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INSIDE THE MOVEMENT

Insights into Youth Fitness Attitudes
Edition 1

In partnership with the High Five Group November 2025

Lifestyle
Fitness®

FOREWORD

Young people's attitudes toward gym usage and physical activity.

At Lifestyle Fitness, we believe that every child and young person deserves the opportunity to lead an active, healthy life. Physical activity is not just about fitness - it's about confidence, mental wellbeing, social connection, and unlocking potential. In a world where young people face increasing pressures and barriers to movement, our mission is clear: to make exercise accessible, inclusive, and empowering for all.

This report reflects the real voices of nearly 2,000 young people across the UK. It shows us that while many are already benefiting from our programmes, there is still much work to be done. We are proud that over 1,250 of CYP in our partner schools are meeting daily activity guidelines - well above the national average. We're also proud of the tailored support we offer: from Junior Gym sessions and match funding for Pupil Premium pupils, to staff trained in adolescent engagement and wellness.

But we are not stopping here. The insights in this report challenge us to go further - to listen more deeply, innovate more boldly, and partner more widely. Whether it's creating youth-only spaces, offering holistic wellness services, or simply making gyms feel more welcoming, we are committed to evolving with the needs of young people.

Together with our partners, we will continue to break down barriers and build environments where every young person feels confident, supported, and inspired to move. Because when we invest in their wellbeing, we invest in a brighter, healthier future for all.

INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings from a research survey specific to children and young people's (CYP), perceptions and engagement with physical activity and gym environments including activity barriers and trends. The survey was completed by 1,993 CYP in Years 7 to 13 (ages 12-17 years old) and was designed to explore their attitudes toward gym usage, current activity levels, and preferences for how fitness and wellbeing opportunities are delivered.

Key themes include:

- Motivations to be active
- Barriers to participation
- The impact of social and emotional factors
- Preferences around environmental design and support services

The aim is to provide actionable insight for fitness providers, schools, stakeholders and policymakers, supporting the creation of more inclusive, engaging, and youth-centred spaces that encourage regular, positive physical activity.



WHO ARE LIFESTYLE FITNESS®

Lifestyle Fitness® operates over 17 fitness clubs (out of a total 24) within education establishments - they are well used by both the school & local community. The clubs host dedicated after-school sessions for pupils aged 11-16 to be introduced to fitness and build the confidence to exercise for life. Our successful initiative operates across all education sites and sees up to 40% of students join.

The dedicated qualified team regularly attend assemblies and lessons to provide education on nutrition and exercise. The aim is to ensure every student has the opportunity to learn about the importance of physical and mental wellbeing.

IMPACT OF PARTNERING WITH LIFESTYLE FITNESS®

70%+ of young people in Lifestyle Fitness® partner schools achieve the recommended 60 minutes of daily activity - over 20% above the national average.

Affordable access to physical activity through junior memberships, school partnerships, and match-funding for Pupil Premium students.

After-school and enrichment programmes give pupils access to facilities, tackling the “no time” barrier to exercise.

Dedicated Junior Gym sessions create a safe, comfortable environment for young people.

Specialist-trained staff adapt sessions to support adolescent development and individual goals.

Strong culture of health and wellbeing embedded across Lifestyle Fitness® partner schools.

Flexible participation options - train with friends, in age-specific groups, or with family.

Tailored youth programmes with guided inductions, goal-setting, and optional nutrition or performance advice.



“I can train with my friends and feel confident.”

Year 8 Junior Member
- Everest Community Academy, Basingstoke

METHODOLOGY

The research was designed and conducted by Lifestyle Fitness with independent support from the High Five Group. The survey was distributed to secondary schools and academies across a range of 5 UK Local Authorities, with introductory communications and a controlled online survey. The 4-minute online survey was conducted in the Spring Term 2025, and took a whole class approach to young people aged between 12-17yrs of age, ensuring representation across age, gender and locations.

The research design was informed through an independent panel, and the survey results in this report are rounded to the nearest whole number, as a result percentages may not add up to exactly 100%, differences of + or -1% for net scores are due to rounding, where sub group sample sizes are fewer than n= 30, results have been interpreted with caution as indicative.

