Coaching Boys INTO MEN®

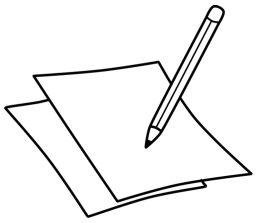
Advanced Coaches Clinic

Survivor-Centered Approaches to Discussing Sexual Assault

Time: 1 hour and 55 minutes

Goals:

1. **Explain and de-stigmatize the realities and impacts of gender-based violence, survivorship, and power.**
2. **Develop survivor-centric and trauma-informed expectations for yourself and your athletes to build healthy team cultures.**
3. **Understand the best practices for responding to incidences of sexual violence in any audience.**



Worksheets Included:

1. Facts About Survivor Realities
2. Best Practices for Handling Disclosure
3. Media Narratives on Sexual Assault:
4. Do's and Don'ts of Shaping Discussions About Sexual Violence
5. Practicing Responding in Your Community:

DISCLAIMER FOR TRAINERS

Conversations about sexual violence are never easy. Please remember that there may be moments of tension, defensiveness, and frustration during this training, and that added patience and preparation for how to respond and de-escalate may be useful. Where we start the conversation isn't where we will end the conversation. We're having these conversations in the context of various attitudes about survivors and sexual violence. Take care of yourself during and after this training, as your energy and commitment to violence prevention are critical and appreciated.

For training demos and additional guidance on delivering Advanced Coaches Clinic materials, check out our Learning Collaborative recordings at:

https://www.coachescorner.org/healthy-relationships-advocates/#collab

onelove

FUTURES WITHOUT VIOLENCE®

Acknowledgments:

FUTURES extends special appreciation to the **One Love Foundation** who provided critical support in writing, revising, and sharing content. More One Love content can be found at JoinOneLove.org.

Section 1 Warm Up and Reflection

15 minutes

DIRECTIONS: Read the introduction to coaches.
Spend 5 minutes on the warm up question and allow coaches to respond out loud in a circle.
Then, spend 5 minutes covering the debrief talking points.

Introduction to Section 1: Warm Up and Reflection

We're starting from the place where we're all here to prevent dating abuse - we're here to be leaders, mentors, and allies in preventing violence and building healthy relationships. Understanding how to best respond to and communicate about instances of abuse, harassment, and assault is a critical component of this.

We want to ground this discussion in the values we promote with our athletes, like respect, compassion, and leadership through listening. Conversations about violence are difficult and very necessary, so remember when you are speaking that our discussion today may impact some people in the room more heavily than others.

Warm Up Question:

What stories or assumptions about sexual violence are out there? What are the conversations like in your community? You could pick up on these conversations from:

- Discussions with loved ones / within your community
- Entertainment and media (TV, books, social media)
- Local / national news stories (laws and policies, high-profile cases)

Debrief Talking Points

- Conversations about sexual violence are *all around us*, and whether we know it or not, there are ALWAYS survivors of trauma in the room.
- In order to be a role model for your team and community, you need to be considerate and intentional about how you communicate about gender-based violence (sexual violence, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking).
- Identifying the key values and beliefs that we want to guide how we respond to disclosures, allegations, and general conversation about instances of abuse in our communities will provide a foundation for thoughtful and compassionate discourse about gender-based violence.
- In this session we will use scenarios and role plays to discuss key values, try on best practices, and consider obstacles to responding with care, humility, and confidence.

Section 2 Respecting Survivors and Understanding Victim Blaming

15 minutes

DIRECTIONS: Read the introduction with coaches and the definition of victim blaming. Then, spend 3 minutes having coaches brainstorm out loud examples of victim-blaming language and use the debrief talking points to close. Follow up that exercise by reading Coach Handout Page 1 to provide statistics and facts about the realities that survivors face.

