

# EFFECTIVELY ENGAGING WOMEN IN RUNNING

A RUN ENGLAND GROUP LEADER TOOLKIT

WHERE  
TO MEET?  
KEEP MOTIVATED!  
DELIVERING  
YOUR  
SESSIONS  
SESSION  
STRUCTURE  
GET YOUR GROUP NOTICED  
SUPPORT & ADVICE  
ROUTES  
FOR  
SUCCESS  
TIMING  
IS EVERYTHING  
TO CHARGE OR NOT  
TO CHARGE?  
MAKE IT  
SUITABLE

THIS  
GIRL  
CAN

With



For more information & support with your Run England Group, visit [runengland.org](http://runengland.org)

# Break down the barriers to joining a Run Group

## **I don't have enough time / It's at the wrong time**

Offer sessions at different times i.e. before work, after school drop-off, mid-morning before nursery pick-up, during lunch hour, straight after work, early weekend runs.

## **I'm scared of failure or being ridiculed**

Use positive images about your Group which real women can relate to e.g. Utilise #WhyWeRun and #ThisGirlCan resources provided by Run England / England Athletics / Sport England.

## **I can't run / keep up with everyone else**

Reassure them that everyone starts with walking. The walk-jog programmes allow them to progress at their own pace. No-one is left behind!

## **I don't know anyone else in the Group**

Reassure them that everyone in the Group is in the same boat. Suggest that they bring along a friend to the first session, but ultimately they'll make new friends.

## **I'm too overweight / unfit**

Make sure they have GP approval before participating in your sessions and if necessary recommend a walking programme to help them get started. Run England Groups are open to everyone, regardless of age, ability, size or shape, but be honest with yourself, you may not be able to cater for all fitness levels within your group. It is important that if you are not able to cater for someone that you do communicate that to them in an appropriate way. Look to signpost them to a more appropriate group or for support and advice on weight loss and walking programmes. Maintain contact and encourage them to join in once they are ready.

## **I've got too many work pressures**

Acknowledge the work pressures that they may be facing but be clear on the benefits of putting aside time to relieve these pressures. This in turn will make them more productive at work. Consider offering sessions from their place of work.

## **I have to look after my children**

Consider flexible sessions during school holidays or after school to include the children as well. Offer mother & children sessions or buggy runs if you have the capacity. A parent who runs is a great role model!

## **I have no running kit**

Recommend affordable retailers. A pair of running shoes and a good sports bra is all they need to get started. Approach local sports retailers to see how they can support your Group members and arrange for members to go to a retailer together so it's less intimidating. More experienced members can also offer peer-to-peer advice. Run England membership also provides special offers and discounts on running shoes and kit.

## **It's dark / cold / wet outside**

Offer advice on appropriate kit and hi-vis gear. Choose safe, well lit routes for running at night but be prepared to cancel a session for safety reasons.



# BREAKING BARRIERS

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# SUPPORT & ADVICE

- ✿ Communicate regularly via social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and email or text messaging.
- ✿ Be available to answer questions and reply promptly.
- ✿ Pre-empt some of the questions beginners may have about everything from kit, pacing themselves and warming up, to stretching and eating before exercise.
- ✿ Offer advice at sessions or make advice available beforehand by emailing hand-outs.
- ✿ Link up with local health professionals i.e. physiotherapists, sports massage therapists, biomechanics specialists and local running shops to offer an all-round service to your runners. The local services might be able to offer your Group members a discount in return for getting them the extra business!



Make your Group suitable for women who may be interested in taking up running.

## Consider their motivations:

- ★ Fitness   ★ Weight loss   ★ 'Me' time
- ★ Meet new people   ★ Try something new
- ★ Challenge   ★ Peer pressure
- ★ Advice from a health professional

## Then consider

- ★ How your Group caters for women with these different motivations.
- ★ How you talk to women with these different motivations.
- ★ How you tailor your programme to achieve their range of personal goals.
- ★ How you can demonstrate that their achievements match their motivations for running.