Sample Profile

- **Gender: Female:** 49% (n=985) **Male:** 48% (n=963)
Other: 1% (n=19) **Prefer not to say:** 1% (n=26)
- **Age range:** 11-17 years (Years 7 to 13)
- **Number of schools represented:** 6 x schools
- **School type:** Maintained Schools (part of MAT- Multi Academy Trusts)
- **Areas:** Staines, Macclesfield, Epsom, Cheshunt, Basingstoke, Stourport and Salisbury
- **Range of Free School Meal (FSM) eligibility:** 15.1% - 25,8% (average: 20.65%)
- **N** = 1,993 CYP (Children & Young People)

METHODOLOGY

As per the methodology to gather this data, a whole school approach was obtained from specific year groups and unique CYP, offering a sample that was:

- Geographically diverse
- Gender-inclusive
- Representative of varied social and educational backgrounds

The survey captured both:

- Quantitative data - such as gym attendance, activity frequency, and service preferences
- Qualitative insights - including open-ended reflections and personal views
- All responses were submitted anonymously, allowing participants to share openly and honestly

The survey captured responses from a diverse group of young people across all year groups (7 to 13), with a gender mix including female, male, other, and prefer not to say.

The gender distribution across the total survey participants shows a relatively balanced response between female (~48%) and male (~46%) students, with a small but important proportion identifying as non-binary or preferring not to disclose. This level of inclusivity provides a strong foundation for understanding the varied needs of young people across gender identities.

“I like the fun stuff at the gym - challenges, music, things that make it feel less serious.”

Year 8 Junior Member
- Goffs Academy, Cheshunt

METHODOLOGY

Notably, the Years 10-11 group (typically ages 14-16) had the highest response rate, reflecting a key age range where gym engagement could be encouraged or lost. In contrast, responses from Years 12-13 were proportionally lower, suggesting a potential gap in engagement or a shift in priorities as young people near school leaving age.

This insight supports the need for age-sensitive programming, particularly targeting early secondary (Years 7-9) with confidence-building experiences, and re-engagement strategies for older students (Years 12-13) who may benefit from flexible, independent, or holistic offers.

There is also a clear opportunity to ensure that programmes are gender-responsive:

- Female respondents expressed higher sensitivity to confidence, comfort, and the social environment
- Male respondents were more likely to attend a gym currently, suggesting familiarity but also the potential to explore broader wellness models
- Respondents identifying as 'Other' or 'Prefer not to say' highlighted the need for inclusive environments, where young people of all identities feel safe and represented

“I love that I know how to use the gym equipment properly and I feel like I train like an athlete.”

Year 9 Junior Member
- Goffs Academy, Cheshunt



KEY OUTCOMES & FINDINGS

66%

of young people want to be more active, yet only

32%

of respondents use a gym.

36%

say cost is the main barrier to gym access.

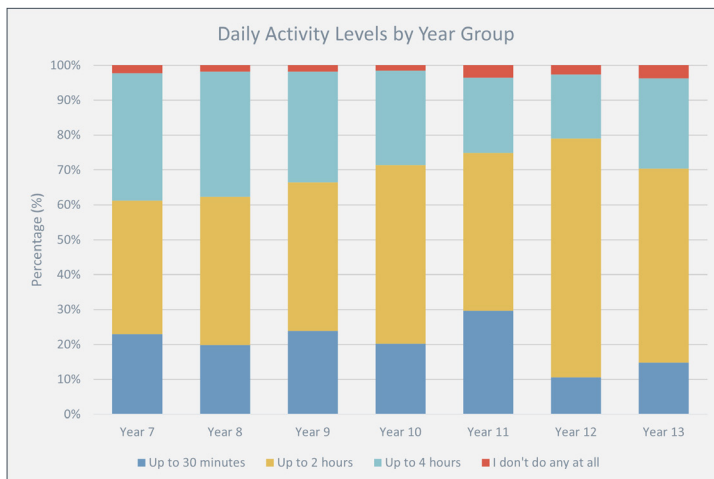
79%

feel more confident exercising with friends or in a supportive environment.

