



**Trauma Informed
Practices:
A Resource for
Coaches**

**Athletes As
Leaders**



AthletesAsLeaders.org

Practicing Boundaries and Consent

- You play a key role in showing what appropriate boundaries should look like with an adult and with someone in a position of power.
- Avoid comments about an athlete's physical appearance, clothing, hair, weight, food choices, or their gender expression.
- Praise athletes on their strength, character, teamwork, effort, dedication, new skills, and level of improvement.
- Practice consent. Beyond high fives and fist bumps, ask before you touch. For example, ask "is it okay if I move your arms to correct your position?"
- Avoid special privileges for certain athletes.
- Limit contact with athletes to team-related matters. Avoid one-on-one contact. Maintain an open-door policy, allowing parents and athletic directors to observe practices.
- Include parents and caregivers in team communication and announcements.
- While it's okay to talk about concerns or serious topics, keep in mind your role. Avoid sharing or asking for personal information (i.e. student or staff gossip, relationship issues or trauma history).



Building a Healthy Team Culture

- Trust athletes when they report an injury or issue related to health and safety on your team.
- Ask returning athletes and captains how they can create a culture where everyone feels a sense of belonging.
- Help your team develop positive traditions and healthy group activities that contribute to team building. These can include: group meals, community volunteering projects, fun competitions, and positive game day rituals.
- Be aware of power imbalances on the team and actively work to level the playing field. Promote equity and inclusion, and encourage open communication.
- Avoid any actions that promote division or power imbalance among athletes. For example, using terms like “rookie” or making younger players do chores.
- Talk with your team regularly about how you all can create a safe and welcoming environment as the foundation of the team’s culture.



Promoting Equity

- Advocate for girls' teams to get the same promotion (i.e. assemblies, announcements, primetime schedules) and resources (i.e. fundraisers, facilities, gear) as the boys' teams.
- Consider the intent vs. impact of rules and requirements on diverse groups of athletes (such as cost of equipment, dress code inequity, requirements to cut/change hair, etc)
- Encourage the leadership of athletes in decision making (such as hiring coaches, practice plans, team building ideas, etc.)
- Hire, promote, and advocate for a diverse coaching staff.
- Advocate for access for athletes with disabilities.
- Learn about Title IX and how you can prevent gender discrimination.

Challenging Gender Stereotypes

- Avoid terms that reinforce negative stereotypes such as 'girl push-ups,' 'run like a girl,' 'man up,' or 'girls are so dramatic.'
- Use gender-inclusive terms such as 'huddle up, team,' 'listen up everyone' or 'okay, wrestlers!'
- Nurture a supportive team culture for girls & non-binary* athletes, regardless of how they choose to dress or express themselves. The goal is for all athletes to feel welcome and included on the team.
- Showcase a variety of successful sports figures from diverse backgrounds, genders, and identities to inspire your athletes.



*non-binary = outside of the binary ("either/or") of male or female. Non-binary identities can include expressions of masculinity, femininity, both, or neither.

Supporting Survivors of Trauma

If an athlete reports that they have experienced abuse or trauma:

- Listen to them. Believe them. Thank them for telling you, and let them know you are there to support them.
- Be prepared to share community resources (i.e. hotlines, school counselors, local sexual assault programs, etc.) with athletes. Include these in team materials, and help connect athletes when they need support.
- Follow the reporting requirements for your school or organization, and state laws for mandated reporting.
- Sports can provide a regular routine and relief from stress, both of which are recommended for trauma survivors. Welcome the athlete to re-join the team when they are ready.





Know that there are likely survivors of trauma on your team, even if no report has been made.

It is especially helpful to:

- Respect their bodily autonomy and practice boundaries and consent.
- Allow breaks and rest. Share season schedules and practice plans in advance.
- Trust when athletes report an injury or other issue related to health & safety. Prioritize athlete well-being in the team environment.
- If you are a mandated reporter, it is best to mention this at the start of the season. You can offer yourself as someone they can talk to and include they should be aware of your duties to report abuse.

Resources

- **Athletes As Leaders** offers a format and script for weekly team discussions on related topics.
 - athletesasleaders.org
- **Know Your IX** is a resource to learn more about the Title IX law, and how to support survivors.
 - knowyourix.org
- **U.S. Center for Safe Sport** offers a toolkit that covers trauma informed coaching, positive team climates, and handling disclosures.
 - eptoolkit.uscenterforsafesport.org/toolkit-resources/
- **Positive Coaching Alliance** is a resource for coaches that includes free trainings and materials.
 - positivecoach.org/coaches/

