



Implementation Guide for Advocates

What does Athletes As Leaders have to do with sexual assault prevention?

» Our [Background Information](#) document helps make the connection.

Athletes As Leaders Program Goals:

Long Term Goals:

- Change the social norms of the school and/or athletic community by leveraging the social influence of student athletes to support the AAL core principles*
- Reduce and prevent instances of sexual/gender-based harm, abuse, assault, bullying, harassment, victim blaming
- Create an environment focused on equity

Short Term Goals:

- Increase gender equitable attitudes (by challenging harmful gender stereotypes; and reducing adherence to rigid gender norms)
- Increase a sense of leadership individually and as a team to improve the community to reflect AAL core principles*
- Increase connection to and cohesion within community [the mentor(s), the team, the school]
- Create a sense of inclusion, support, and belonging for people of all gender identities, racial identities, sexual orientations, abilities, and other marginalized identities
- Increase empathy and concern for how one's actions affect others
- Increase willingness to intervene on behalf of the common good; increase intention to intervene in situations of harm
- Create and promote positive norms within the team; decrease acceptance and normalization of harmful behaviors
- Understand the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationship behaviors; Increase caring behaviors and decrease harmful behaviors

Athletes As Leaders Core Principles*

These are the core principles we believe that all schools and organizations want for their community members. We encourage student athletes to model and promote these as social norms with their peers.

- **Health & Safety**
- **Inclusive & Welcoming Community**
- **Empathy**
- **Consent**
- **Gender & Racial Equity**
- **Youth Leadership**

When to Use the Program: A Checklist

- Your school or athletics organization shows readiness and willingness to work on preventing sexual violence.
 - » A basic understanding that sexual violence is an issue and that the organization or school wants to address it.
 - » For ideas on eliciting buy-in, see Steps 1 & 2, below.
- Your school or athletics organization has a protocol to respond to sexual assault when it is reported.
 - » For more information on policies and prevention programming, see our [Recommended Policies](#) and Step 1 below.
- Violence prevention efforts engage athletes of all genders.
 - » Research shows that sexual violence prevention should engage those who identify as men and boys, as they are more likely to perpetrate sexual violence, and can play an active role in interrupting abusive behaviors amongst peers. If the school has boys' sports teams, they should implement a violence prevention program. (Check out [Coaching Boys Into Men](#) as an option).
 - » AAL is a complementary program for girls' teams. However, using a violence prevention program with *only* girls' team sends the wrong message and places the responsibility on athletes who play on girls' teams. Everyone deserves leadership opportunities and should have a role in creating a safe community.
 - » For all-gender/ co-ed teams, discuss with the community and decide what will work best. AAL is intentionally gender inclusive, as it was designed for women/girls, non-binary, and gender non-conforming people. Several communities have used or adapted AAL for all-gender/ co-ed teams.

Step-by-Step Implementation Guide for Advocates

Step 1: Preparation

Make Sure Critical Policies and Procedures are in Place

Before you begin Athletes As Leaders, it is important to make sure there are certain policies and procedures in place and all staff/volunteers are aware of them. This includes things like making sure there is a plan in place in case an athlete discloses assault or abuse. For guidance, see our [Recommended Policies](#) provided in the Advocate toolkit.

You may not have control over changing policies for the organization/ school that you partner with. In this case, it is still a good idea to be familiar with their policies, and even recommend filling in any gaps in policies that you notice.

Learn About Your Community's Resources

Several of the sessions in Athletes As Leaders cover sensitive topics. Discussing these topics may result in athletes experiencing difficult emotions or disclosing past or present assault or abuse. It is critical to be prepared with professional resources to support athletes before you start the program.

- » Learn about the resources available to survivors of sexual and domestic violence in your community. These could include your local sexual assault or domestic violence agency, school resources including health centers and counselors, crisis hotlines or other agencies that specifically serve youth.
- » For more information on conducting a Community Readiness Assessment, we recommend the [Tri-Ethnic Community Readiness Model](#). The model involves interviewing key stakeholders in the community. It provides both a vocabulary for communicating about readiness and a metric for gauging progress. It can help identify types of prevention/ intervention efforts that are appropriate.

If you are not professionally trained in sexual assault and/or domestic violence prevention:

- » Contact the local sexual assault or domestic violence agency in your area and inquire about partnering to implement this program. You may be able to

partner with them to advance your school or organization's prevention efforts. They may offer training in advocacy and/or support in doing prevention work. They can also be a resource as a professional resource should a disclosure occur.