57%

are interested in wellness services such as mental health support, nutrition advice, and mindfulness.

A. Activity Levels



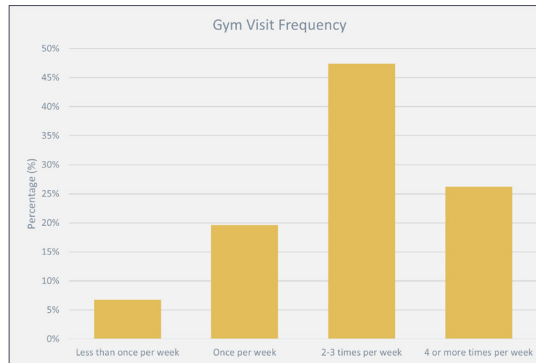
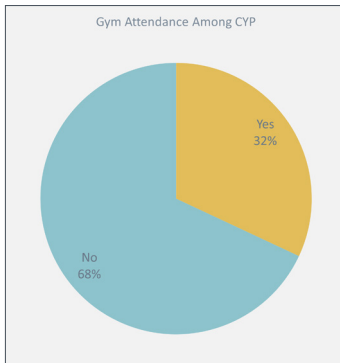
- **44% of respondents** report being active for **1-2 hours per day**, with only **6%** doing less than 30 minutes
- **11%** are active for **3-4 hours per day**, and **2%** report no activity at all

INSIGHT:

A high percentage (47.8%) of CYP are starting to achieve the recommended daily activity guidelines, but a notable minority (29.6%) are still significantly inactive. Boys are more likely to be active (51%) than girls (45%), and lower activity is more common among CYP from less affluent families (45%) and Black, Asian, or Other ethnic groups (42-44%).

DID YOU KNOW - CMO Guidelines - All children and young people should engage in moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity for at least 60 minutes and up to several hours every day. Vigorous intensity activities, including those that strengthen muscle and bone, should be incorporated at least three days a week.

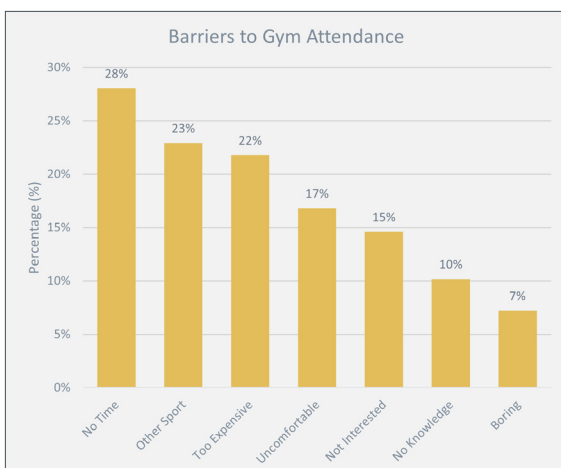
B. Gym Participation



- 32% currently attend a gym, while 68% do not
- Of those who do attend, 47% go 2-3 times per week, while 26% go 4+ times

INSIGHT: A strong proportion of young people are already engaged with gyms regularly, showing strong potential for youth-specific gym programming.

C. Barriers to Gym Usage (Among Non-Attendees)



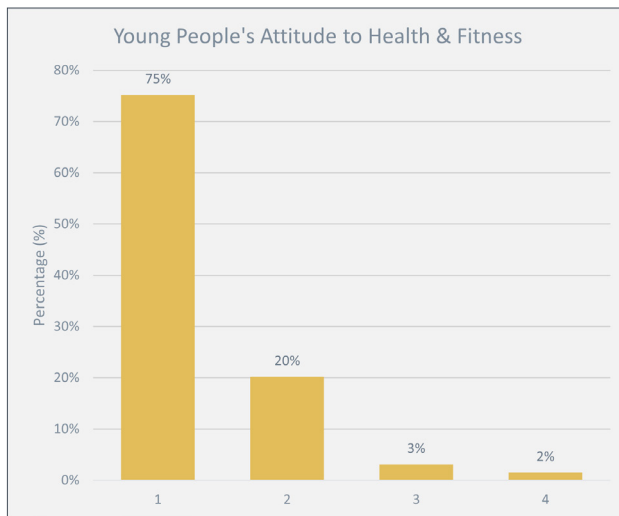
Top reasons for not attending:

- Too expensive (22%)
- No time (28%)
- Uncomfortable in that environment (17%)
- Not interested (15%)

Other common reasons include a lack of knowledge and a preference for other sports.

