

## Your Personal Coach

Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D.

Dear Kathleen,

**My granddaughter – Stacy -- is almost fifteen. She is an “A” student, and plays all kinds of sports, including soccer, basketball, softball, bowling, and field hockey. I have always been very supportive of her interests and attended games when I could. But now she’s at an age when she should be becoming more of a lady and less of a tomboy. Don’t you agree? It doesn’t seem normal for girls her age to want to continue to play organized sports.**

**-- Concerned Grandmother**

Dear Granny,

Not only is it normal for teenage girls to continue to play sports, it is terrific for them to do so. Tons of research has shown that girls who participate in sports have higher self-esteem, are less likely to engage in premarital sex, or experience an unwanted pregnancy, and have a better body image than non-athletes. Sports are critically important self-empowerment, and self-esteem boosters, especially in light of the many studies that show that for many girls, self-esteem begins to plummet after age ten. A 1997 study conducted by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and reported by the Women’s Sport Foundation ([www.womenssportsfoundation.org](http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org)) showed that both male and female teens who participated in athletics were healthier, less likely to use drugs, think about suicide, or binge drink than their non-athletic peers.

Even though there is still a long way to go for full parity in athletics, during the three decades since the enactment of Title IX, (a federal law prohibiting sex discrimination in federally-funded education, including athletics), girls and women have benefited from opportunities to participate in sports. Female athletes in every sport have provided young women with dynamic role models for perseverance, reaching for goals, and success. A high proportion of female CEO’s and other high-achievers played sports during high school and college, and most continue to pursue athletic interests even in the midst of their busy lives. When interviewed, many of these successful women specifically pointed to their early experiences with sports, and said they learned values like goal-setting, teamwork, self-respect, and motivation – traits they use everyday in the corporate environment.

So, would you rather have Stacy building her muscles and self-esteem on the basketball court, or becoming a couch potato, hoovering Fritos as she waits for life to offer something interesting? I think you get my point.

Stacy sounds like a fabulous example of a student-athlete – excellent on the playing field and also in the classroom. I think you should continue to attend her games and let her know how proud you are of her accomplishments. In spite of all the wonderful benefits of sports for girls (and boys), the rate of athletic participation declines once girls enter high school. About 30% of freshmen girls play sports, but this number declines to 17% for seniors.

As for you, Granny, how about getting involved with sports or physical activity

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yourself? Regardless of where you are in the life cycle, exercise, physical activity, and sports have a role to play in living a balanced life. So if you've not been on the golf course, tennis court, or bowling alley in as long as you can remember, you should think about doing so. How about spending an afternoon at the bowling alley with Stacy? This could bring you closer, help you understand her athletic dreams, and help you get in shape. Who knows? Before too long, you might join Stacy and be "Bending It Like Beckham" on the soccer field.

Send your personal coaching questions to [kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com](mailto:kathleen@fullpotentialliving.com) or call 473-4004. Kathleen is a personal and executive coach, clinical psychologist, and writer. (©2003 Kathleen Brehony. All Rights Reserved.) Columns are archived at [www.fullpotentialliving.com](http://www.fullpotentialliving.com).