# MAKE IT SUITABLE

## Keep your Group motivated

- ♥ Organise post-run socials i.e. pub brunch, Christmas parties, summer BBQs.
- ♥ Organise 'feature runs' or 'away days' at National Trust venues or parks.
- ♥ Link up with another local Group and run together.
- ♥ Working towards a shared target will keep the Group focussed and motivated, so consider signing the Group up to, for example, a Race For Life or Great Run Local event or aim to complete their first parkrun in, say, eight weeks' time.

## Acknowledge the Group's achievements:

- ♥ Praise and reward all achievements with mentions on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Post Group photos or photos of those who have achieved significant goals, however big or small they may be.
- ♥ Organise prize/certificate presentations on completion of specific goals. Offer goody bags/T-shirts\* at end of 'x' number of sessions – everyone loves a freebie!

\*approach your Local Running Activator, County Sports Partnership or Sport England for advice on applying for funding to help with purchasing items.

- ♥ Send regular motivational emails, texts or social media posts to individuals and the Group.

## Train a Support Leader from within the Group:

- ♥ As your Group grows you may need more support and there may well be a runner within the Group who would like to step in and help out as a Support Leader.
- ♥ Approach your Local Running Activator, County Sports Partnership or Sport England for advice on applying for funding to help qualify and support another Group Leader.



## Members will leave:

- ♥ Be understanding as running may not be part of their life right now.
- ♥ BUT keep communicating with them and when the time is right, they may come back for more. Remember their birthday, drop them an email or text message at Christmas or before your next course starts. Include them in any social event – it may just be the prompt they need to get back to running.



# KEEP MOTIVATED!

# DELIVERING YOUR SESSIONS

Consider the steps that you take when organising and leading a session:

## Before the run

- \* Test the route, contact the runners.
- \* Collate replies you have received, answer any questions.
- \* If numbers are high, find a Support Leader and let them know the route.
- \* Arrive at the meeting point (with registration forms/disclaimers, register, money, First Aid kit, hi-vis gear/torches etc.).

## During the run

- \* Register runners, check for injuries.
- \* Explain the route that you're going to be running.
- \* Start dynamic warm-up routine.
- \* Run the route, try to talk to every runner during the run.
- \* Finish the run, ensure everyone is back safely.

## After the run

- \* Cool down and do static stretches with runners.
- \* Hand out 'homework' for beginner runners to do before next session.
- \* Stay behind and answer any questions that runners may have.
- \* Send out 'well done' emails or texts once you get home.
- \* Post on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.
- \* Remind them of the time and venue for the next session.
- \* Repeat...

- \* **Remember to value your time, knowledge, skills and experience. Your runners are likely to appreciate the sessions more and show more commitment to them.**

## To charge or not to charge?

Many Leaders offer sessions for free, but don't be afraid to charge for your sessions.

- \* If you do charge for your sessions, consider the different ways of charging:
  - \* Drop in/pay as you go.
  - \* Pay upfront for 'x' number of sessions or the full course.
  - \* Monthly direct debit to attend as many sessions in each month.
  - \* Annual membership with discounts on courses, sessions and kit.
- \* If you're happy to offer your sessions for free, consider raising money for a charity, a local cause, School PTA. This can be very motivating for the Group especially if it's something linked to their local community.



# TIMING IS EVERYTHING

Time group sessions in line with the different life stages of women



## New mums

Buggy fitness sessions/sessions with a crèche alongside.

## Nursery mums

Post drop-off early morning sessions.

## School mums

School drop-off sessions; before school pick-up sessions.

## College/University students

Late afternoon/early evening sessions.

## Working women

Pre-work or post-work sessions; late evening sessions; lunchtime sessions; weekend sessions.

## Retired women

Mid-morning powerwalk-jog sessions.

