

# **Moving from a Relationship Bystander to a Relationship Upstander Workshop Guide**

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Start Strong Boston - Boston Public Health Commission  
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[www.startstrongwichita.org](http://www.startstrongwichita.org)

## Moving from a Relationship Bystander to a Relationship Upstander

### Background

*\*This workshop was developed for parents of young teens, ages 11-14, but may be appropriate for older teens as well.*

Young teens look to their parents/caregivers and other adults in their lives for guidance as they establish behavior patterns, especially around relationships. Parents/caregivers may have given advice and guidance to their children at a younger age when confronted with hurtful rumors or issues of being bullied or witnessed bullying. Adolescents are learning how to be a good friend and still do the right thing in the face of peer culture and pressures. These are experiences that can often be difficult to maneuver.

As adults, we need to advocate for young teens to take a “stand” against unhealthy and abusive relationships and support healthy relationships and behaviors. In order for teens to do this safely, they need tools to help them make informed and safe decisions. Helping teens think about when, where and how to be an ‘upstander’ will help them make those safe decisions. Parents/caregivers often express discomfort about broaching these topics with their 11- to 14-year-olds, as they don’t think their children are ready for these conversations. Some parents/caregivers say they are waiting for their children to bring up these issues.

Parents/caregivers play a critical role in providing a good example and teaching young people the importance of respectful, honest romantic relationships, how to make responsible decisions regarding relationships and how to support friends and deal with conflicts. Even when parents/caregivers think their children are not listening to or watching them, they often are. Part of our challenge is to help parents/caregivers overcome their tendency to wait for children to initiate the conversation and help parents/caregivers find the right language to have proactive conversations about healthy relationships, creating a comfort level among parents/caregivers so that these conversations become easier to have. The following parent/caregiver education session is intended as an in-person education workshop delivered by a trusted, informed community spokesperson. This may be school personnel such as teachers or guidance counselors; it may be a health professional or a staff member in a community organization. The credibility of the educator is important to parents/caregivers as they look for knowledge about adolescent development and parenting skills as well as youth social networking practices.

This workshop may be presented as part of a series, and is particularly appropriate following other workshops which address healthy relationships and discussions about bullying, negative peer pressure, harassment, rumors, racial slurs, sexting/cyberbullying, fears about dating and teen pregnancy, etc. The goal of the workshop is to help parents/caregivers understand the importance of discussing romantic relationships and offer practical guidance for how to encourage their young teens to support and promote healthy relationships among their own peer groups.

## **Workshop Guide for Moving from a Relationship Bystander to a Relationship Upstander**

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The session includes three sections, each corresponding to one of the learning objectives. The first section and exercise introduces parents/caregivers to the concept of an ‘upstander’ and why it’s important for their children to be healthy relationship ‘upstanders’. Section two prepares parents/caregivers as they make plans to talk to their child about how to take a stand safely. Section three covers material on how to encourage parents/caregivers to discuss online activities and use technology and social networks in a responsible and safe way. It is important to include all three elements in your parent/caregiver education session, but we have also made suggestions within on how to present a shorter version. Also attached are handouts and an evaluation form that can be used for participant feedback.

## WORKSHOP GUIDE

This 1 hour and 20 minute parent/caregiver education session offers information about the background, barriers and opportunities for parents/caregivers in encouraging their children to be “upstanders” around the issue of teen dating violence prevention and healthy relationship promotion. Some parents/caregivers join the session with advanced knowledge about being an upstander; others will have less experience. The session leader may want to assess participant experience prior to beginning the session and tailor the content accordingly.

### Objectives:

- Increase parent/caregiver understanding of what an upstander is and why it is important for their children to be healthy relationship upstanders.
- Increase a parent’s comfort and skill in talking to their young teen about taking a “stand” and being an upstander both online and offline.
- Increase a parent’s intention to model “upstanding” behavior for their young teen.

### Materials:

- Handout A
- Post-it notes
- Markers
- Chart paper

While parents/caregivers are waiting for workshop to begin, pass out **Handout A** which gives a short background on the context of delivering this workshop. The materials describe why we are covering this material and introduce parents/caregivers to teen dating violence prevention and promoting health teen relationships.

### I. ICEBREAKER: (10 min.)

- Welcome parents/caregivers and thank them for coming. Tell them that the next hour or so will be an opportunity for them to learn and practice new skills to help their young teens engage in becoming upstanders around the issue of teen dating violence prevention and healthy relationship promotion.
- Ask participants to turn to the person next to them and introduce themselves. Instruct them to ask the person next to them to complete the following statement: “One issue, person, or cause that I’m proud that I’ve stood up for is...” It can be an issue, person or cause.
- After three minutes, ask if there are any participants who would be willing to share how they answered the question.

