

Athletes As Leaders



How to Build Relationships with Teams

Relationships are key as a mentor! These tips are intended for mentors who will facilitate groups with athletes, who don't know the team well (yet). If you are a coach, athlete or someone else who already knows the athletes well, these tips will likely not apply to you.

- » **If there is a pre-season retreat, see if you can get on the agenda.** This could be a great time to start building relationships. You could play games to get to know each other, ice breakers, team building activities, etc. You can do a brief introduction to the program and provide some content if there is time. You could get a head start on the first session of Athletes As Leaders "Introductions & Group Agreements."
- » **Attend a few practices and games.** This is a great opportunity to learn the athletes' names, get a look at team dynamics and see the way the coach interacts with the team. Try to remember specific things players did and recognize them at the next group session. This is also a great way to support girls' sports in general. If you can't attend games, keep up with how their season is going.
- » **Learn the athletes' names.** It's so much more genuine to connect with people when you know their names. Going to games is a good way to start learning. You can also have the athletes introduce themselves by name at the beginning of the season. You can use team rosters and team photos for reference. For the first few sessions, you can also have them say their name before they make a comment during the group.
- » If you have a particularly large or energetic group, **having a "call and response" phrase** to get their attention can be helpful. Ask the coach if they have one, and use it if they do. You can also ask the players.
- » **Ask team leaders to help you.** Talk to team captains or upperclassmen before the first session. They can help initiate some of the discussion. Much of Athletes As Leaders relies on the team to create new team expectations (the "Team Talk") so talk to captains about stepping up as leaders and setting the

tone. Also, ask if they can help teach team cheers, which is a great way to end each session.

- » **Check in with the coach throughout the season in order to plan the final sessions.** Make sure you have time to complete all the sessions. Sometimes seasons can be shortened or extended depending on whether they qualify for playoffs. Also, sometimes JV teams do not have playoffs and so their season may end earlier.
- » **Be flexible.** Games and practices may be rescheduled, especially for outdoor sports. Keep in close contact with coaches so that you can make sure the sessions stay on schedule, and make up sessions if you need to do so.
- » **Lastly, boundaries!** While it is beneficial to build relationships with teams, it's also important to model healthy boundaries. Do not discuss your own personal relationships, do not allow youth to break the rules, do not give special attention or privileges to only one (or a small group) of athletes, and make sure coaches and parents know what you are doing with the athletes. Review and follow any policies already in place for staff and volunteers.

Thank you for serving as a mentor and encouraging athletes to become leaders in creating a safe and welcoming community for all.