

# STRATEGIES FOR COACHES, MENTORS & YOUTH GROUP LEADERS

**C**oaches, mentors, youth group leaders, religious leaders, employers, and anyone else who works with youth in extracurricular and out-of-school settings has a special role to play in preventing radicalization and building resilient, inclusive communities. These adults act as a liaison with parents and are often the most trusted adult allies, confidants, and advocates for young people. They are uniquely charged with helping to cultivate young people’s character, values, and moral development and are ideally situated to build positive identity and resilience to extremist propaganda and disinformation. Here are some ways how:

**Lean in** to team values. Sports teams, part-time jobs, youth groups, and other extracurricular activities are ideal places to impart values about teamwork, collaboration, trust, and perseverance. This makes them ideal settings to establish core values and make clear what kinds of behaviors and speech will not be tolerated. Remind youth that they represent you and your team/company/organization and that their behavior matters.

**Acknowledge** incidents. When hateful acts occur in the community, in the group, or on the team, make sure all students know that such incidents are unacceptable. Absolute language can be very helpful here: “This is/was completely unacceptable to me” or “I will never tolerate that kind of behavior.”

**Remind** youth that you are an advocate and an ally, and that you take your responsibility to keep them safe very seriously. Direct language is also helpful here: “I will always have your back.” “Your well-being is what I care about the most” and “I will never let this sort of thing go unaddressed.”

**Manage** expectations. You can’t promise that hate, bias, or extremism will never happen on your watch. But you can commit to improve your team, program, or setting to make sure that it is a place where all youth feel safe and that they belong. Gathering ideas from the children and youth you work with can also be helpful.

**Communicate** with parents. Assure them that you are committed not just to the basic safety of their child, but also to establishing a learning environment where everyone can thrive free of fear. Make clear what the policies are for when students or youth violate that agreement.

**Advocate** for better policies with sports league representatives, corporate offices, or other policy leaders. Create no-tolerance policies to make it clear that hate, discrimination, and bias will not be tolerated. Insist that team members, new employees, or youth in your care understand and commit to these policies, codes of conduct, and standards for behavior.

**Begin** now to make inclusivity a centerpiece of your work. Bias and injustice can influence even seemingly neutral spaces. By taking the initiative to tackle these problems before they occur, you not only reduce the chances of hate incidents later on—you are preparing youth to be leaders on these issues in their schools and communities.