### II. INTRODUCTION: STANDING BY VS. STANDING UP (15 min.)

Explain to participants that while most people may understand what a bystander is, it is less common that people know what an upstander is. Tell them that one of the main objectives of today is to better understand what it means for them, and their young teen, to be a healthy relationship upstander.

## Directions

- Put two pieces of chart paper on the wall. One of the pieces of chart paper should have the phrase “A bystander is someone who…” written in the center of it. The second piece of chart paper should have the phrase “An upstander is someone who…” written on it.
- Pass out 2-4 post-it notes to each participant.
- Instruct participants to write on a post-it how they would finish each of these sentences. They may write multiple sentence finishers on each post-it and should be encouraged to write more than one sentence finisher.
- Once participants have completed both of their sentence finishers they may come up and stick them on the appropriate piece of poster board.
- Read a sampling of the responses that were posted. Make sure to note patterns, themes and if there is a general consensus.
- Explain that while “bystander” often implies someone or a group of people watching on as an individual is harassed, bullied, or made fun of, being an “upstander” implies doing something active to express their displeasure or express their support or come to the assistance of a victim. Being an active upstander can be as simple as not repeating a rumor or gossip about someone, or in the case of technology use, it may mean the simple act of NOT passing on an embarrassing picture electronically and expressing disapproval of others’ actions.
- Share the definition of upstander created by the organization “Facing History In Ourselves”  
***Upstander:** An individual, group, or institution that chooses to take a positive stand and act on behalf of themselves and others –Facing History In Ourselves*

## III. FOCUS ACTIVITIES:

### A. Upstander Values Voting: (15 min.)

Being an upstander is not always easy and can sometimes be risky. This activity will help participants think about their own comfort with being an upstander and their comfort with their teens being healthy relationship upstanders. Before starting this activity make sure that you have placed the “More Likely to Take Action” and “Less Likely to Take Action” signs at opposite ends of the room and that there is room between the two signs for participants to form a line.

#### Materials:

- “More Likely to Take Action” and “Less Likely to Take Action” signs and tape

#### Directions:

- Tell participants that they will be getting up and moving around for this next activity.
- Make sure that the signs are posted and that there is an area clear of chairs and tables for participants to stand.
- Point out the “More Likely to Take Action” and “Less Likely to Take Action” signs at opposite ends of the room. Tell participants that you are going to read a series of statements and you

would like them to stand at a place on the line that best represents how they feel about each statement.

- Read the following statements. After each statement you may ask some of the debrief questions to dig deeper into why participants chose to stand where they are standing.

**“You see two older teens making fun of an elementary school student who is crying”**

Possible Questions: Who would you approach first, the child or the teens? What strategies could you use? Describe the conditions that affect your decisions to take action or not.

**“You see someone breaking into a car out of your living room window”**

Possible Questions: Should a resident feel responsible if the community isn't as safe as it could be? What are some ways to get residents to feel ownership and responsibility for their community? Describe the conditions that affect your decisions to take action or not.

**“A couple is sitting on a bench and one of them is crying softly”**

Possible Questions: When does something become ‘our business’? How do we tell if there is a “real” problem? What if their body language showed fear and/or aggression? Describe the conditions that affect your decisions to take action or not.

**“A couple is shouting at each other in the hallway of your building”**

Possible Questions: What if the fight gets physical? What if the person is asking for your help? What are some ways you can possibly help that person? How prepared are you to deal with situations like these? Describe the conditions that affect your decisions to take action or not.

**“A coworker tells you that his partner “overreacts” whenever they have a relationship conflict”**

Possible Questions: What are the challenges of talking with a co-worker about their relationships? What red flags does the word “overreact” raise? Describe the conditions that affect your decisions to take action or not.

**“A teen who you are ‘friends with’ on facebook is passing along embarrassing pictures of his or her ex-girlfriend or saying nasty things about his or her girlfriend”**

Possible Questions: When does this become ‘our business’? Does this depend on the age and relationship you have with that teen? Describe the conditions that affect your decisions to take action or not.

**Debrief:**

- Ask participants if they would encourage their young teens, if they were faced with the same situations, to respond the same way that you did? Why is it different if it is a teen responding?
- Ask participants if there is any difference between being an upstander against regular violence vs. being an upstander against relationship violence.
- Acknowledge that just telling a teen that they should be an upstander against relationship violence could lead to dangerous consequences. Teens like adults, need to be able to think critically about when, where and how they engage in upstanding behavior.

