

Athletes As Leaders



Session 8: Fostering Healthy Relationships

Prep Before Session:

Make Sure You Have:

- Group agreements to refer to during “Warm Up” (if needed)
- Ball to throw during “Cool Down”
- Research local resources in the community (such as: names of the school counselors, local domestic violence and/or sexual assault programs). Display them on dry erase board or poster, or have brochures, cards, etc. Consider displaying in locker rooms also.

Review Key Messages:

- All healthy relationships require equal partnerships, communication, and boundaries.
- Everyone has the right to feel safe and be treated with respect in all relationships.
- You are responsible for your own behavior, and not others’ behavior.

Warm Up

Introduce Topic and Give Notice About Sensitive Content: (3 min)

Welcome! In the last session, we talked about promoting consent. Today’s topic is about fostering healthy relationships and preventing harmful behavior. When we talk about relationships, we mean all types of relationships, like dating, hanging out, hooking up, friendships, and even teammates. This applies to all genders and sexual orientations.

Today’s discussion will help us to recognize the difference between healthy, unhealthy, and abusive relationships. This topic is sensitive and can be difficult to discuss. There may be people in the room who have personal experience with

unhealthy or abusive relationships. I encourage those who are comfortable to please reach out after this session if you or someone you know needs help.

There are many different types of relationships. People should feel encouraged to find the best arrangement that works for them! Whether you are dating, teammates, or friends, the most fulfilling relationships are based on equality, communication and boundaries. Communicating your feelings and needs is important so that others are clear about what you want in a relationship. Respecting boundaries is critical so that everyone feels safe and comfortable.

Disagreements in relationships are normal. Even feeling angry, jealous, and sad are completely ok and normal. However, it's important to notice unhealthy behaviors, like dishonesty, bad communication, or overreacting. Open and honest conversations can help find solutions that work for everyone in the relationship.

If unhealthy behaviors continue, they could be red flags for abuse. Abuse happens when a partner or friend tries to have power and control over someone else. Abuse isn't just physical but can also be emotional and sexual. Abuse can be hard to recognize and even be mistaken for love. For example, extreme jealousy may be mistaken as a sign of one person's love for another.

We can only control our own behavior and actions. It's important for each of us to make sure that we are respecting other people's boundaries. It's not ok to use our emotions as an excuse to harm someone. Healthy relationships aren't about telling your partner or friends what to do, but telling them what you need and making sure you are listening to their needs, too. Everyone deserves to feel heard, respected, and safe. All relationships should be built on mutual trust no matter the person's identity, including gender, sexual orientation, and race.

Work Out

Discussion Questions: (7 min) [You may want to break into small groups for the "work out" discussion if you have a large group.]

? **As a close relationship develops, what can people do to make sure it's an equal partnership?**

[Possible answers: discuss consent and boundaries often; respect one another's boundaries; communicate and respect one another's needs; give each other space when needed or asked; be flexible with what activities are done together or alone; respect each other's time to spend with other friends].

❓ What are some relationship behaviors that are unhealthy or abusive?

[Possible answers: being overly jealous; going through personal belongings, like checking a partner's phone without consent; putting a partner down; name-calling; isolating a partner or friend from other friends or support systems; pressuring a partner to do something they don't want to do; sharing a partner's personal property, like photos, without consent].

❓ This one is a fill-in-the-blank question. Relationships are the most fun and fulfilling when you can _____.

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

- » Relationships should make you feel uplifted and valued as a partner, even when there is conflict. When there is a disagreement, every person should always treat their partner, friends, or teammates with respect. Everyone deserves safety, equality, and trust no matter their identity.
- » Discussing and respecting consent and boundaries is healthy. Both people should be comfortable and feel safe.
- » In all relationships, you are responsible for your actions and behaviors towards others. You are not responsible or in control of another person or their behavior.
- » Often abuse happens slowly over time. Abuse can be physical, emotional, or sexual and can happen in all forms of relationships.
- » Abuse is never ok. And there is only one person responsible—the person who is causing harm. They can, and should, get help from a professional. There are also resources for people who have experienced abuse or assault, such as school counselors, and local domestic violence and sexual assault programs.
- » **So here is a challenge for you:** If you ever hear about an abusive relationship or a sexual assault, it is important not to blame the victims or question their behavior. If you feel safe to do so, you can try to support a friend (if they are being abused or abusing someone). You can support them in getting help.
- » **As student leaders and athletes,** it is important to treat others with respect, promote healthy relationships, and seek support if you are ever concerned about anyone who is in an unsafe situation.

Cool Down

Team Talk: (8 min)

Now it is time for you to lead 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.

This week we are going to discuss how you can promote healthy relationships and support someone in an unhealthy relationship:

? **For this first question, I would love to hear lots of answers! Fill in the blank, with one word or short phrase. In relationships, everyone deserves _____.**

[Possible answers: to feel safe; to feel trusted; respect; to not feel pressured; support; honesty; to feel equal].

? **What could you do to help a friend who is being treated badly or who is being abused in a relationship?**

? **What could you do to help a friend who is treating someone else badly or abusing their partner?**

[Refer/remind participants about the list of community resources and supports. If time permits, ask the group if they know of other resources to share.]

Thank you for all of your participation and sharing. The group has a good understanding about healthy & unhealthy relationships, and I really appreciate your sensitivity to the topic. It's time to break for the day (or get to practice).

Close the Circle with a Team Cheer.