- » To find your local sexual assault or domestic violence program, your state coalition will offer a list, or you can search at <http://nsvrc.org/organizations>

Step 2: Develop Relationships

Prevention work begins with relationships. When planning to implement the program, it's important to develop relationships with leadership, coaches, parents, staff and others. You never know who might become your strongest supporter.

Leadership

- » Athletes As Leaders will work best when there is buy-in from leaders of the school or organization.
 - For a school, this could mean administrators and athletic directors.
 - For a sports organization, this could mean coaches and organizational leadership.
- » Some ideas for eliciting support from the top:
 - Set up a meeting with an administrator such as the principal, athletic director, or manager. Talk about the leadership opportunity that Athletes As Leaders can offer to athletes.
 - Share with them some facts about the prevalence of sexual violence and the effects of sexual violence on young people.
 - Share with them why athletics is a great location for sexual violence prevention programming.
 - Share the goals of the program.
 - Share results from the national program evaluation. Find this on our [Evaluation Tools](#) page.

Coaches

- » Recruit coaches who want the program implemented with their teams. Many high school sports coaches are exceptional people. They often go above and beyond for the athletes they coach and care deeply about their athletes' development on and off the field.
- » Some ideas for recruiting coaches:

- Ask the athletic director if they can put you on the agenda for the next coach meeting or training. If you only have a short time, show the Athletes As Leaders video and talk briefly about the goals of the program and what is expected of coaches.
 - Share with them some facts about the prevalence of sexual violence and the effects of sexual violence on youth. Explain that this can happen on any team, at any school or in any organization, and this program is a way to be proactive against this type of violence. It also trains athletes, who already tend to be leaders amongst their peers, to speak up against issues of injustice and incidents involving harassment and violence.
 - Share the goals of the program (see above).
 - Offer Athletes As Leaders as an opportunity rather than a mandate.
 - Coaches are more likely to commit to doing this program with their team if they are intrinsically motivated rather than told they have to do it.
 - Once there is success with one team or a few teams, the organization or school can build momentum and more teams will likely want to participate.
- » Explain the benefits of the program. There are a number of incentives for teams to participate. A few possibilities include:
- **Athletes As Leaders can attract positive attention to the team, school or organization.**
 - **The program can help build strong character and leadership in their athletes.** Coaches want their athletes to succeed in sports, but also in school, relationships, and life in general.
 - **Athletes As Leaders benefits athletes.**
 - Athletes have reported that the program created a more positive team environment among their sports teams and brought the team closer together.
 - Athletes have reported being more confident challenging gender stereotypes after completing Athletes As Leaders.
 - Athletes have reported they could recognize the signs of an unhealthy relationship after completing the program.
 - Athletes have reported they believed they had the ability to influence their peers as student athletes and leaders after completing the program.

- **Monetary or other external incentives.** Explore whether the school or organization could commit funds or resources toward external incentives for program participation. This could take several forms, including any of the following:
 - Organizations and schools can choose to pay coaches and mentors for the time they spend in training and in implementing the program. However, lack of funds should not be a barrier to doing this program, and many coaches and mentors will want to participate because of the other benefits mentioned above.
 - Incentives for teams could include food, gift cards, or recognition. Consider asking local businesses to donate or asking the Booster Club to offer some funds for this purpose.

Other Important Relationships

- » **Parents & caregivers** should at the very least be notified that their athlete is on a team where Athletes As Leaders is being implemented.
 - A [sample parent letter](#) is included in the Athletes As Leaders toolkit for advocates. A letter for parents and caregivers should inform them about the program and could encourage them to review the content (online) and have further conversations at home. If a parent or guardian has any concern with their child receiving the program, they should contact the coach or the advocate.
 - Other ideas for engaging parents include a documentary movie night, a parent education night, sending home materials, or having parent volunteers help coordinate or facilitate Athletes As Leaders groups.
- » **All other staff** in the school or organization should be aware that this program is being conducted.
 - You can offer basic training on the issue of sexual assault as it relates to their work.
 - Staff should be made aware of procedures for reporting disclosures of abuse or assault, should they happen.
- » **Your local sexual assault or domestic violence agency.** To find your local sexual assault or domestic violence program, your state coalition will offer a list, or you can search at <http://nsvrc.org/organizations>.
 - Let them know you're doing this program and see if they want to partner. They may be able to offer training and technical assistance.
 - Be prepared to call them if you need consultation.
 - Ask them if they are willing to partner and share resources with you.