**B. The When, Where & How of Healthy Relationship Upstanding: (20 min)**

As adults, we need to advocate for young teens to take a “stand” against relationship violence and support healthy relationships. In order for young teens to do this safely, they need tools to help them make informed and safe decisions. Helping young teens to think about when, where and how to be an upstander will help them make those safe decisions.

## Directions:

- Tell participants that there are a number of ways to encourage and help their teen be a healthy relationship upstander.
  - Explain that one of the first things they can do is help their young teen identify a situation that may need a healthy relationship upstander's help. A good way for them to gauge whether an upstander is needed is by asking themselves the following questions:  
***'If I or someone I care about were in this situation, would I want someone to help me/them?'***
  - If their answer is yes, then it is time for them to figure out **how** they can be both a safe and effective upstander.
  - Explain that their young teen's upstanding choices can be broken down into three categories. Write the following categories on the board or a piece of chart paper:
    - **Take care of it on their own**
    - **Get an adult's help or advice**
    - **Call the police**
  - Tell participants that you are now going to do a concentric circle activity to get them to think about when they would want their young teen to be an upstander and, more importantly, *how* they would want their teen to be an upstander.
  - Have participants count off by twos (one, two, one, two). Instruct the ones to stand shoulder to shoulder making a circle facing outwards. Next instruct the twos to stand facing the ones. The ones and twos should now be face-to-face making a large circle.
  - Tell participants that you are going to read a statement and that you want them to talk to each other about what advice they would give their teen. They should indicate whether they would want their teen to be an upstander in that situation and whether they would recommend that they take care of it on their own, ask an adult for help, or call the police. Participants should also share some of examples of *how* they hope their teen would intervene. This could include what they hope their child might actually say.
  - After each statement ask the participants on the outside of the circle to move down one person to the left. They should be in front of a new person. The participants in the inner part of the circle should not move.
- **Statement 1:** A good friend of your child says that he wants to break-up with his girlfriend and he's going to have another friend do it for him.
  - **Statement 2:** A classmate of your child is telling people that she's the "boss" of her boyfriend and that's how it should be.
  - **Statement 3:** A friend of your child is asking him/her to help her spy on her ex-boyfriend to see if he's dating a new girl.
  - **Statement 4:** Your child's friend destroyed a partner's laptop computer because he/she saw a picture on facebook he/she didn't like.
  - **Statement 5:** Your child overheard a classmate making serious threats to his or her partner over the phone.

- **Statement 6:** Your child sees a man punching a woman in the face on the way home from school.

**Debrief:**

- Ask participants to identify the adults or friends that they hope their young teen would look to for help or advice.
- Ask participants what opportunities they see in their daily or weekly routines to talk to their young teen about their relationships and their role as a healthy relationship upstander (car rides, dinner time, etc).
- Reinforce that young teens need ongoing opportunities to talk about relationships and healthy relationship upstanding. If those lines of communication are open, they will be more likely to ask for help or advice when they are having an upstanding challenge similar to the examples above.

**C. Being an Online Upstander: (15 min.)**

*This is an essential exercise within this workshop. If you must shorten the workshop, we urge you not to leave this one out or shorten it. Instead we recommend that Section B be shortened or eliminated if time is short.* Many of the upstanding opportunities for young teens happen online. While the internet is a great place for young people to connect with friends, it also possesses a number of unhealthy relationship risks.

**Materials:**

- Chart paper with facebook status updates (one status update on each piece of chart paper)
- Markers (located near each piece of chart paper)

**Directions:**

- Tell participants that they are going to think about some of the upstanding challenges that the internet presents.
- Explain that facebook, for those who may not be familiar with it, is a website that allows people to connect with each other. One of the main features of facebook is the status update function where people can post whatever is on their mind. Many instant messenger programs have this same feature.
- Tell participants that it is important for them to help their teens think through how they will respond when they see unhealthy relationships online.
- Point out the pieces of chart paper around the room (or on tables if there is room on the walls).
- Explain that that they are going to try and come up with good upstanding response comments for the unhealthy relationship comments posted. These comments can be a few sentences or a few words long. Participants can write more than one response for each. They should walk around the room and write their upstander “status updates” below the statement on the paper. They also have the option of writing “no comment” or “talk to them about it offline”.

**Instant Messaging/Status Updates:**

- **Kimberly:** OMG! I feel like slapping him. Boys are so dumb. How are you going to talk to another girl RIGHT IN MY FACE!?!?

