

# ENGAGING WOMEN IN PADDLESport



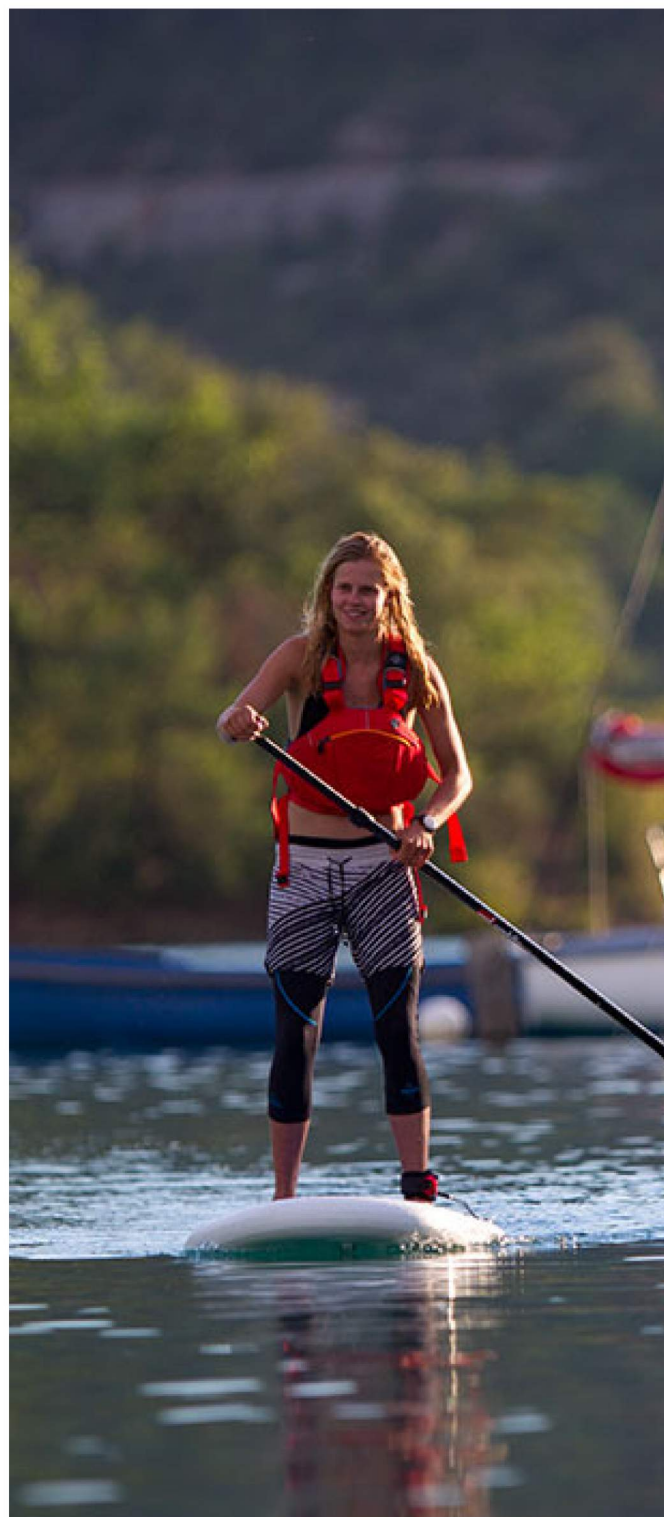
# KEY CONSIDERATIONS IN ENGAGING WOMEN IN PADDLESport

The purpose of this document is to enhance the great work already being done by clubs and centres by providing some key considerations in engagement and retention. The specific aim is to increase participation of women and girls but much of this information can be applied to engage other groups.

The British Canoeing Women's Engagement Day and research done by others, specifically the 2016 Women in Adventure Sport Conference Report, have highlighted some small considerations which can be taken on by everyone to create a welcoming atmosphere. There is no one size fits all and everyone should be treated as an individual. Recognising what people need in order to feel confident is a great skill.

## TOP TIPS

Look at your club through someone else's eyes. Taking a step back and looking with fresh eyes can be a great way of understanding how someone new will experience your club or centre for the first time.



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**GO**  
Paddling!

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# FIRST IMPRESSIONS

**When someone approaches your club or centre for the first time the easier and clearer the pathway to their first session the better.**

## SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Promote positive behaviour. Avoid gender based assumptions - treat women as per the skills they actually have, be non-judgemental; encourage and support women to stretch themselves; tune into the things women value and care about; help women celebrate their successes; take action to enhance women's perceptions of competence; and help support an environment where women can be themselves.