Introduction to Section 2: Respecting Survivors and Understanding Victim Blaming

A foundation for healthy and constructive conversations about gender-based violence is to make sure that our messages are "survivor-centered," or prioritizing the rights, needs, and wishes of the survivor. Often when cases of gender-based violence gather a lot of public attention (#MeToo, Brett Kavanaugh, Brock Turner), the experiences and perspectives of survivors are not only ignored, but attacked. There are many ways in which victims of sexual assault or harassment – whether women, men, or non-binary individuals – are vilified, blamed, characterized as untruthful, and in turn, have their trauma minimized or denied altogether. Attitudes and language that blames the victim make coming forward and seeking justice harder. As coaches, we need to be able to spot victim-blaming language and attitudes in order to create a culture where harm can be talked about and repaired constructively.

Victim Blaming: Holding a victim accountable for a crime that was perpetrated against them.

Discussion Question:

What are some examples of language and attitudes that blame victims for crimes perpetrated against them?

Debrief Talking Points

When we hear about cases of sexual violence in the news or in our communities, we might subconsciously judge the survivor, and think if we were in their shoes, we would have done things differently. Understanding the realities of survivors can combat the influence of personal bias or victim blaming in our conversations.

Facts About Survivor Realities:

1 **Survivors of abuse face numerous barriers to receiving fair treatment & justice through systems.**

Within the criminal justice system, the vast majority of perpetrators of sexual assault will not go to jail or prison. Outside of the criminal justice system, survivors can face social and economic pressure that may discourage them from reporting. An employee experiencing harassment at a workplace may never report out of fear that they might be fired. Survivors within the same friend group as the person who harmed them might fear losing their social network if they come forward.

2 **Only 2% to 10% of sexual assault claims are found to be false.[1]**

While this figure is very low, it still does not paint the entire picture. When you factor in the overwhelming majority of survivors who do not formally report their assault, the rate of false claims plummets.

3 **Approximately 1 in 3 adolescent girls in the United States is a victim of physical, emotional, or verbal abuse from a dating partner.[2]**

There are very likely members of your team who are perpetrating this harm, and you are a key to breaking that pattern and building positive relationship attitudes and habits.

4 **More than 50% of sexual assaults experienced by women, including rape, are committed by her romantic partner. And more than 40% of sexual assaults experienced by women are committed by an acquaintance.[3]**

Women and girls can be put in the most danger by the people they know, like, or love. These close social relationships can complicate the desire for women to report this violence to anyone.

5 **Studies have found that men who grew up bullying their classmates are four times as likely to have engaged in violence against a female partner within the past year than men who did not grow up bullying.[4]**

Bullying is a huge challenge that our youth face. Recognizing that violent behaviors start at a very young age is critical to interrupting cycles of violence and preventing gender-based violence later in life.

1- National Sexual Violence Resource Center
2- National Council on Crime and Delinquency
3- National Sexual Violence Resource Center
4- Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine

Section 3 Handling Disclosures

10 minutes

DIRECTIONS: Read the following background with coaches. Then, use Coach Handout Page 2 for coaches to alternate reading best practices for handling disclosures.

MAKE SURE TO NOTE MANDATORY REPORTING OBLIGATIONS THAT COACHES HAVE. THIS TRAINING DOES NOT COVER LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES WITHIN A SCHOOL COMMUNITY. INSTEAD IT OFFERS LANGUAGED THAT CAN BE USED TO SUPPORT ANY SURVIVOR IN YOUR LIFE.

Introduction to Section 3: Handling Disclosures

Knowing how to support a survivor when they disclose their experience to you is a fundamental step towards being able to confidently lead conversations about gender-based violence. In order to advocate for policies and practices that take into account what survivors experience, you must have some basic skills to use if someone in your life chooses to disclose to you. Being a trusted role model for young athletes comes with responsibility. Practicing what to say when a survivor discloses will make future conversations about gender-based violence (remembering that survivors are always in the room) more comfortable and constructive.

