

Female participation

The development of a participation pathway for female participants beyond AFL Auskick is critical to the long-term growth and development of the game. Junior leagues and clubs are encouraged to offer structured youth girls competitions for female participants graduating from AFL Auskick and mixed AFL junior competitions.

Note that the provisions of this aspect of the AFL's Junior Policy do not apply to umpiring and, accordingly, females will be appointed to officiate matches based on their ability and competency to do so.

This policy endorses the following participation pathway options for female participants aged 5-18 years.

5-12 years

- › AFL Auskick program or mixed-gender junior fixtures using appropriate AFL junior rules.

13-14 years

- › This policy strongly recommends that youth girls aged 13 and 14 years participate in a structured youth girls competition. However, if there is no youth girls competition available the following applies:
 - *In accordance with the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)¹, people aged under 12 years of age cannot be excluded on the basis of sex or gender identity from participating in a competitive sporting activity; and*
 - *Pursuant to section 42(1) of the Act, people of one gender aged 12 and over can be excluded from participating in competitive sporting activities in which the strength, stamina and physique of competitors is relevant.*

AFL members will exclude female participants who turn 14 years by January 1 in the year of play from playing in any competition that is not a 'female competition'.

Definition – A female competition is a competition conducted specifically for female participants.

If no youth or senior female football competition is available for a female player who turns 14 years by January 1 in the year of play, that female player may apply to play down an age level should she meet the criteria outlined with respect to such an exemption. If a senior female competition is available for a female player who turns 14 years by January 1 in the year of play, however that female player is not ready to progress to senior football, she may apply to play down an age level should she meet the criteria outlined for such an exemption.

The philosophy of this provision is to provide ongoing opportunities for female participants in a safe environment that is appropriate to the participant's skills and physical capacity. Junior leagues and clubs are encouraged to offer structured youth girls competitions for female participants graduating from AFL Auskick and mixed AFL junior competitions.

12-18 years

- › AFL youth girls competitions at under-12, 15 and 18 levels, using appropriate AFL youth girls rules.

Senior women's

- › Youth girls may graduate to senior women's competitions at 15 years old.

¹ *The provisions of section 42 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth) are essentially replicated in equivalent state legislation such as section 64-66 of the Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic).*

Providing for children with disabilities

The AFL has an inclusive approach to participation including a Disability Action Plan and supports the notion that every child has the right to be involved in sport, especially a sport like Australian Football. Including children with disabilities is not hard; it just requires enthusiasm and understanding.

Below are a few suggestions when working with children with disabilities:

- › Check the needs and abilities of the children;
- › Encourage the carer/parent to be involved and assist in activities and be responsible for the needs of the children;
- › Every child is unique and should be provided with the same opportunities to participate;
- › Work with what the child **can** do and if you are not sure ask them or their parents/carer;
- › Children with disabilities, like all children, will improve considerably with continual exposure to skills. If the activity is the child's first exposure to a skill, have patience and give them time to improve;
- › Introduce the child to a group;
- › A youngster with a disability must be seen as a person first – the similarities to peers should be noted, not the differences;
- › Activities can be modified to cater for all abilities. Children with a disability, like all children, may or may not require activities to be modified depending on their level of ability. Remember when modifying activities the integrity of the activity should be maintained;
- › Any changes should be viewed as temporary, working towards, where possible, the original activity. If one change does not work, try another;
- › Wherever possible have the child participate in all aspects of the day's activities; and
- › Provide activities where children can succeed and develop self-esteem.

Remember all children must be encouraged to participate in all activities – People First Disability Second (*Acknowledgment: Australian Sports Commission's Disability Program*).