

Athletes As Leaders



Session 2: Understanding Privilege & Oppression

Prep Before Session:

Make Sure You have:

- Group agreements from Session 1 (if needed)
- Whiteboard or poster board. Save time by writing definition ahead of time on the board or poster.
- Ball to throw during “Cool Down”

Optional Video to View Before or During the Session:

- Sometimes You’re A Caterpillar (<https://youtu.be/hRiWgx4sHGg>)

Review Key Messages:

- Oppression occurs at all levels of society and causes inequality.
- Our identities impact our experiences in life.
- We need to understand our own identities and experiences, and not make assumptions about others.

Warm Up

Introduce Topic and Offer Definitions: (3 min)

Welcome! Today we are talking about privilege and oppression. This lesson is not meant to make anyone feel guilty or ashamed of having or lacking privilege. We recognize that we ALL have some privileges. And we have all faced challenges, too. We can find ways to use our privileges to challenge oppression and create a safe and inclusive environment for all people and all identities.

As a reminder, here are our group agreements we created during our first session. [Refer to the group agreements created in Session 1]. Let’s take care of each other and stick to these agreements.

Write or display these statements: **“OPPRESSION = ONE GROUP IS GIVEN MORE POWER AND ACCESS + OTHER GROUPS ARE GIVEN LESS POWER AND ACCESS.”**

 [Ask for a few examples of types of oppression. Hint: they often end in “ism.”
Possible answers: Racism, Sexism, Classism, Ableism, Ageism, Heterosexism, and so on]

Certain advantages, access to resources and power is given to people who belong to certain groups. This is called privilege. The group that is given more power often gets to make decisions, policies, and laws. When one group is given more power, many other groups have less power.

The groups with less power are often given less resources and often experience more challenges. They have less of a voice in making decisions, policies, and laws. Looking at it this way, oppressed groups are valued less in society. This leads to higher rates of discrimination and violence against them.

People experience privilege and oppression differently in our society depending on their identities, including gender, race & ethnicity, family’s level of wealth, sexual orientation, physical and cognitive abilities, age, and many other factors. Privilege and oppression occurs at all levels of society, not only in individual interactions. It happens across relationships, like within families and peer groups; throughout communities like schools, the workplace, and religious organizations; and even at the larger societal level, seen in national, state, and local laws and regulations.

Groups with privilege show up in schools as well. For example, students who grew up speaking English as their first language have books and materials written in their native language.

Facilitate Privilege Activity: (2 min)

Next, we are going to do an activity that requires a little bit of mental math. The purpose of this activity is not to blame anyone for having more privilege or for receiving more help than others, but to have an opportunity to identify both the challenges and benefits we may experience in life. For this activity, everyone will start with two points. As I read the following statements, please follow the instructions. For example, if I say, “If you have a pet animal, add one,” only the people who have pets will add one. Please keep track of your number. Because some statements may be sensitive, you will not be asked to show or tell anyone your total points at the end of this activity.

[Read the following questions]:

1. If you play a sport, add one.
2. If English is your first language, add one.
3. If you ever felt unsafe walking alone at night, subtract one.
4. If you feel that your identity, including race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity, is accurately represented in the media, add one.
5. If you have visible or invisible disabilities, subtract one.

Debrief the Activity: (1 min)

Some folks may end up with less points than others and may experience more challenges because of their various identities. That doesn't mean those with more points have easy lives, it just means their lives aren't made harder because of their identity. It also doesn't mean that those who have less points will certainly experience overwhelming struggles throughout their life. Keep in mind that this activity does not represent all identities.

Everyone has many identities. Sometimes a person's identities are obvious or visible. Sometimes they are not. For instance, you can't necessarily tell a person's sexual orientation or whether they have a disability just by looking at them.

You don't know what another person is experiencing, unless they tell you. So it's important not to assume you know what they are going through. Our visible and unseen identities impact how we experience different issues. It's important for us all to become more self-aware of how our identities benefit us or present us with challenges. It can begin to help us understand how other people may experience privilege or challenges as well. As we come to understand privilege and oppression, we can begin to create safer communities.

Facilitator Notes

For the "Work Out" discussion next, you can break into small groups if you have a large group. This will allow more people to participate. Use different ways to split up the groups each session, so different people can interact. For example, assign groups by birthday month, favorite season, favorite flavor (salty, spicy, sweet, sour), number of siblings, and so on.

Work Out

Discussion Questions: (6 min)

❓ **Based on the activity, in what ways have you experienced privilege? It is your choice what or how much you want to share.**

❓ **Why is it sometimes difficult for people to see their own privilege?**
[Possible answers: their way of life is “normal” to them; most people look like them; they are in the majority; they don’t know it any other way; they have their own struggles, so it’s hard to see when they have been privileged too].

❓ **Why is it sometimes difficult to see the oppression that other groups experience?**
[Possible answers: they don’t take the time to listen or observe; they are not that close with other people who are oppressed; it’s not personally affecting them; they blame challenges on the individual, rather than larger patterns].

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

- » Oppression shows up in patterns in society, not just individual interactions. Oppression leads to inequality.
- » When a person is part of a group with less power, it is because institutions, laws, and regulations give privileges to some groups over others, not because there is anything “wrong” with the person.
- » It is essential to be aware of your privileges so you can make space for other voices to be heard and advocate for fairness.
- » It is important to not make assumptions of other people’s identities and experiences.
- » Follow the lead of people who are most affected by particular issues. For example, if you want to help make the school more accessible and inclusive to people with disabilities, start by listening to people with disabilities.
- » It’s especially important when you have privilege to challenge things that are unfair or hurting others, even if it hasn’t personally affected you.
- » **So here is a challenge for you...** Think about how you may be privileged or oppressed. Listen to people who are left out, harmed, or discriminated against, so you can understand an issue. Educate yourself about different forms of oppression.

- » **As student-athletes and leaders...** it is important to speak out against unfairness, discrimination, and oppression and to work toward justice and fairness for all people.

Cool Down

Team Talk: (6 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 so you can see and hear each other. 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 interacting with people on your team, at school, on social media, or in the community. We hope they will become the new team norms that will help you take action as leaders in the community.

We are going to pass the ball so we can focus on the person who is talking. Only the person who has the ball should be talking. If you are willing to share next, please show the previous speaker you are ready for them to pass you the ball!

This week we are going to brainstorm ways that we can challenge oppression:

? **Please fill in the blank. I would like to hear a lot of voices on this one. At [Name of High School], our community should be _____.**

[Possible answers: "inclusive," "respectful," "fair," "open-minded," "non-judgmental"]

? **What can you do if you see an issue at school where a group of people is being treated unfairly or people are being targeted?**

[Possible issues: low-income students not having access to proper equipment to participate in sports; tracking systems that leave out students of color in advanced classes; or graffiti at school with hate speech. Possible answers: talk to your school counselor, teachers, and/or principal; get together a group of students to write a letter, sign a petition, or make signs; listen to the students experiencing the issue for how you can help advocate for change.]

? **What does it look like for you to be a supporter (or an ally) for people who are experiencing challenges or obstacles?**

Thank you for all of your participation and sharing. I know this is a big topic and I appreciate you bringing your open minds together to discuss a complicated issue. It's time to break for the day (or get to practice).

Close the Circle with a Team Cheer.

Facilitator Notes

You can say "Athletes As Leaders!" or a powerful word or phrase that relates to the Team Talk. You could also do any team cheer that the team normally uses to end huddles. If this is the beginning of the season, it can be a great time to have team captains or veterans teach team cheers.