INSIGHT: Financial and emotional barriers are significant. There's a need for more accessible, inclusive, and youth-oriented environments.

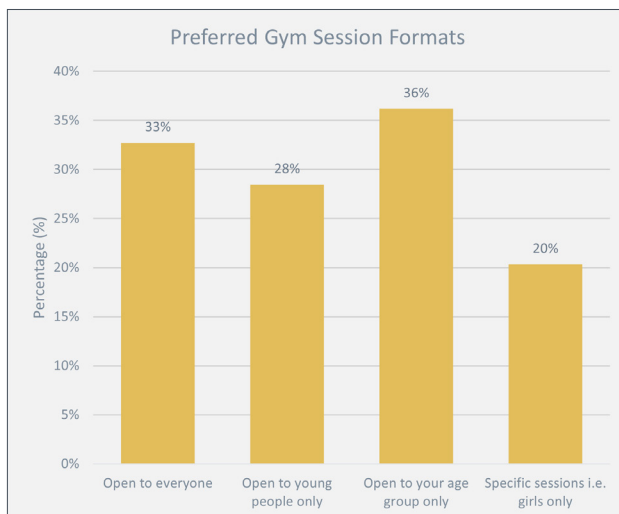
D. Health & Wellness Attitudes



- Average importance of health and fitness rated at **4.17/5**
- **91% rated physical activity as a 4 or 5**, showing high intrinsic value placed on being active
- Physical activity most often made respondents feel **happy (55%), tired (57%), calm (36%), and relaxed (27%)**

INSIGHT: Young people see health and fitness as highly important and experience mostly positive emotional outcomes after being active.

E. Preferred Gym Models

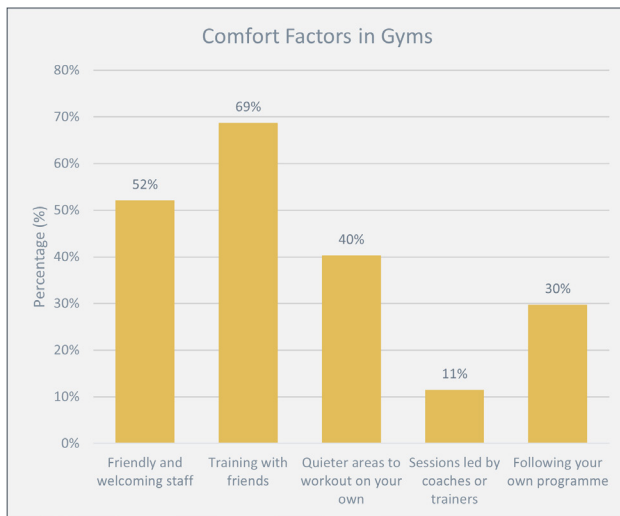


When asked about preferred gym formats:

- **33% want open access to everyone**
- **28% prefer youth-only spaces**
- **36% want access for their own age group**
- **20% want specific sessions (i.e. girls only)**

INSIGHT: A variety of models are needed - some prefer mixed environments, others value targeted, safer spaces.