Studies have shown the adverse effects that negative reactions to disclosures have on survivors. When survivors disclose to professionals and receive a negative reaction, survivors question the effectiveness of disclosing to anyone else. When survivors disclose to family and friends and receive negative reactions, feelings of self-blame are reinforced. Fear of negative reactions is one of the many reasons survivors might not come forward with their stories right away or ever. To support the survivors who share their experiences with us, there are many things we can keep in mind:

Best Practices for Handling Disclosures:

Listen to understand, not just respond
Be an active listener, show that you're listening with your eye contact, your body language, and by only asking questions if you need clarification about something they have already stated, not to probe for details they haven't shared.

Mirror language
If a survivor says "I was really scared when X and I were hooking up, I thought I had communicated to them that it wasn't something I wanted to do," make sure to keep your response in the same terms that they use (I'm sorry X made you feel uncomfortable in that moment). Don't name something that they have not named first (like, "It sounds like you were raped").

Offer resources
There are experts who are trained to respond to survivors in your community. Being connected with your local domestic violence and sexual assault programs, as well as the counselor in your school, will give you a sense of the available resources that you could offer to any survivor in your life. You can also offer to look online for resources alongside the survivor if that is a step they are interested in.

Allow for silence
Get comfortable with silence, don't try to fill it. You aren't expected to have all the answers, think of yourself as a compassionate witness.

Avoid hyper-optimism and "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger"-isms
Don't look for silver-linings or try to turn their trauma into a hurdle for them to overcome. Adding pressure to move on or become stronger when faced with harm or violence puts even more weight on the survivor's shoulders.

Above all, BELIEVE THEM
This person trusted you and honoring that trust is important. Your response to this survivor could have a serious impact on the rest of their healing process. Take that seriously and be explicit that you hear and believe what they are sharing.

Section 4 Leading Discussions on Sexual Assault

25 minutes

DIRECTIONS: Read the introduction. Then, for the next 10 minutes, each coach should use Page 3 of the Coach Handout to underline any victim blaming language that they identify and circle the survivor centered language that they identify. Then, come back together as a larger group and debrief using the debrief questions.

Introduction to Section 4: Leading Discussions on Sexual Assault

Discussions and narratives about sexual violence on the national scale are first filtered through the lens of the media. When the message of the media is colored by victim blaming attitudes, the audience of that media can take on and reproduce those attitudes and harm others. Coaches, like the media, have a consistent and faithful platform in their team and school community. The language that coaches use must be thoughtful and survivor-centered - which does not have to include any punitive language about the person who used violence.

Coach Handout - Page 3

Media Narratives on Sexual Assault:

1. "What happens, in the United States in particular, many high profile people are targeted relentlessly by people who want to trash and smear them with a public display of allegations and smear and so on, who often turn out to be talking complete nonsense and are doing it as a scam."

2. "It would seem that someone is lying, but we likely won't ever find out who that might be. We do know, however, that John Doe was not charged with sexual battery or other crimes for the unknown 1994 incident or for the disputed '96 incident. Likewise, no records have surfaced indicating that he was ever investigated by law enforcement for either incident. While star college athletes have been known to receive favorable treatment by law enforcement, that alone does not prove Doe's guilt."

3. "For someone like me, it's just incumbent upon you to set the example every single day so that the people that were talked about (in those emails)… don't need to feel that way, they shouldn't feel that way. Hopefully, all of us can learn from this that it's about bringing people together… so that people can become the people that they dream about."

4. "And if these allegations need to be re-examined which, in my understanding, they've been through court, then I'm a big believer in the justice system and setting legal precedents. If the case needs to be reopened, I am absolutely, wholeheartedly in support of that. Because I think that there's one thing about—social media is fantastic about raising awareness about issues, but it's not the judge and jury."

5. "Business as usual isn't our concern right now. Our entire league has a great deal of healing to do, and our players deserve so much better. We have made this decision in collaboration with our players association and this pause will be the first step as we collectively work to transform the culture of this league, something that is long overdue."

Debrief Questions:

1. ***After reading those examples, what victim-blaming language did you identify? What feelings do you think motivated that language?***
2. ***Were there any examples of survivor-centered language? What feelings do you think motivated that language?***
3. ***What impact do you think these quotes could have on different groups of people?***

Section 5 Do's and Don'ts of Shaping Discussions About Sexual Violence

15 minutes

DIRECTIONS: Read the introduction. Then, *in random order*, read the list of Do's and Don'ts to coaches and ask them to guess whether the behavior is a "do" or "don't" and how they arrived at their answer.