## Weight-loss groups

Post-consultation/weigh-in sessions.

## 'Taxi' mums (who drop children off at sports clubs)

Evening/weekend sessions from the club venue.

## Drop-in sessions

These sessions offer flexibility but you may not know how many will turn up. You could have a wide variety of abilities on the day so you may need a Support Leader to help you.

## 6/10-week courses

With these sessions you'll know runner numbers in advance and the Group will motivate each other as they've all started together. However, runners do tend to expect more. You may run into school holiday time which can be disruptive for the course. You will also need to consider what happens if someone gets ill or injured and misses a week or two.

## Term-time only sessions

These sessions appeal to parents as they fit in with school holidays but you may find some runners want to continue through the holidays. Consider offering mother and children sessions during the holiday time.



# SESSION STRUCTURE

# GET YOUR GROUP NOTICED

- ★ Start with your friends and family. Word of mouth is a very powerful marketing tool for running groups. The school gates are always a good place to start!
- ★ Utilise social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, as well as car stickers and branded kit on runs. Have a presence at a local event such as your local parkrun.
- ★ Post flyers in local coffee shops, community centres, social groups, village halls, nursery/playschools and workplaces.
- ★ Attend community groups/socials and ask if you could speak about the benefits of running to the participants. Offer to start a session from their venue.
- ★ Invite a local journalist to your sessions to get real hands-on experience of what the Group is all about. Submit an article to your local paper/magazine about the Group's goals and achievements.
- ★ Join the conversation using #ThisGirlCan on social media

## It's all in the name

- ★ Choose words that your target audience will relate to: beginners, walkers to joggers; back to running, joggers, striders.
- ★ Make it sound fun!
- ★ Here are some examples of 'fun' and relevant group names: Run Off Your Feet, Mums On A Run; The Blister Sisters; Just Joggers; Ladies Joggers; Beginners 2 Runners.



Make the venue as convenient and as comfortable as possible. Think outside of the usual sporting or fitness venues and consider places where the Group members will feel instantly 'at home':

- ★ School gates
- ★ Local park
- ★ Workplace
- ★ Community centre
- ★ Coffee shop
- ★ Church hall
- ★ Pub

## WHERE TO MEET?



# DELIVERING YOUR SESSIONS

- \* Make sessions fun, friendly, sociable and structured (but varied).
- \* Make them 'easy' so they come back for more!
- \* Use short loops for beginner sessions so you can keep tabs on everyone.
- \* Mix walking and jogging so no one is left behind.
- \* Keep it personal and know your runners by giving regular advice and encouragement.
- \* Get the Group to encourage one another as they go.
- \* Give optional 'homework' to do outside the sessions e.g. core stability/injury prevention exercises, cross-training or extra walks/jogs/runs.
- \* Encourage your runners to meet up outside your sessions. They will love to share what they've achieved.

**Consider the variety of sessions that you can offer to keep them coming back for more.**

Here are a few ideas:

- \* Trail runs
- \* Early morning runs with brunch
- \* Speed sessions
- \* Hill sessions
- \* Cafe runs
- \* Fartlek or relay runs
- \* Time trials
- \* 'Treasure hunt' runs
- \* Orienteering runs
- \* Geo-caching runs
- \* 'Jog with your dog' runs
- \* Mother + children runs
- \* One mile hill challenge runs
- \* Family fun runs



## ROUTES FOR SUCCESS



- \* At the beginning, try to stay away from busy main streets as this can be intimidating for beginners.
- \* If you're running at night, ensure the route is well-lit and appropriate, hi-vis clothing is worn by all runners.
- \* Take the Group off the main roads into parks and trails during the day to add some variety to the sessions.
- \* Talk to the Group about where they like running or walking. They may know some great places or have their own preferences for the type of routes they like.
- \* Use short loops so you can see everyone at once during the sessions. This will make it easier to find good venues and to manage mixed ability sessions.