- **Marcus:** She knows she better do what I tell her...
- **Craig:** I def just put her in her place...She can't be doing whatever she wants, whenever she wants to.
- **Sam:** I don't want you going to that party without me. If you do I'm going to let your friends know what a XXX you are.
- **Missy:** All I have to do is cry and he gets me whatever I want. What a loser...he's lucky I'm still with him.

### **Debrief:**

- Read some of the upstander responses that participants wrote down. Ask the group which ones might go over well and which ones won't? Outline the distinctions between comments that are directly confrontational and those that bring up a general opposing opinion or ask questions.
- Ask participants to identify some of the challenges of being an online upstander. What are some of the limitations of having a "virtual" interaction? (Examples may include that someone could post rude things on their wall, it's hard to have a "real" conversation online, they could make it worse for the person they are standing up for, lots of their friends "liked" the status update, cannot be anonymous, person might bring the comment up in-person).
- Ask participants if and how they are currently talking to their teen about their online activity.
- Discuss the value of in-boxing someone a response versus writing a response directly on their wall. Emphasize how having an audience can impact disagreements between two people.
- Share that it may be scary for a young teen to respond to a comment online but that small acts, like writing or saying "that's not okay", can have a huge impact.

## **IV. SUMMARY/CLOSE: (5 min.)**

### **Remind parents that:**

- In order to be healthy relationship upstanders, young teens need to know how to do it in a safe and productive way;
- Being an upstander does not mean that your young teen needs to solve the problem alone;
- Making regular time to talk to young teens about their relationships and your expectations of them as a relationship upstander will make it easier for them to ask for help or advice when they have an upstanding question or challenge;
- Parents/caregivers need to model healthy relationship upstanding if they want their young teen to do the same.

### **Commitment:**

- Ask participants to identify one piece of information or advice about being a healthy relationship upstander they will commit to sharing with their teens in the next week. Ask them to write down that action/commitment on **Handout B**. This form is for their own use to take home.
- Administer to participants the Workshop Evaluation Form (see page 18) for the session.

*It can be awkward to bring up scary or uncomfortable subjects with your child, but they are counting on you!*

## **RESOURCES**

National Dating Abuse Helpline. Call toll free at 1-866-331-9474 or TTY 1-866-331-8453 or online at [www.loveisrespect.org](http://www.loveisrespect.org).

*What Parent Need to Know about Teens: Facts Myths and Strategies*. Publication by David A. Wolfe, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. [www.camh.net](http://www.camh.net) contact: [publications@camh.net](mailto:publications@camh.net)

National School Climate Center, *BullyBust*. [www.schoolclimate.org/bullybust/parents/upstander\\_behavior/](http://www.schoolclimate.org/bullybust/parents/upstander_behavior/)

“A Parent’s Handbook”, Start Strong Idaho, 2010 ([www.startstrongidaho.com](http://www.startstrongidaho.com))

StartStrongParents.org

## Tips for Talking to Your Young Teen about Relationships

1. **Discuss how to act as a healthy bystander or ‘upstander’ and friend** when young teens observe unhealthy behaviors in their peers
2. **Encourage open, honest, and thoughtful reflection** about healthy relationships and teen dating violence and possible interventions. Allow teens to clarify their values and expectations for healthy relationships. Allow youth to debate those issues and to come to their own understanding, rather than dismissing answers as “wrong”. Communication with your child about relationships is an on-going process rather than a one-time conversation.
3. **An effective parent balances sensitivity with firmness**; adapts to the changes faced by your young teen; talks openly and respects differences of opinion; is strong enough to make unpopular decisions; and doesn’t always get along with or agree with their young teen. Teach – don’t just criticize.
4. **Understand your teen’s development** and how it affects your relationship. Adolescence is all about experimentation. From mood swings to risk taking, “normal teenage behavior” can appear to be anything-but-normal. However, new research reveals that brain development during these formative years plays a significant role in shaping your teen’s personality and actions. Knowing what’s normal is key so you can better understand and guide your teen.
5. **Understand the pressure and the risk your teen faces.** There are new and increasing pressures and expectations, such as sex, substance use and avoiding abuse from peers or dating partners. Teens often voice the concern that their parents don’t take the time to listen and help solve situations that matter to them. Think in terms of reducing harm vs. zero tolerance.
6. **Take a clear stand** against disrespect, abuse of power, any forms of violence, or use of abusive or inappropriate language with a firm and clear message.
7. **Make the most of “teachable moments”** to discuss healthy and unhealthy relationships -- using TV episodes, movies, news, community events, learning about friends’ experiences, etc.
8. **Accentuate the positive.** Talks about relationships need not focus solely on risky behavior or negative consequences, but should also address factors that promote healthy adolescent development and positive outcomes (i.e.: academic success, relationships should be fun and fulfilling, supporting etc.)
9. **Be an active participant in your teen’s life.** Encourage your teen to be involved in extracurricular activities. Find outings that you can share with your teen. Explore ways to know more about their friends and interests.
10. **You know that there is no magic pill, no simple method that works every time.** You will make mistakes. The best we can do is help teens make the most responsible choices possible by maintaining a balance between being sensitive to their desires and needs, yet firm in providing guidance and direction.