Step 3: Recruit and Train Mentors to Facilitate the Program

Recruiting Mentors

Advocates can serve as mentors (who will facilitate the program); however it is a good idea to consider the best fit. Finding a great mentor is a critical consideration for the Athletes As Leaders program. The program aims to change social norms within the team and the larger community. Who will serve as mentor(s) is important decision and should be left up to the community. Coaches and athletes can decide who they think would be best to mentor the team and facilitate the program. It's important to think about team dynamics. The power dynamic can be intense on some teams between coaches and athletes. The athletes should be doing a lot of the talking in this program, and the mentor should respect the leadership of the youth. You can help guide teams to think about who a positive and relatable mentor would be and who will facilitate the groups and help the athletes participate openly. Then you can invite potential mentors to learn more about the program.

Refer to [Mentors: Finding a Good Fit](#)

Training Mentors

After recruitment, the advocate can train all potential mentors (facilitators). The Mentor Training is designed to be 1.5 to 2 hours and should be completed before the season starts. The training requires the potential mentors to practice facilitating portions of the curriculum. This is an essential part of getting prepared to lead the program with athletes.

Refer to [Mentor Training](#)

Training Coaches

- » Regardless of the coach's gender identity, it is beneficial for the advocate to provide an orientation, or brief training for *all* coaches of the team. Review the [Information for Coaches](#) handout in a detailed manner, elaborating on the examples. The training should provide basic information regarding sexual assault, how the program works, and how to handle issues that may come up. It is critical that the coaches are educated on the key concepts of the program, so they can reinforce these throughout the season (on page 2 of the handout).
- » During the training, ask coaches to fill out a [Season Planning Form](#), providing their contact info, the dates of the season and their top 3 choices for days/times the program will be done. This helps maintain commitment to

completing the program. And it will help you match them with the mentor that based on availability. A best practice is to complete Athletes As Leaders sessions the same day and time every week. Mentors and coaches should also have a backup plan in case rescheduling a session is necessary, as well as a way to communicate rescheduling with athletes.

- » This training for coaches can be formal or informal depending on the size of your group and the relationships with coaches. Regardless, make sure coaches have the chance to offer their own examples and ask any questions.

Step 4: Implement the Program

Advocates can help support Mentors to make the program successful. Advocates can also serve as a mentor themselves. An advocate can:

- » Set up the schedule with coaches (review the Season Planning Form completed by coaches and contact them to agree on a regular day/time for Athletes As Leaders).
- » Make sure mentors, advocates and coaches all have contact information for each other.
- » Send regular reminders to coaches and mentors weekly about dates, times and locations of the program sessions.
- » Ask mentors how you can best support them. You can make sure they have any materials they need (listed in the first section of each session). You could provide coverage to help facilitate a session if it is a difficult topic or if a mentor is unavailable.
- » Relationships are KEY. Stay in touch with coaches and check in regularly. Get involved with the teams and ask how you can support them. Show up to games and competitions and cheer them on!

Step 5: Evaluate

The program toolkit has [Evaluation Tools](#) which include the following:

1. The program's [Weekly Survey](#) is intended to evaluate how the program is going and what the athletes think about it. This survey is a good option if you want feedback on how Athletes As Leaders is working for a particular team in the midst of

implementation. It can be helpful for gauging how the program is going, especially if it's your first time implementing it.

- » The weekly survey can be completed at the end of sessions.
- » The weekly survey can be administered weekly, monthly, or just once at the mid-season point.
- » The mentor should leave a few minutes at the end of the session if you will administer the weekly survey.
- » Surveys should be done anonymously so that athletes feel they can be honest.

2. The **Athletes As Leaders Pre- and Post-Survey** are intended to evaluate the outcomes of the program. In other words, this will help you measure the impact the program had on the team. Did the program make a difference?

- » The Pre-Survey should be completed before or during the beginning of Session 1.
- » The Post-Survey should be completed at the end of Session 10.
- » These surveys should be completed anonymously so athletes can be honest.
- » If at all possible, budget a small incentive such as a gift card for athletes who complete the post survey (not required)
- » Please **contact us** if you are willing to share your data from the surveys!

3. All communities' needs are different, including what is desired (and/or required) for measuring success. If you choose to create your own outcome evaluation, we recommend reviewing the "Short Term Goals" of the program (listed at the top of this document). It also may be helpful to consider the "Key Messages" (listed at the top of each session in The Program). Both may help you design an evaluation that is tailored to the program and that meets the needs of your community.

As outlined in this Implementation Guide, there are many tasks that an advocate can take on to help make Athletes As Leaders successful. The community can help guide the process. Ask for input from community stakeholders (including student athletes) as you encounter challenges or opportunities for growth.

Thank you for the steps you are taking to create a safer community! You are welcome to **contact us** if you have any questions about coordinating or implementing the Athletes As Leaders program.