

# Athletes As Leaders



## Facilitation Guide for Mentors

Thank you for serving as a mentor for athletes by facilitating Athletes As Leaders!  
This guide will supplement your [training](#) and review of the [program](#).

### **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

## **AAL 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**

## **Engaging Youth Leaders**

- » This program is intended to create positive social norms on the team. This is a great opportunity to engage youth leaders who may be highly effective at changing social norms amongst their peers.
- » You are encouraged to partner with student athletes to help lead and facilitate the program. You can consider team captains, team veterans, and upperclassmen for leadership opportunities. We encourage you to also consider others who would like the opportunity to lead, those who have great ideas during groups, or anyone who may have advanced knowledge about the topics.
- » Talk with these youth leaders ahead of time. Share the Key Messages (listed at the top of each session) with them. Ask if they would be willing to speak first when you ask questions, or if they can facilitate the discussion questions themselves. If choose to have discussions in small groups, you can ask youth leaders to split up and each lead a small group.

## **Program Design:**

- » Each session starts with tips for mentors to prepare, including reviewing Key Messages. These are not intended to be read to the group, but rather to ground the lesson for the mentor(s). If the conversation ever gets off track or if time is short, the mentor can always bring it back to the Key Messages.
- » The program sessions are written with a simple script for the mentor to follow. If it is in regular font, it is the mentor script. Any instructions will either be in a purple text box or in [brackets].

- » The mentors can stick to the script, but they are free to put their own spin on the language. They are encouraged to adapt the program to make it culturally relevant and use anecdotes from the team and the specific sport.
- » You can facilitate the program with one or more mentors. If co-facilitating, divide up the script ahead of time and discuss your plan. Sit or stand apart from one another to create a more inclusive environment.
- » Each 20-minute session has 3 sections:
  - **Warm Up:** Introduce the topic using the mentor script. A couple lessons have a short activity or an optional video. In general, the warm up should only take a few minutes.
  - **Work Out:** Facilitate discussion questions with athletes. You may do this in large or small groups. Reinforce the key messages with the talking points. You may choose to share all the talking points, or only those that have not been covered already by the athletes.
  - **Cool Down:** Facilitate the "Team Talk," where the team will create new team norms to follow. This should always be done as a large group with the whole team. You may choose to have specific athletes/leaders on the team to facilitate this section (if they are not helping facilitate the entire session).

### **Space and Technology Requirements:**

- » Make sure there is room for all the athletes to sit comfortably.
- » If possible, sit in a circle or some seating arrangement where athletes can see each other.
- » There are a couple videos that are completely optional. If you show them, make sure the space has internet access, a computer with speakers and a screen to display the video. If this is not possible, you could consider sending it out before or after the session. You may also skip the videos.

### **Scheduling Best Practices:**

- » Strive to complete program sessions at a consistent day and time every week and send coaches reminders on the day before or day of. Think about the best time to run group: before practice, during practice or after practice. Try to avoid game days. Groups held *during* practice (as opposed to after practice) will usually draw the best attendance. It also helps when coaches require attendance and have the program sessions on a team calendar.
- » Facilitate the Athletes As Leaders program with only one team at a time. Usually the smaller group, the more athletes will be able to talk. Tips for large teams are listed below.

## **Preparing for the Group Sessions:**

- » Before starting the groups, you must complete the Athletes As Leaders training for mentors. An advocate may provide this training in person. Recorded webinars also available free online at [www.AthletesAsLeaders.org/training](http://www.AthletesAsLeaders.org/training).
- » Prepare for each session in advance. Read through the entire session and research any topics that you are not familiar with. Feel free to reach out to your prevention advocate or to the Athletes As Leaders program if you do have questions about the content.
- » Take time on your own to reflect on your own personal experiences and how they relate to the topics. It's ok to share a brief personal reflection about how you relate to the topic. Model good boundaries, and do not share anything that an athlete, parent, or administrator may think is inappropriate based on your role.
- » While it is okay to read the script, it will be much more engaging to speak authentically with the group, using your own language, so try to prepare and study the content ahead of time.
- » If you have the resources to do so, consider bringing snacks and/or water to the groups. You can play music when athletes enter to get the energy up. You can incorporate movement as well. Throw a ball or other equipment in the group circle during the Cool Down session. If you have more time, consider having small groups discuss the Work Out questions while walking or running laps.
- » Use this opportunity to build relationships and connections with the athletes as a mentor. Learn the athletes' names and follow the team's progress in their sports season. Especially if you are not a coach or member of the team, check out our resource "[Building Relationships with Teams](#)," also included in our toolkit.

