

Athletes As Leaders



Session 4: Addressing Misinformation & Bias

Prep Before Session:

Make Sure You Have:

- Group agreements to refer to during “Warm Up” (if needed)
- Oppression Chart and Glossary from Session 3
 - Display Oppression Chart or write on board
 - Review Glossary ahead of time; many terms appear in this session
- Ball to throw during “Cool Down”

Review Key Messages:

- Many people have received misinformation about specific groups of people, and we need to educate ourselves to avoid bias.
- We can help create a community that is safe and welcoming for people, including all sexual orientations and abilities/disabilities.

Warm Up

Introduce today’s topic with visualization activity: (5 min)

Welcome! [Remind group about the agreements created in Session 1 if needed]. We are going to start with a silent activity. First, let’s pause and take some deep breaths. We are going to use our imagination and it may help to close your eyes.

- » Imagine a place that is genuinely welcoming and safe for everyone.
- » Think about what that would feel like.
- » How would you see people interacting?
- » How would people be welcomed who were new?
- » How would people be treated if they had struggles or challenges?
- » What if everyone had what they needed to live and be well?

[Invite athletes to open their eyes and return focus to the group. Ask a few volunteers to share one word to describe the place they imagined.]

Last time we discussed stereotypes and how they are harmful to both individuals and society. We talked a lot about race and gender. Today we will continue the conversation and talk about misinformation and bias. We will focus more on people with disabilities and the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, plus more) community. These two groups have been unwelcomed in many settings, including sports, and are even targeted with violence at higher rates. Let's think today about how we can all play a role in helping to create a safer and more welcoming community.

Think about youth sports, rec leagues, club teams, high school athletics, college, and professional sports. Historically, sports have not been a welcoming or safe space for athletes with disabilities and LGBTQ+ athletes. Meanwhile, athletes with disabilities and LGBTQ+ athletes have been our teammates and have made incredible accomplishments in our sport.

We have been talking recently about oppression. When specific groups are excluded or mistreated, it is sometimes based on bias and misinformation. This is incredibly harmful. Bias can quickly develop into distrust, fear, and hatred. Biases make bullying and violence more acceptable and more common.

Many of us have not had enough education, especially about people that are given less power and privilege in society. When we think about what we have been taught, and NOT taught, we can understand how our biases exist. We can educate ourselves and others to avoid bias.

Work Out

Discussion Questions: (6 min) [You may want to break into small groups for the "work out" discussion if you have a large group.]

- ① Studies show that P.E. classes are unsafe environments for more than 50% of LGBTQ+ students because of bullying and harassment. And that LGBTQ+ students may be underrepresented on sports teams. **How could [your sport] be less hostile and more welcoming to LGBTQ+ athletes?**
- ① Imagine a game where spectators are yelling insults and making gestures that make fun of people with disabilities. **How would you want [your school or team] to address this?**

Talking Points: (2 min) [You may choose to share all talking points, or only those that have not been discussed already by the athletes.]

- » Our goal should be for everyone to feel a sense of belonging on this team. And we should think about how our team can spread that sense of belonging for everyone in the school.
- » Language has a strong impact. There are terms that have been used throughout history that are hurtful toward people with disabilities and LGBTQ+ people. As leaders you should be aware of the language you use. You can educate people about biased and hurtful terms if you hear them.
- » Some negative terms have been reclaimed by people who have those identities and used as positive terms. It is very important to use terms that people prefer to use for themselves. It's better to ask than assume.
- » It's so important to never make assumptions about a person's identities. How a person presents in their appearance is not enough to understand who they are as a person.
- » Do not assume that everyone is straight and cisgender. LGBTQ+ people exist in every community and deserve respect. If you know someone who identifies as LGBTQ+, do not assume you know things about their relationships or behavior just because they are LGBTQ+.
- » People with disabilities are capable. If they need anything, let them tell you. It's ok to ask people what they need for accessibility, like to attend a sporting event or party.
- » **So here is a challenge for you...** try to catch your own biases and educate yourself. Find advocacy groups to follow on social media to expand your education and understanding. Educating ourselves to reduce our biases is a lifelong journey.
- » **As student leaders and athletes...** you can help create spaces where people can be their true selves. You have a role in creating a safer and more welcoming community.

Cool Down

Team Talk: (7 min) [You may choose to have specific athletes/leaders to facilitate the Team Talk.]

Now it is time for the Team Talk! Let's get in a circle and get ready to pass the ball. We are going to think of things that you can all do as student leaders & athletes. Hopefully these will be things everyone in the group can agree to do, when you are interacting with people on your team, at school, on social media, or in the community. We are hoping they will become the new team norms that will help you take action as leaders in the community.

Today we are going to brainstorm ways to address misinformation and bias.

- ❓ **Imagine a person says something hurtful that seems based on misinformation about a specific group. What are some ways to help them recognize it?**

- ❓ **What online resources, advocacy groups or ideas do you have to educate ourselves to reduce our biases?**

Thank you for these great ideas. Please think back to the safe and welcoming community that you imagined at the beginning of our session today. This week, I encourage you to share your ideas with each other about ways to create that here at [your school].

I appreciate your participation today. It's time to break for the day (or get to practice).

Close the Circle with a Team Cheer.

[The Experiences of LGBT Students in Athletics.pdf \(glsen.org\)](#)