, Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Planning, 2013.

Reimers, A and Knapp G, Playground usage and physical activity levels of children based on playground spatial features, Journal of Public Health (Germany) 25 (6) 2017. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6069007/>

Make Space for Girls: Pitches, Planning and Equal Access to Public Space 2024 [Make Space for Girls](https://www.makespacefor.org.uk/media/1033/make-space-for-girls.pdf)

Kathryn P. Derosé, The Mediating Role of Perceived Crime in Gender and Built Environment Associations with Park Use and Park-based Physical Activity among Park Users in High Poverty Neighborhoods, Prev Med. 129, 2019. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6886686/pdf/nihms-1542383.pdf>

Barker, A. Holmes, G. Alam, R. Cape-Daventhill, L. Osei-Appiah, S. and Warrington Brown, S. (2022) What Makes a Park Feel Safe or Unsafe? The views of women, girls and professionals in West Yorkshire. University of Leeds, Leeds. DOI: 10.48785/100/108

Stilianos Syropoulos, Bernhard Leidner, Evelyn Mercado, Mengyao Li, Sophie Cros, Angel Gómez, Aphrodite Baka, Peggy Chekroun, Joshua Rottman, How safe are we? Introducing the multidimensional model of perceived personal safety, Personality and Individual Differences, Volume 224, 2024, 112640, ISSN 0191-8869, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2024.112640>.

YWCA Scotland, Glasgow: A Feminist City? Young Women Lead Report 2021. [YWL 2021](https://www.ywca.org.uk/media/1033/ywl-2021.pdf)

Plan UK State of Girls Rights report 2024 [Plan-UK-State-of-Girls-Rights-report-2024_Updated.pdf](https://www.planuk.org.uk/media/1033/plan-uk-state-of-girls-rights-report-2024-updated.pdf)

Essex VVU/ECVYS Youth Voice Listening Project 2026 [Essex VVU/ECVYS Youth Voice Listening Project 2026 Report - Essex Violence and Vulnerability Unit](https://www.essex.gov.uk/media/1033/essex-vvu-ecvys-youth-voice-listening-project-2026-report-essex-violence-and-vulnerability-unit.pdf)

Girlguiding Research briefing 2021: It happens all the time Girls' and young women's experiences of sexual harassment [girlguiding-research-briefing-girls-experiences-of-sexual-harassment-june2021.pdf](https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/media/1033/girlguiding-research-briefing-girls-experiences-of-sexual-harassment-june2021.pdf)

Transport for London: 2026 [Ending violence against women and girls on London's transport network: Evidence, insight and action](https://www.tfl.gov.uk/media/1033/ending-violence-against-women-and-girls-on-london-s-transport-network-evidence-insight-and-action.pdf)

Maihan Vu & others Listening to Girls and Boys Talk About Girls' Physical Activity Behaviours, Health Educ Behav, 2006. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16397161/>

Theocharides-Feldman, O., & King, J. (2024). 'There's nowhere for us': spatial and scalar experiences of judgement amongst young women in the UK. Gender & Development, 32(1–2), 223–244. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2024.2348402>

Barker, A., Warrington, S., Holmes, G., & Cape-Daventhill, L. (2026). Claiming the Right to the Park: Teenage Girls, Safety and Belonging in Public Green Spaces. CrimRxiv. <https://doi.org/10.21428/cb6ab371.6cc81345>

Earthscape Play Inc Spring 2024: The Deconstructed Heart sculpture at the Gaukel Street Parkette has been designed with a very specific audience in mind: teenage girls.: [Gaukel Street Parkette - Earthscape Play Inc.](https://www.earthscapeplay.co.uk/media/1033/gaukel-street-parkette-earthscape-play-inc.pdf)

Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2024: Guidance Public Sector Equality Duty: guidance for public authorities in England September 2024 ; [How to consider equality in policy making: A 10-step guide for public bodies in England | EHRC](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/media/1033/how-to-consider-equality-in-policy-making-a-10-step-guide-for-public-bodies-in-england-ehrc.pdf)

Llywodraeth Cymru/Welsh Government 2025: [Wales: a Play Friendly Country - Statutory Guidance](https://www.gov.wales/media/1033/wales-a-play-friendly-country-statutory-guidance.pdf)

Scottish Government Play Sufficiency Guidance 2023: [Play Sufficiency Assessment Regulations 2023: planning guidance - gov.scot](https://www.gov.scot/media/1033/play-sufficiency-guidance-2023-planning-guidance-gov.scot.pdf)

Scotland Play Strategy 2025: [Scotland's Play Strategy - Play Scotland](https://www.play-scotland.org.uk/media/1033/scotland-s-play-strategy-play-scotland.pdf)

Play England 2025: Briefing: History and Impact of the First APPG on Play (c.2005–2010): [All-Party Parliamentary Group \(APPG\) on Play — Play England](https://www.playengland.org.uk/media/1033/all-party-parliamentary-group-appg-on-play-play-england.pdf)

Llywodraeth Cymru/Welsh Government 2024: [Planning Policy Wales - Edition 12](https://www.gov.wales/media/1033/planning-policy-wales-edition-12.pdf)

Llywodraeth Cymru/Welsh Government 2024: [Play Sufficiency Assessment toolkit \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](https://www.gov.wales/media/1033/play-sufficiency-assessment-toolkit-html-gov.wales.pdf)

Making Space In Chelmsford and Maldon 2024-2026: [Strategic Guide](https://www.making-space.org.uk/media/1033/strategic-guide.pdf)

Theocharides-Feldman, O. and King, J. (2024) "Locating Young Women in Public Space: A Feminist Spatial Researcher-in-Residence Model", The Journal of Public Space, 9(1), pp. 99–108.

doi:10.32891/jps.v9i1.1817.

Young Foundation 2020: Caroline Yang and Zoe Dibb: Positioning Peer Research in Policy Context. [TheYoungFoundation-LivedExperience-v2-singles-1-1.pdf](https://www.youngfoundation.org.uk/media/1033/the-young-foundation-lived-experience-v2-singles-1-1.pdf)

LSE short film: [are girls being designed out of public space?](https://www.lse.ac.uk/media/1033/are-girls-being-designed-out-of-public-space.pdf)

London Legacy Development Corporation 2024: [Waterden Green: Co-clienting with teenage girls](https://www.lldc.org.uk/media/1033/waterden-green-co-clienting-with-teenage-girls.pdf)

Friends of Rowntree Park 2025: Make Space York Report: [Report - Make Space York](https://www.friends-of-rowntree-park.org.uk/media/1033/report-make-space-york.pdf)

Greenspace & Us Part 2 A community insights co-production project with teenage girls to understand their needs for more inclusive and accessible greenspace October 2023 Natural England Joint Publication JP053 [Greenspace & Us Part 2 A community insights co-production project with teenage girls to understand their needs for more inclusive and accessible greenspace](https://www.naturalengland.org.uk/media/1033/greenspace-us-part-2-a-community-insights-co-production-project-with-teenage-girls-to-understand-their-needs-for-more-inclusive-and-accessible-greenspace.pdf)

Inclusive Skateparks: A workshop-based study together with non-normative skateboarders:

Fredrik Angner, Niklas Boström & Rebecca Rubin [110424 Inclusive skateparks.pdf](https://www.inclusive-skateparks.org.uk/media/1033/110424-inclusive-skateparks.pdf)



Designed by Pegasus Group
33 Sheep Street,
Cirencester,
Gloucestershire.
GL7 1RQ



Make Space for Girls is a charitable incorporated organisation, registered with the Charity Commission in England and Wales with number 1193772.

© Make Space for Girls September 2026