

Athletes As Leaders



Session 6: Ending Rumor Spreading & Shaming

Prep Before Session

Make Sure You Have:

- Group agreements to refer to during “Warm Up” (only if needed)
- Ball to throw during “Cool Down”
- Research the local resources in the community (such as names of the school counselors and local sexual assault programs). You can write them on the board, make a poster, provide brochures, and/or display in locker rooms.

Review Key Messages:

- Every person has the right to decide if, when, with whom, and how they engage in consensual intimate/sexual behavior.
- It's not ok to spread rumors or shame people for their sexual/intimate behavior.
- It's not ok to blame people for the assault or abuse that they experience.

Warm Up

Introduce Topic: (2 min)

Welcome! Last session, we talked about unpacking society's beauty standards. Today, we are going to talk about rumor spreading and shaming. As you know, rumors and shaming can be deeply hurtful. Today we are going to talk specifically about sexual shaming and its effects. In discussing this topic, please keep in mind our group agreements so we can create a safe space for everyone, and please take care of yourself in any way you need.

Everyone has different values and expectations when it comes to sex. For example, in high school, some people may have engaged in sexual or intimate

behavior, and some people may have not. The way we talk about that has a big impact on our community.

You may remember our discussion on harmful gender stereotypes. One of those harmful messages is that people should act differently based on their gender. For example, those who identify as men are often celebrated for their sexual experiences. Meanwhile, those who identify as women are often shamed. However, people should be able to make decisions that feel best for them, and that will look different for everyone.

When we spread rumors or shame people for those decisions, it is a form of sexual harassment. For example, sexual rumors and shaming sometimes spread after people hook up after a party. Some people feel that sharing other people's information about their sexual life is exciting or ok. But it is not ok to spread information about someone else's sexual/intimate behavior. That is their business.

When we don't respect people's privacy, we often cause them harm. When you hear a rumor being spread, think about how it would feel to have your private information shared without your consent. As leaders in the community, it is our responsibility to stop the spread of sexual rumors and shaming by speaking up when we hear it happen around us.

Work Out

Discussion Questions: (8 min) [You can break into small groups for the "work out" discussion if you have a large group.]

❓ **Is this something you see happening at your school or on social media?**

❓ **What are the ways in which shaming and rumor spreading can be harmful?**

❓ **How does rumor spreading and shaming differ for certain communities, like women/girls, LGBTQ+ folks, people of color, and so on?**

[Possible answers: sexual rumors about girls can sometimes be judged or labeled more harshly than for boys; when boys are having sex it is seen as a positive thing compared to when girls are having sex; communities of color are often oversexualized or seen as sexually exotic; the LGBTQ+ community is often harshly judged for their sexual/intimate behavior; victims of sexual assault are often blamed for the harm that was caused to them by being shamed for being promiscuous/sexual/intimate].

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

- » There are unfair societal expectations about how people are supposed to be sexual/intimate or abstinent based on their gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, and so on. These can make people feel unnecessary pressure to act a certain way when it comes to sexual or intimate behavior.
- » Every person has the right to decide if, when, with whom, and how they engage in consensual intimate/sexual behavior.
- » The effects of rumor spreading and shaming can differ in certain communities. Sexual rumors about girls can sometimes be judged or labeled more harshly than for boys. When boys are having sex, it is sometimes seen as a positive thing compared to when girls are having sex. Communities of color are often oversexualized or seen as sexually exotic. The LGBTQ+ community is often harshly judged for their sexual/intimate behavior. Victims of sexual assault are often blamed for the harm that was caused to them. For example, shaming victims for being perceived as promiscuous or flirtatious.
- » Shaming people for their sexual and intimate choices pushes them away from the community. This can be especially harmful for people whose sexual/intimate choice has been taken away at any point, like victims of sexual assault, who may need the support from community the most. Shaming others only causes more harm and is not ok.
- » Everyone wants to be able to make choices that are best for them when it comes to abstinence and sexual/intimate behavior. This is more likely to happen in a community that is free of judgment and where everyone is treated equally.
- » **So here is a challenge for you:** Think about ways that you personally can help stop rumor spreading and shaming: Whether a rumor is about someone you know, or don't know. Whether it is something that may be true or untrue. It doesn't matter. It's not ok.
- » **As student athletes and leaders,** it is our responsibility to help create a community where people can make choices that are best for them. It is also critical that we support survivors of sexual assault and abuse, and never make comments that cause blame or shame.

Cool Down

Team Talk: (8 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. 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 brainstorm ways that we can help stop hurtful rumors.

- ❓ **What are some things you can do when you hear someone shaming or spreading a rumor about someone's personal life?**
- ❓ **What if sexual rumors or name-calling were being spread on social media instead of in-person. What could you do to help in this situation?**
- ❓ **What can we do to support survivors of sexual assault?**

[As the conversation wraps up, mention community resources for survivors of sexual assault.]

Thank you for all for your participation today. And for sharing your ideas on how to stop rumor spreading and to create a more supportive community. It's time to break for the day (or get to practice).

Close the Circle with a Team Cheer.