

Athletes As Leaders



Session 9: Building Community

Prep before session:

Make sure you have:

- Group agreements to refer to during “Warm Up” (only if needed)
- Ball to throw during “Cool Down”

Review key messages:

- A safe & welcoming community benefits everyone.
- When you see harm, you can speak up or offer support. When you cause harm, you can apologize and commit to doing better.
- As a leader you can demonstrate what it means to treat people with empathy, care and concern.

Warm Up

Introduce topic: (3 min)

Welcome! Last session we talked about healthy relationships. Today we are going to talk about how we can create a community of inclusion and connection.

Communities whose members are strongly connected have decreased rates of sexual violence, youth violence and relationship violence. This season we have discussed how to build the kind of community that we all want to be a part of. This may sound like a big task, but the biggest change can happen when we work together.

Something that you can practice is suspending immediate judgment and replacing it with empathy. For example, imagine seeing someone with clothing or hair that is different than what you would wear. Our immediate thoughts may be

judgment about the way the person looks, their identities, or that they want to attract unnecessary attention. Try to identify these thoughts and replace them; maybe by admiring their uniqueness or self-expression.

Another example is judging people's behavior. For example, you see someone acting in a manner that you are not used to seeing or expressing a lot of emotion. It can be easy to label it in a negative way. Instead, we can replace these judgments with care for the person's wellbeing. You can wonder, "I hope that they're ok" or "I wonder what is going on for them." If you feel safe to do so, you could ask if they are ok or if they need help.

This change in mindset could improve our community by inviting connection instead of pushing away 'otherness.' As leaders, we can show empathy and see everyone as a part of our community. We can lead by treating people with care and concern first.

Another way we can strengthen our community is by holding ourselves and our community members accountable when harm occurs. It is so important to apologize when we harm others. And to speak up when you see someone hurt. This community accountability can reduce and prevent violence. As we discuss this topic today, keep in mind the ways that you can replace judgment with empathy instead. And how accountability makes our community better.

Work Out

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

❓ **This first question is a fill in-the-blank question and I'd love to hear from everyone. "I feel like I belong when _____."**

[Possible answers: people acknowledge me; I am complimented; people check in on me; people ask me questions; people use kind words]

❓ **What groups of people might we be excluding unintentionally at _____ High School?**

❓ **What should community leaders do when they see harm or cause harm?**

[Possible answers: Apologize when you cause harm; when someone makes a hurtful comment, ask what they meant by that, or educate them why its hurtful; check in with the person who was hurt]

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

- » Many athletes already practice showing love and support to each other. Think of the things you already do on your team, like motivating a teammate at practice, supporting a teammate when they are struggling, and doing team cheers and huddles. Think about how that sense of community can be spread to the rest of the school.
- » Building a strong and welcoming community benefits everyone. Showing empathy, kindness, care, and concern for your community members increases connectedness, and can create a network of compassion that keeps everyone safer.
- » Part of being a student athlete is being a leader at this school. You can create a sense of inclusion and belonging through your actions and words both on social media and in real life.
- » All people have the potential to cause harm. Harm includes: hurtful comments, prejudice, harassment, shaming, exclusion, and violence. We may cause harm unintentionally. Part of building a strong community is apologizing for harm that we may have caused.
- » It is our job as leaders in the community to speak up when we see harm being caused. When you hear a hurtful comment, you can ask the person what they meant by that. Or educate them why it was hurtful. People should only do this if they feel safe to do so. Sometimes it is less risky for people with privilege to speak up or intervene. This can be an opportunity to be an ally.
- » It is our responsibility to hold our community members accountable. We need to make it clear that oppression and violence are not acceptable.
- » **So here is a challenge for you:** Try to catch yourself making unfair or negative judgments. See if you can make your thoughts and interactions lead first with care and concern. If you do hurt someone, take accountability and reflect on how you can do better.
- » **As student leaders and athletes,** it is important for you to help create a culture that is more inclusive, especially for those who may feel like they do not belong. You will be contributing to a safe and welcoming environment at _____ High School.

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 to build a better community. 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.

- ❓ **What ways can our team make people feel like they belong in this community?**
- ❓ **What is the best kind of apology?**
- ❓ **What are ways we can hold our team and its members accountable when we make mistakes or harm others?**

Thank you for all of your great ideas to help to create the community we all want to see. It's inspiring to think about the change we can create when we work together. I'm really looking forward to our last session next week. It's time to break for the day (or get to practice).

Close the Circle with a Team Cheer.