



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:

- » Build strong teams and foster healthy relationships among athletes and their peers
- » Build trust, positive team culture, and set norms for behavior within the team, school and larger community
- » Help define healthy and unhealthy behaviors in relationships
- » Challenge harmful gender stereotypes & media messages

Program Design:

- » The program sessions are written with a simple script for the mentor to follow. *Any text in italics is meant as a facilitator script.* If it is in regular font, it is usually an instruction or a facilitation tip.
- » The order and the program components are intentional. The mentor should stick to the key messages and concepts of the script but is free to put their own spin on the language. You can adapt to make it culturally relevant and use anecdotes from the team and the specific sport.
- » You can facilitate the program with one or two 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 and watch the video online. The team can sit at tables, on the floor, or in any position to watch the video.
 - **Work Out:** Facilitate discussion questions with athletes. Reinforce the key concepts with the talking points.
 - **Cool Down:** Facilitate the "Team Talk," where the team will create new team norms that the team agrees to follow.

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, and also view the video.
- » Every session requires showing an online video, so make sure that the space has internet access, a computer with speakers and a screen to display the video. If this is not possible, you could consider using a tablet or a phone to show the video.
- » If no internet is available at the site, you could consider sending the video out in advance to athletes to watch before the session.

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.
- » Do 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. The training is also available free online at 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.
- » 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.
- » Define the purpose of each session up front in order to get everyone on the same page. Use phrases like, "Today we will talk about _____; or "The reason we are here is"
- » Find ways for athletes to help with the sessions. This could mean helping to set up the room before sessions, selecting music, writing things on the board, and helping to present the information.

- » 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.
- » Learn the athletes' names and follow the team's progress in their 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:

- » 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." 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."
- » 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.

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.** This program aims to change social norms and the participation of “key influencers” is key. For example, talk to the team captains, upperclassmen, and other athletes who tend to have a positive peer influence on the team. Ask them 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” (discussion after video) and the “Cool Down” (creating 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 time constraints we need to move on, 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.

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!