## Relationship Conversation Starters: Talking to Your Young Teen

1. What are your friends' dating relationships like? What are the words that your friends use for dating? What is the difference in these terms and how long do your peers stay together. Do they make a commitment to each other? Are there certain things that boys want that girls don't? Are there things girls want in these relationships that boys don't want?

### **Actions and Talking points:**

- Compare their notions about the roles of males and females.
  - Mutual respect should be a key part of any relationship.
2. What are some examples of someone saying or doing something that crosses your personal boundaries? Everyone has a right to communicate how they want to be treated by others. What can you say and do to communicate your personal boundaries? When does playing or teasing become too much and is no longer fun?

### **Actions and Talking points:**

- Personal boundaries help define your expectations about how you want to be treated in a respectful, non-threatening and comfortable way on your own terms.
  - Everyone has a right to communicate how they want to be treated by others
  - Communicating personal boundaries includes telling others your expectations and expressing when your boundaries have been crossed.
  - Everyone has different personal boundaries and it's important to treat a person how they want to be treated.
3. All relationships are unique. But what do you expect from someone you would go out with? What do you think makes a relationship healthy? What do you think healthy relationships look like, feel like, and sound like?

### **Actions and Talking points:**

- In a healthy relationship there should be respect, safety, support, individuality, fairness and equality, acceptance, honesty and trust, communication and it should be fun.
  - Encourage emotional awareness – the ability to recognize moment to moment emotional feelings and to express all feelings (good and bad) appropriately.
4. For youth who are starting to date or have friends that are, the following question may be appropriate to pursue.

Have you ever seen any kind of abusive behavior between two people who are going out?

### **Actions and Talking points:**

- Compare your teenager's definition of "abusive behaviors" or "violence" to that of your own.
- Look at warning signs from the perspective of a potential abuser. Don't look the other way if you see warning signs in your child. Reach out to help him or her recognize potentially unhealthy or abusive behaviors.

## Handout A

# Moving from a Relationship Bystander to a Relationship Upstander

Young teens look to their parents and other adults in their lives for guidance as they establish behavior patterns, especially around relationships. You as a parents/caregivers may have provided advice and guidance to your child(ren) at a younger age when confronted with hurtful rumors or issues of being bullied or witnessing bullying. Adolescents are learning how to be better friends in the face of peer culture and many conflicting peer pressures. These are experiences that can often be difficult to maneuver.

As adults, we need to advocate for young teens to take a “stand” against unhealthy and abusive relationships and support healthy relationships and behaviors. In order for young teens to do this safely, they need tools to help them make informed and safe decisions. Helping young teens to think about when, where and how to be an ‘upstander’ will assist them in making those safe decisions. As a parent or caregiver you may feel uncomfortable bringing up these topics with your 11- to 14-year-olds, you may think your children aren’t ready for them. Some parents and caregivers say they are waiting for their children to bring up these issues, which may never happen.

Parents/caregivers play a critical role in providing a good example and teaching young people the importance of respectful, honest romantic relationships, how to make responsible decisions regarding their own relationships, and how to support friends and deal with conflicts. Even when parents/caregivers think their children are not listening to or watching them, they often are.

We hope this workshop will help you overcome any desire to wait for your child(ren) to initiate the conversation. We hope this session will help you find the right language to have conversations about healthy relationships and create a comfort level to talk to your kids about healthy relationships and how to safely be an ‘upstander’.

**Handout B**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**I Will Talk to My Child about Being an “Upstander”**

A. What is one thing that I can do with my child over the next week or two?

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B. What are 2 other things that I can do in the next couple of months?

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C. A reminder to myself about what I’ve learned:

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## Workshop Evaluation Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Did this workshop meet your overall expectations?

**YES**                      **NO**

2. Do you think you will talk to your child about healthy relationships and being an upstander?

**YES**                      **NO**

3. Do you feel more competent to talk to your child given the information and skills you learned today?

**YES**                      **NO**

4. How much of the information presented was helpful to you?

**Not much**

**Some of it**

**Most of it**

5. Do you have any further comments or suggestions:

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***Thank you for your feedback!***