



The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Family Violence Prevention Fund have come together to create Start Strong, an unprecedented \$18 million initiative working to prevent relationship violence among young people by promoting healthy relationship behaviors. Through this four-year initiative, the nation's largest foundation working to improve health and health care, and the nation's leading domestic and sexual violence prevention agency, are identifying innovative, practical solutions to teen dating violence and abuse.

Studies show that one in three adolescent girls in the United States is a victim of physical, emotional or verbal abuse from a dating partner. This abuse is associated with higher levels of drug and alcohol abuse, unplanned pregnancy, STDs, depression and a host of other problems. It is a serious public health problem.

To address it, Start Strong is working with 11- to 14-year-olds to build healthier relationships, and with those who influence them (parents, caregivers, older teens, teachers, counselors, coaches, etc.) to send better messages and put them on a path to healthier lives. Start Strong uses four key strategies:

- Educate and engage youth in schools and out-of-school settings: Each of the 11 Start Strong communities is implementing either Safe Dates or the Fourth R, both of which are in-school, evidence-based, rigorously evaluated curricula. Each Start Strong community also is using other settings – afterschool programs, community-based organizations, clubs, teams, and others to engage and educate youth.
- Involve teen influencers: Parents matter. So do the older teens and siblings who are role models. Even as young teens turn to peers for advice, parents and other influencers still play an important role in shaping attitudes and building resiliency. Each site is helping teen influencers gain the skills they need to support safe, respectful youth relationships; focus public attention on this issue; and build healthy relationships of their own.
- Change policy and environmental factors: Start Strong is working with its communities, school districts, administrators, teachers and students to develop school policies that will reduce and prevent teen dating abuse. Each site is working to change policy and practice at schools, other youth-serving settings, and in their communities.

- Implement effective communications/social marketing strategies: Because media and technology shape youth perceptions and social norms, Start Strong is using public education and social marketing to prevent dating violence. Site-led communications strategies will connect to and build on the initiative’s national communications strategy.

Start Strong communities are implementing and evaluating prevention strategies focused on young people in 11 communities:

Atlanta, GA	Bronx, NY	Oakland, CA
Austin, TX	Boise, ID	Providence, RI
Boston, MA	Indianapolis, IN	Wichita, KS
Bridgeport, CT	Los Angeles, CA	

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation is funding ten of these sites and Blue Shield of California Foundation is funding one site in California. The Family Violence Prevention Fund provides expert direction and intensive assistance to all 11 sites.