



# STARTING THE CONVERSATION

## Coach Starter Kit

Videos produced by



ARTS + LABOR

Lessons and materials developed by

**RESOURCES**  
*for* **LEARNING**

# **“Starting the Conversation”**

## ***Coach Starter Kit***

Welcome to “Starting the Conversation.” The lessons and materials of this program address the growing problem of relationship violence among high school athletes and aim to help Texas students create a positive team and school culture where aggressive, abusive attitudes and behaviors in relationships do not occur. This program features vignettes, resources, conversation starters, role-playing scenarios, and personal reflections to achieve the following goals:

- Reduce relationship violence, sexual violence, sexual harassment, and online abuse/harassment by empowering students to create a culture of respect and to hold themselves and their peers accountable
- Enhance students’ empathy and perspective-taking, relationship skills, and responsible decision making

Many coaches and educators feel uncomfortable starting conversations with their athletes about relationships and intimacy. While some hesitancy is understandable, with the right tools coaches can be proactive in addressing these topics. “Starting the Conversation” gives students opportunities to develop the skills and perspectives required for healthy, satisfying relationships.

In order for adults to comfortably and effectively facilitate these discussions, this program keeps the conversation focused on general attitudes and behaviors, rather than specific examples of how individuals within the school operate. This program also avoids discussion of the technical aspects of intimacy.

Here are a few ways you can prepare yourself for these conversations and tailor the activities for your athletes:

### **1. Get to know the problem and the policies.**

- a. HB 121 mandates that all Texas school districts adopt and implement a dating violence policy. Your district has clear policies and specific definitions of sexual and relationship misconduct. Learn them to become a more confident and effective educator, coach, and advocate. Texas law requires that teachers and coaches must report suspected abuse to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Service or any local or state law enforcement agency within 48 hours. It is not your responsibility to investigate, confront the abuser, or to determine innocence or guilt.
- b. Familiarize yourself with the topic of dating violence by checking out the included resource list.

### **2. Invite an open and engaging dialogue.**

- a. Facilitate the conversation in a setting where your athletes will be comfortable being open and honest and won’t be subject to disruptions, distractions, or outside observers.
- b. Set ground rules for the discussion. Encourage respectful conversation where no students are made fun of or criticized for what they might share. Emphasize that individual statements are confidential and should not be shared with others.
- c. Create an open, reciprocal environment of guided conversation and learning. Avoid attempts to convince students to accept your own viewpoint as “truth.” Your athletes are the experts on what is happening in their own lives and among their peers, but they need

your guidance and support to understand problematic attitudes, assumptions, and behaviors. Demonstrate your willingness to learn and listen.

**3. Take a firm and consistent stance against violence, prejudice, and misogyny.**

- a. Make it clear that interpersonal violence and abuse are not only unacceptable, they are illegal and punishable by law.
- b. Look for opportunities to engage in conversations with your athletes on these topics during the lessons and throughout the sports season. If you observe your athletes catcalling, bragging about their intimate lives, or spreading rumors, don't hesitate to take action. Jump in and let them know that these behaviors are not okay and explain why.

**4. Challenge students to think beyond clichés.**

- a. Ask them to think critically about their own thinking. For example: "What are some reasons you say that? What are some examples when that might not be the case?"
- b. Ask students to consider the different perspectives of individuals. For example: "What might have motivated the men in the second video? What might have led them to behave in these ways?"

**5. Be sensitive to diverse needs. Not all students will want to engage right away.**

- a. Recognize that some students may be victims of interpersonal violence and abuse or may have witnessed traumatic events at home or elsewhere.
- b. Some students may be exploring their own sexuality and identity or may not feel comfortable discussing these issues as readily as others.

**6. Focus on attitudes and beliefs—not individuals or the technical aspects of "hooking up."**

- a. While education about the technical aspects of physical intimacy is a critical component for young people's learning, this conversation is about relationship dynamics, not the mechanics of sex or intimacy. Remind students to focus on the attitudes and beliefs around relationships, not about the physical details. By focusing on respect in relationships, you will ensure that students do not unintentionally traumatize other students.
- b. Target behaviors and attitudes, not individuals. Dialogues that target or place blame can lead to the villainizing of groups or individuals.

**7. Get help before you need it.**

- a. Talk with school administrators and counselors before "starting the conversation." That way they will be prepared to support you if questions or concerns arise as a result of the lessons.
- b. Out of your comfort zone? Has someone expressed anxiety, fear, past or current trauma, or abuse? Assure them that it is not their fault, contact the appropriate authorities if appropriate, and immediately connect them with a counselor or an administrator to address the issue.

## **Implementation**

These lessons are designed to be flexible in implementation and can be delivered by a coach during team time, a tutoring or study period, an advisory period, a physical education or athletics class period, or in team homeroom. The series can be shared at any time throughout the year; however, the beginning of the semester or season is a natural time to begin the conversation and set standards of behaviors that your athletes will live up to over the season or school year. Ideally, the lessons will be delivered over the course of a few weeks. Avoid playing all the videos and delivering all the lessons in one sitting.

## **Materials**

- Video capacity (screen, projector, and speakers)
- Printed handouts (Lessons 1 and 2)

- Pens/pencils
- Dry-erase or chalkboard for group discussion
- Dry-erase markers or chalk

More information and resources about this topic can be found in the resource list included in this program. Thank you for making the decision to “start the conversation” with your athletes!