

## Promoting Safer and Gender Equitable Sports Cultures

Time Required – 3 hrs (over 3 sessions)

### Objectives:

- To help coaches and athletes recognize their full potential as role models on and off the field.
- To create a safe space for conversations regarding ending violence against women and girls and the role athletes can have in these situations.

### Materials

- 8 poster boards
- One roll of tape
- Printout of all three scenarios and discussions questions for Activity 3.

### Facilitator's Notes:

A coach is a mentor, friend, teacher, parental figure and leader of their team. Coaching begins from your first conversation, through every practice and after every game — the time you spend with your players is laying the groundwork for the foundation of your team's culture. Coaching isn't only about the X's and O's, but is about you growing as a leader and, in turn, helping your team develop into leaders in their communities.

Coaching starts with you, and learning to leave your biases and ego at the door. Humility and inclusivity will allow you to be a better and more supportive coach for your players. The ability to learn from your fellow coaches and your players' life experiences and perspectives will allow you to grow and develop as a leader of athletes.

Being a leader means leading by example for other men, but also listening to guidance and to the experiences of others. Hearing women's stories and experiences makes you a stronger male ally who can, in turn, inspire other men and boys to do the same.

A coach can play a big role in the development of a young person. Constant consideration to the incredible impact one has as a coach is vital to the continued success of a team and the continued development of a positive locker room culture. The coach of every team sets the tone for the future of their team, and it's this tone that starts with you.

"... I never heard him once talk about winning. You play hard because your teammates are like a family. You owe that to your teammates. He always thought the scoreboard would take care of itself."

- Wade Phillips about his father Bum Phillips.



### Activity 1: Promote Safe Spaces (Coaches Only)

1. If you want your team to be like a family, every member must feel safe and comfortable to share who they are and what they feel and believe. Each player must also be accountable to themselves, their fellow teammates and their coaches. The first day of practice can be all about creating this safe space and inclusive culture. Have all coaches on your staff, including you, participate in Activity 2: Creating a safe space and have them share their thoughts with each other.
2. Write down and map out all the destinations you want your team to reach.
  - Destinations can be: winning a championship; not finishing last; finishing as a top defence; improving a skill set, etc.
  - Identify roles for every player on your team. Each player must feel that their role on your team is as important as the next player. When players play, they know they are a critical cog, they want to do more for their team and step up for their 'family.'

### Activity 2: Team Safe Spaces (Whole Team)

1. Begin by placing four poster boards on every wall of your convening space (locker room, gym, staging area, etc). Every wall will have a title. Poster board titles include:
  - **I am afraid of**
  - **I want to achieve**
  - **I want us to achieve**
  - **I'm not comfortable with**
2. Allow each player to write anonymously on each board. Explain that they may write a sport related comment on only one of the boards, the rest must not be related to anything on the field.
  - Focusing only on the sport they play allows the team to hide behind the game and not recognize that many of their thoughts outside the game affect their behavior within it.
3. After each player is done, gather the entire team and read out only your own contribution.
  - By opening up in front of your players, you will allow them to begin to feel comfortable both with you and within the space.
4. Once you are done, allow only volunteers to share. If no volunteer arises, continue on to the next activity. Hang all four boards somewhere prominent within your convening space and tell all players that at the beginning and end of every practice, meeting or game (throughout the season) they will be able to volunteer and share any of their statements from the boards.
  - This exercise highlights how vulnerability and honesty creates a safe space which in turn creates a family dynamic amongst players and coaches. Note that all their coaches had gone through the exercise and that their boards will also be on display all season.



### Activity 3: Role Models (Players Only)

1. Many players don't see themselves as role models. Many believe they are just athletes whose behavior, language and beliefs are their own and that no one pays attention to them. This exercise looks to have your players begin to understand that, as athletes, they are seen and believed to be role models, whether they want to be or not.

Consider the following scenarios:

- **Scenario 1: Teammate calls another teammate a “pussy”**
- **Scenario 2: Teammate is seen catcalling a woman and harassing her in public.**
- **Scenario 3: Teammate is accused of physically assaulting their partner.**

2. Break the team up into three groups. Within the three groups, smaller teams shall be selected to act out each scenario, with every player taking part in one of the re-enactments.

After each re-enactment, players not involved in the re-enactment must write down three points about how the scenario makes them feel or what it makes them think. Once all players have an opportunity to perform and reflect, bring back all players for a larger group discussion.

3. Scenario 1: Teammate tells another teammate to “stop being a girl ... man-up!”
  - Facilitate a discussion regarding the use of language and its negative affect on teammates, fans, friends, family and partners.
  - How did the players feel when they heard these terms? How do they think their teammates felt? How would their friends, family or partners feel if they used this language with them?
  - Do they feel these words are negative or motivational? Discuss the difference between negative and toxic language and motivational and inspiring terminology. Discuss how using language that effeminizes men and boys plays into the stereotypes of how men and women should act and equates female traits or characteristics as negative or lesser than.
4. Scenario 2: Teammate is seen catcalling a woman and harassing her in public.
  - Facilitate a discussion explaining that taunting women and girls creates a toxic, unsafe environment where women and girls feels excluded and disrespected.
  - Discuss how a person may feel when a stranger yells comments, even those seen as compliments can lead to discomfort or even fear.
  - Discuss the difference between a compliment and harassment and the appropriate way and time to approach another person.
  - Discuss how the safe space created in a sports facility doesn't end when you leave, and that respecting one another's space is a key element of the safe space, which in the outside community translates into respecting all other people's space, privacy and sense of self.



5. Scenario 3: Teammate is accused of physically assaulting their partner.

- Facilitate a discussion regarding the use of physical force against another person and the debilitating affects it has on the individual experiencing the assault, family, friends and partners.
- How do the players think the victim feels in this scenario? How would the players feel if this happened to them?
- Important that players know and understand that any violence against women and girls is unacceptable and can lead to criminal charges. Reiterate the importance of respecting women in all spaces.
- Discuss other forms of violence such as emotional, sexual, harassment, etc, and help players understand the impact on the team, the sponsoring institution or organization, funders, sponsors, and the wider sports community.
- Address the notion that even if the players don't want to be role models, other students may see players in that light and their behavior reflects both on themselves as individuals, but also on their teams and families.

### Conclusion

In creating a safe space for honest and open conversation, coaches and players can begin to see the incredible impact they can have in conversations happening in their communities. These conversations allow for player growth as leaders and allies to those who experience violence in its various formats.

It also opens the door to discuss individual and team leadership in regards to speaking up against violence against women and supporting women who have experienced violence. As a coach, consider the inspiring role you can play, and the different ways in which you, your team, and your athletes can play in promoting gender equality and ending violence against women.

Visit [whiteribbon.ca](http://whiteribbon.ca) and [itstartswithyou.ca](http://itstartswithyou.ca) for additional resources such as posters, digital stories, e-learning modules, and other social marketing tools to help you address gender equality and violence against women in the community.

