

We all can take steps to help make our communities safer, but sometimes we don't know how. As an athletic leader, you have a unique opportunity to equip the athletes you know with the skills and tools to create safer communities. This fact sheet provides some tips and information on how to be an ally in sexual violence prevention.

What is sexual violence?

Sexual violence exists on a spectrum. It ranges from inappropriate comments to sexual harassment to sexual assault. Any form of sexual violence has a basis in imbalances of power, where the more powerful person commits harmful acts and behaviors against another person who has less power.

ATTITUDES & BELIEFS	VERBAL EXPRESSIONS	PHYSICAL EXPRESSIONS
Racism Sexism Ableism Xenophobia Homophobia Transphobia	Cat-calling Bragging Rape/Sexual Jokes	Sexual Assault Sexual Abuse Non-consensual Sexual Touching

What is prevention?

For a long time, efforts designed to tell children how to protect themselves have been thought of as "prevention." Asking children and people to protect themselves by "just saying no" or staying away from strangers and certain activities is an **ineffective form of prevention called risk reduction**. This puts responsibility on the potential victim to avoid their own sexual assault instead of holding potential perpetrators accountable for their actions. Risk reduction also ignores the realities of how sexual violence occurs.

Effective sexual violence primary prevention focuses on shifting harmful social norms that uphold power imbalances and allow sexual violence to occur. Prevention aims to change existing harmful spaces rather than asking people to navigate them, with the ultimate goal of creating safer, more equitable communities. See the chart below for a better understanding of the differences between these two strategies.

Coaches and athletes alike are in a prime role to directly help shape new and healthy social norms for the next generation.

Primary Prevention	VS.	Risk Reduction
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Places the responsibility on everyone in the community to eradicate the root causes of sexual violenceEducates on creating safe spacesAddresses multiple risk factors of sexual violence perpetrationFocuses on changing the root causes of sexual violenceChanges the social norms that allow sexual violence to happenAddresses all forms of sexual violence		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Places the responsibility on the potential victim to prevent violence against themselvesEducates on navigating through existing harmful spacesDoes not address risk factors of sexual violence perpetrationFocuses on individual acts of sexual violence, but not the root causesEducates a potential victim on how to stop an attack in progressFocuses on some forms of sexual violence

What prevents someone from committing sexual violence? What causes them to commit sexual violence?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have identified factors that may decrease (protective) or increase (risk) someone's likelihood of committing an act of sexual violence.

Protective Factors

- Use of reasoning to resolve conflict
- Empathy and concern for how one's actions affect others

Risk Factors*

- Adhering to strict, traditional gender role norms
- General tolerance of sexual violence within the community
- Association with sexually aggressive, hypermasculine peers

What Can I Do?

Luckily, sexual violence is 100% preventable! When we start early, we can instill positive social norms in young people to help create safer, more equitable spaces. Ultimately, we want to reduce the likelihood that someone may *commit* sexual violence and create a society that doesn't tolerate harmful power-based behaviors against others.

Challenge "Real men don't cry" & "You throw like a girl"

Athletes are taught that success is possible with dedication and hard work. Not at all bad on the surface! But oftentimes, "tough love" and insulting language are used to "motivate" and "discipline" athletes. Creating safer communities involves building supportive spaces where people don't demean each other or see someone as "less than" when they don't live up to socially-defined standards.

Try

- **Ask open-ended questions.** What does it say about our society's values when we tell athletes who perform poorly that their skills are comparable to a girl's or a woman's? That showing a fellow teammate support or some sort of affection is "gay"? That because of their physical ability, they should be able to defend themselves? Such comments send very clear messages – that girls and women are valued less; that being gay is a liability; that the victim of an assault is to blame for not protecting themselves. These messages perpetuate the very beliefs that contribute to violence. As a coach or captain, you have the opportunity to push back and demonstrate that these harmful beliefs are not tolerated.

Resources

Raliance Sport + Prevention Center

<https://www.raliance.org/sport-prevention-center/>

Athlete Ally

<https://www.athleteally.org/about/>

NSVRC- Youth Activists

https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/2014-01/saam_2014_becoming-an-agent-of-social-change_0.pdf

NJCASA- Partners in Prevention: Coaching Beyond the Scoreboard

<https://njcasa.org/news/partners-in-prevention-coaches-as-allies/>

"It's just locker room talk"

As athletes, there's a lot of pressure to be well-liked and have a socially-acceptable image. That image can consist of comparing our sexual partners and how many we've had. It's common for folks to brag about their sexual experiences or talk about others' experiences from time to time. The locker room is a popular place to talk about these things before or after a game or practice. Whether or not the stories are true, these conversations can be harmful because they perpetuate the toxic social expectation and stereotype that all men constantly think about and need sex. Flaunting sex as "achievements" is part of that expectation. These expectations aren't necessarily limited to heterosexual and cisgender* men and boys either; folks in the LGBTQ+ community may have similar expectations of trans men, masculine-presenting women, or non-binary people. Many men, boys, and masculine-presenting people feel pressured to live up to these standards so that they can be accepted by their peers. You can put a stop to this expectation and your team can, too.

**Cisgender means a person identifies with the sex they were assigned at birth.*

Try

- **Lead by example.** Don't participate in, encourage, or let this type of behavior slip by. Explain why these conversations could be harmful. Let your team know that the people being talked about in these stories may not want that moment being shared. It's an experience they may have trusted to be kept between only the people involved. That should be respected. The storyteller should know that their actions have consequences and can potentially cause the person they're talking about to feel self-conscious about their own reputations. Let them know that partners aren't trophies to add to their collection; they're people with feelings and have an entire life beyond the intimate moments they shared with someone else.

Sources:

CDC- Sexual Violence Risk & Protective Factors

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/riskprotectivefactors.html>

CDC- Sexual Violence Prevention

<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/sexualviolence/index.html>