## KEY AREAS TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT

**Pre-contact information** - Make it easy for someone to find your details and get in touch. Using a mix of female and male imagery on websites and social media can make a big difference. Having male and female contacts can also help. Having sessions running at a range of times may help those with a range of other commitments.

**First contact** - When someone enquires about coming to the club the more information you can give the better. Ensure they are clear on what to wear and bring. Women in particular feel more confident if they are sure of what facilities are available (toilets, changing rooms etc), who they will be meeting, whether they will get wet etc. A lot of people are put off by the idea of wearing a cold damp wetsuit that many others have worn before.

**On arrival** - A smile and warm welcome really is the most important thing! Communicate this to all those at your club and centre. Let people know exactly where the toilets and changing rooms are. The less uncomfortable, uncertain or in the way people feel the better.

**Kit** - Comfortable kit which fits properly makes people feel happier. This includes boats not being too wide or narrow for someone. Keep an eye on everyone and if you see someone struggling with kit or looking uncertain a friendly helping hand is sure to be appreciated. Subtle things such as shouting out what size PFD you are giving someone can cause embarrassment.



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**Language** - The language we use can impact how comfortable both men and women feel. Outdated phrases such as 'man up' and 'like a girl' should not be used in negative terms. In recent times the phrase 'like a girl' has been reclaimed to be used in a positive way but generally it has been seen to have negative connotations.

If you have social media channels it is important that they are well moderated and all chatter is respectful, constructive and pleasant.

**On the water** - Be clear and friendly. Let people know there is no pressure to be perfect or all at the same level. Remember to treat each person on the water as an individual and that not everyone responds to the same communication.

**Post Session** - Make sure you tell everyone you are happy they came and that you want to see them again. Encourage questions and discuss any fears or difficulties openly. Make sure people know how they can continue in paddling. Having low commitment ways that people with busy lives can continue taking part in activities can increase long term retention. Give out both a male and female follow up contact. Encourage people to follow your social media channels.



# ENGAGING AND RETAINING

One important factor which came to the fore, both in our engagement day and from other research, is the importance of the prominence of women within a club or centre. The term role model comes up quite frequently. These role models can range from young club members, to long term paddlers, through to athletes. The main aim is visibility of women for women.

A significant amount of research has shown that low self-confidence can be more pronounced with women. This can slow down the process of development and limits progression of female coaches and leaders.

## LOW SELF CONFIDENCE MAY BE DISPLAYED AS:

- Not presenting for qualification assessment until well above the standard required
- Not putting oneself forward for roles that they would be more than capable of undertaking
- Not pushing oneself to undertake new and challenging roles
- Avoiding events where they don't know anyone ("2016 Women in Adventure Sport Conference Report")



**It is important to ensure that everyone is given the same level of support within their club or centre.**

## **SOME KEY WAYS TO ENSURE RETENTION AND PROGRESS ARE:**

**Find out how people want to progress.** Everyone should feel comfortable to be able to move to the next level in their paddling or to stop at a level they feel comfortable.

**Celebrate achievements.** However big or small. British Canoeing want to hear stories from clubs and centres, particularly celebrating their female paddlers - we love a bit of good news!

**Signpost women to female paddling communities on social media** such as the Women's Paddling Community Group or Women in Paddlesports Coaching, Guiding and Leading.

**Consider running childrens sessions at the same time as adult ones.** This allows parents the chance to get their time on the water too.

**Encourage women to take leadership roles.** Whether through coaching or leadership within the club or centre.

**Women's specific sessions.** These can feel supportive for both new paddlers and for skill progression. Although a general inclusive environment can be just as effective and welcoming.

**Mentoring.** Having someone to look to for answers, help and support is very important. This can be a man or a woman the emphasis on being supportive.

**Spread the word.** Encourage both men and women from your club or centre to go into local schools and community groups to do talks about canoeing for everyone. You can also invite groups, such as Guides, to come along and try paddling or provide some introductory sessions to them.

**Host talks within the club.** Ensure that there is a balance of male and female speakers. This can make for a great social event.

## **SHARE YOUR STORIES**

We want to spread the word about all your fantastic female paddlers. Share your stories and pictures with us or tag @britishcanoeing in your social media posts so we can celebrate with you.



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## **FURTHER READING**

For the full information from the engagement day as well as various research articles please visit:

[bit.ly/women-girls-engagement-day](https://bit.ly/women-girls-engagement-day)

## **JOIN THE CONVERSATION**

Facebook Group: [bit.ly/womens-paddling-community](https://bit.ly/womens-paddling-community)

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