## **Facilitation Best Practices:**

- » Be aware of the power dynamics and identities of mentors and participants. Try to have athletes do most of the talking and try to keep the adult mentor pieces short so you have more time for the athletes' discussion.
- » **Use a talking piece**, like a ball, or other sports related equipment, to pass around during group (i.e. only the person with the ball should be talking.) The ball does not need to be passed consecutively around the circle; instead, athletes can throw the ball across the circle to their teammate who is ready using a "popcorn format." Your enthusiastic approach goes a long way! This is

fun for any group, but also may help if you tend to have too many people talking at once.

- » **Be inclusive** of all gender identities. Keep in mind that not all athletes who play on a girls' team may identify as a "girl" or a "lady." When getting the group's attention, try to avoid, "Okay, Ladies!" and instead use more inclusive terms like "athletes," the school mascot, or sport name, i.e. "Okay, wrestlers!"
- » **Create a culture of consent**, or permission. This means that facilitators will not ask athletes personal questions or ask them to disclose any more than they are comfortable with. This goes for you too- it is a great opportunity for you to model boundaries as well. While participation and engagement can be encouraged and even incentivized, no athlete should be forced to participate.
- » **For a very large team**, you can break the athletes into small groups for the Work Out section. Think of fun ways to break up the group, i.e. by birthday month, or by number of siblings. Once in small groups, ask the questions one at a time, allowing time for small group discussions. Then a few volunteers to report out briefly. Make sure the large group comes back together for the Cool Down section.
- » Keep a **close eye on the time**. The sessions can go quickly, especially with a talkative group. If you can allot more than 20 minutes, and feel it would be beneficial for the group, see if you can run groups for a few extra minutes. This would be especially helpful on the first and last session.
- » Summarize and **close each session with optimism and energy**. Thank the athletes for their participation, respect, and thoughtfulness. State when the next session will be, and the topic, if possible. Close the circle with a team cheer. This is a great time for team veterans to teach new athletes their team cheers.

### **Encouraging Participation:**

We have found most teams have no problem with participation, but occasionally you may have a team that is overly disruptive or very quiet. Here are some ideas for increasing positive participation if that is an issue:

- » **Prompt discussion and encourage participation**. Think about the questions in the script for each session ahead of time. Are there follow-up questions you can ask to further the discussion? Some examples might include, "Tell me more about that" or "What do you think about ..." or "What ideas do you have about ..." Listen intently to each contribution.
- » When you ask questions, patiently wait at least 10 seconds for a response. **Silence is okay** and usually someone will speak. Look around the circle at

different athletes as you ask the question. You can ask the question a different way, or give a prompt, if you need to. Ideally, try to encourage around 2-5 responses to each question.

- » With your body language, make sure you invite everyone in the room to participate in the group. If you notice one side or section of the room contributing more, try to direct the next question to the other side.
- » **Recruit support in advance.** As mentioned above, the program aims to change social norms and the participation of “key influencers” is key. Ask a few athletes if they can step up and help you particularly in the first couple sessions to get the conversation going. The best time for them to do that is during the “Work Out” and the “Cool Down” (during the Team Talk).
- » Give positive verbal feedback to athletes when they speak into the group. Emphasize that there are no wrong answers and no stupid questions. If an athlete says something that is completely negative or against your message, try to reframe it positively without shaming the athlete. Or, ask the athletes if anyone has a different opinion on that particular topic or question. Most likely another athlete will speak up and offer a different opinion.
- » Don’t get stuck in one person’s stuff. Always remain neutral and mindful of the flow of conversation. Try to avoid discussions that ramble on or are dominated by one person’s contributions. You can use phrases like, “Given our schedule we need to move on for the sake of time, but thank you for your thoughts....”
- » Do NOT give athletes a consequence for not speaking in group (like running laps). Be honest if you have concerns, give gentle reminders, and refer back to your group agreements you created in Session 1. You could write them on a poster and display them every week if needed.
- » Lastly, keep the “Key Messages” (listed at the top of each session) in your mind throughout the session. You can always bring it back to them if the conversation gets off topic, goes off message, or goes over time.

**Remember this should be fun for the athletes and for you! Avoid making it feel too much like school. Your enthusiasm during the lighthearted activities, and your thoughtful and sensitive approach during serious topics will both go a long way!**