Introduction to Section 5: Do's and Don'ts of Shaping Discussions About Sexual Violence

This training won't provide a set of cookie-cutter actions to take. However it will provide some key practices & values to carry with you. It's important to acknowledge the barriers that prevent us from responding in alignment with our values, and build the courage to respond this way nevertheless.

When speaking about sexual violence:

Coach Handout - Page 4

Don't:

- Victim blame or focus more on the impact on perpetrators.
- Lead conversation towards "who is telling the truth."
- Endorse any "boys will be boys" mentalities and believe that this behavior is inevitable.
- Ignore the whole team & those not "primarily" involved.
- Shut down conversation.
- Let people off the hook, whether they're your star athlete or not.
- Focus on punishment or "protecting" image/team
- Be performative; i.e. wearing a ribbon during the next game, but not speaking about it again.

Do:

- Keep in mind that survivors are always present.
- Consider the key CBIM messages you want to send through your language and actions with: Team; Parents; Admin; Other Coaches.
- Intervene when hearing language that perpetuates myths around sexual assault - this is supporting survivors too.
- Hold our athletes to high standards. Sexual violence is preventable, and it is realistic to expect your athletes to lead with respect in their communities.
- Ask how this is impacting your team/individuals. Your team will follow your lead when you commit to creating the space for these conversations.
- Meet athletes where they are at in their reactions. Be open to other perspectives and adhere to CBIM values.
- Create preventative team culture everyday, not just in response to an incident.
- Focus on healthy relationships, safety, and accountability.

Section 6 Activity: Survivor-Centered Language in Practice

30 minutes

DIRECTIONS: For the first 15 minutes, have the coaches partner up. Each coach should read the first scenario, write down how they would respond, and then read their response out loud to their partner. Then repeat the process for the rest of the scenarios. Emphasize that coaches should reflect on putting their responses into language and behavior that feels authentic to them. For the final 15 minutes, have coaches share some of the responses they came up with to the entire group, and work with coaches to construct best responses.

Coach Handout - Page 5

Practicing Responding in Your Community:

SCENARIO 1: After a former coach is accused of sexual misconduct, you have a discussion with the current athletes on your team. An assistant coach says:
"It's not appropriate for you to be bringing this up in front of the whole team. It distracts them from our practices and it just needs to be handled between the two students."

SCENARIO 2: A survivor comes forward with allegations about an athlete on your team. You get a phone call from the athlete's parent where they say:
"Do you think this will hurt their chances of getting a college scholarship? X has worked so hard their whole life for one mistake to ruin their future."

SCENARIO 3: Students at your school are protesting the administration's response to claims of sexual misconduct. A school administrator says:
"Refrain from speaking about this incident publicly or cancelling any games. We don't want to make it seem like our whole school has this problem."

SCENARIO 4: Upon multiple survivors coming forward publicly and sharing experiences of a beloved NFL star sexually assaulting them, an athlete on your team says:
"Why wouldn't they have come forward years ago? They just made it up after he became famous for attention or money."

Section 7 Conclusion

5 minutes

DIRECTIONS: Read the conclusion with coaches.

Conclusion

The attitudes and behaviors of the athletes on your team have a huge impact on the culture within your school and community. As their coach, that impact starts with you. Gender-based violence occurs everywhere, and the people you know and love are impacted by it whether you know it or not. Speaking thoughtfully and intentionally about experiences of sexual violence shows your community that you take the value of respect seriously, and that no one, no matter who they are, gets a free pass to be disrespectful or harmful in their relationships.

The work of supporting survivors cannot only be done after an incident of sexual violence occurs. Building preventative team cultures, interrupting victim-blaming, and using survivor-centered approaches with your team will elevate the presence of safety and wellness in your community so the athletes on your team and the young people in your community can thrive.

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