F. Comfortable Gym Environments

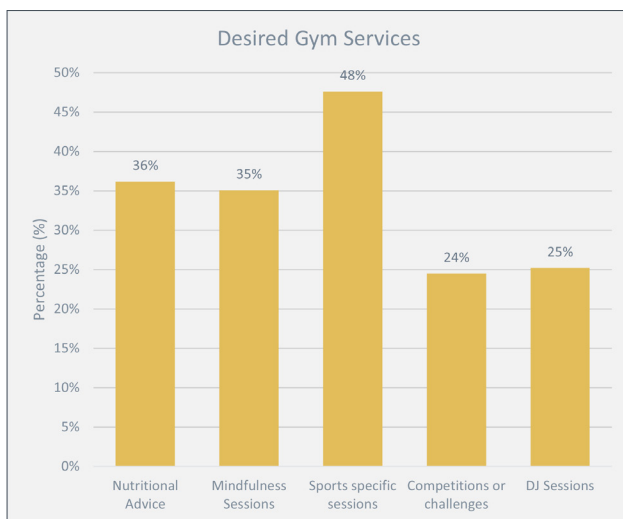


Top features that would make young people feel more comfortable:

- Friendly/welcoming staff (52%)
- Training with friends (69%)
- Quieter areas to work out alone (40%)
- Coached sessions (11%)
- Following own programme (30%)

INSIGHT: The social environment and atmosphere matter deeply to young people. A one-size-fits-all approach won't work.

G. Desired Gym Services



Young people are interested in:

- Nutritional advice (36%)
- Mindfulness sessions (35%)
- Sports-specific training (48%)
- Competitions/challenges (24%)
- DJ/music-based sessions (25%)

INSIGHT: There is an appetite for holistic and engaging experiences that go beyond physical activity alone.

KEY FINDINGS

This survey reveals a strong desire among young people to be more physically active, and a clear opportunity for gyms to play a greater role in enabling that.

While 91% of respondents say that being active is important to them, participation remains uneven due to barriers such as cost, confidence, accessibility, and lack of tailored provision. However, the findings also highlight what works: friendly staff, training with friends, youth-only sessions, and environments that feel safe, fun, and welcoming.

Young people are not just looking for places to work out - they want spaces that support their wellbeing, identity, and independence. Many expressed interest in services like sports-specific training, nutrition advice, mindfulness, and creative challenges that go beyond the traditional gym model.

There is a clear appetite for gym operators to rethink how they engage children and young people. With the right investment, facilities can become a powerful force in supporting both the physical and emotional well-being of the next generation.

“Having it next to my school means I have no excuse not to go and I always feel better after it.”

Year 10 Junior Member
- Macclesfield Academy

REFERENCES

The UK Chief Medical Officers' (CMO) Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that;

- All children and young people should engage in moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity for **at least 60 minutes** and up to several hours every day. Vigorous intensity activities, including those that strengthen muscle and bone, should be incorporated at least three days a week.
- This can include all forms of activity such as physical education, active travel, after-school activities, play and sports.
- Children and young people should engage in a variety of types and intensities of physical activity across the week to develop movement skills, muscular fitness, and bone strength.
- Children and young people should aim to minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary, and when physically possible, should break up long periods of not moving with at least light physical activity.

The UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines for Disabled Children and Disabled Young People recommend that:

- Disabled children and young people undertake **120-180 minutes of aerobic physical activity** per week at a moderate-to-vigorous intensity.
- This can be achieved in different ways (e.g. 20 minutes per day or 40 minutes, three times per week). For example, walking or cycling.
- For good health benefits, disabled children and young people should do 20 minutes of physical activity a day.
- Disabled children and young people should do challenging but manageable strength and balance activities three times a week.

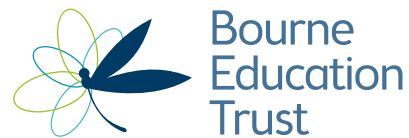


**Physical activity guidelines
for children and young people.**

Please scan the QR code.



THANK YOU



- Avon Valley Academy - Acorn Education Trust
- Epsom & Ewell High School - Bourne Education Trust
- Everest Community Academy - Bourne Education Trust
- Goffs Academy - Generations Multi-Academy Trust
- The Matthew Arnold School - Bourne Education Trust
- Macclesfield Academy - The Sir John Brunner Foundation
- Stourport High School & Sixth Form College - Severn Academies Educational Trust



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ABOUT PARTNERING
WITH US?

Contact sam.pearce@lifestylefitness.co.uk