



WOMEN OF REFORM JUDAISM

WRJ says STOP Starting the Conversation

It can be daunting to reach out and start or join the conversation in your congregation or community about culture, ethics, power dynamics, harassment, and assault. You don't have to do this alone. Making a plan, working with allies, and being thoughtfully prepared will help you move forward effectively.

Step 1: Allies

Find allies who will bring their perspectives and lived experience, and even expertise to your planning, starting within your WRJ affiliate leadership. Then, expand to include at least one other leader in the congregation.

Action: Identify allies in congregational leadership.

Hints:

- Look for an ally who can help you with step 2 - doing your homework
- This first ally could be a lay leader or a member of the clergy, education, administration, or another staff member who will be a good partner.
- Ally conversations build support and ensure you have the knowledge you need to move forward.
- As we help develop and maintain safer environments in our congregations, remember to “practice what we preach” as you do this work, ensuring every person is safe, valued, heard, and treated with integrity and respect. The twelve principles of relational engagement laid out by Dr. Ron Wolfson in [Relational Judaism: Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community](#) and [The Relational Judaism Handbook](#) can be helpful in thinking about and holding these conversations.

Step 2: Do Your Homework

Actions:

- Find out what is already happening in your congregation and who is involved.
- Prepare yourself for the conversations. Education and information are critical.

Hints:

- **About your congregation:**

Before you move forward, check:

- Is there already an individual or team working on this, or trying to, that you could join?
- Is someone on your team involved with this work in the Reform Movement or perhaps in another environment?
- Is there congregational documentation? If so, what does it say? Is there a congregational ethics code? Does it cover both members and employees? Is there a brit (covenant) for the board about respectful treatment? Are there other relevant policies and procedures available as written guidance?

- **Reform Movement and Subject Matter Resources:**

Any one or more of these resources will help you prepare:

- The [WRJ says STOP materials and webinars](#) can help you get familiar with the topics and tools to start conversations, including with prospective allies. The WRJ says STOP [Materials and Resources Guide](#) includes a list of Reform Movement and third-party resources on harassment, assault, and power dynamics/bullying.
- Join the URJ Tent Group on "[Congregational Ethics Codes](#)" to learn from other congregations and see sample codes and resources to create a code. If you are not yet a member of The Tent, learn how to join [here](#).
- The #MeToo Context - our [WRJ](#) and [Religious Action Center \(RAC\)](#) websites have articles and information.
- Take a look at the recent investigation reports in the Reform Movement:
 - [Union for Reform Judaism](#) (URJ)
 - [Central Conference of American Rabbis](#) (CCAR)
 - [Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion](#) (HUC-JIR)
- WRJ's history of advocacy - [WRJ resolutions and statements](#) give helpful background information, resources, and language that can be used in discussing these matters.

- **Language and Barriers to Conversation**

- Cultural and community barriers can make it hard sometimes to have these conversations.
- Using clear and accurate language will help you be persuasive in your advocacy.
- It's OK to use the words "harassment," "abuse," and "bullying."
- Be intentional with your use of language. Check out the [WRJ says STOP Glossary](#) and materials on [Language and Self-Care](#), and other [WRJ says STOP introductory materials](#).

Step 3: Make a plan

Action: Set out your goals and make a plan.

Hints:

- Be able to articulate your high-level goals and the impact you want to make.
- Make an informal plan to get the conversation rolling or to join an existing effort in your community.
- Plan with your allies how to be effective in your congregation.
- Your plan should include working in partnership with participants from all aspects of congregational life - clergy, educators, administrators, staff, and members.

Step 4: Start/join the conversation

Action: Either join the existing conversation or reach out to senior leadership per your plan.

Hints:

- Make an appointment.
- State the purpose.
- Be thoughtful in your approach to reduce the risk of a closed or defensive reaction.
- Learn from your first meeting what, if anything, is already underway.
- Don't go alone. Bring 2-3 representatives to provide backup and let leadership know many are interested in this issue. It also gives more than one pair of ears to listen to what is being said and how it is being said. Too many might feel threatening or less organized, causing a closed or defensive reaction.
- Keep in mind that Collaboration is Key!
 - Share that the WRJ says STOP Initiative is part of the impetus for the conversation. This will lower barriers and let them know that your intent in bringing the topic forward is to be proactive as a partner in shaping the congregational culture and environment and not to start with accusations or challenges.
 - Emphasize that the Initiative works together with the URJ efforts and that we will:
 - Educate on the issues
 - Provide a context to start the conversation with definitions and language
 - Help participants learn to recognize assault and harassment
 - Teach participants to be upstanders and allies
 - Address how your WRJ affiliate, if you are part of one, can support and contribute to the congregational efforts.

- Ask for help spreading the word about the WRJ says STOP webinars for those involved in creating the congregational response and for all leaders.
- Look for opportunities to expand the conversation to recognize that sexual assault, sexual harassment, and bullying/power dynamics are not gender specific.
- Use the [“I Wear Teal Because...”](#) campaign at the right time for your congregation as a way to help all members and leaders of the community internalize our individual responsibility and power to shape the culture and environment.

Step 5: Next Steps

What comes next is very situation-dependent, but here are a few things to keep in mind:

Action: Make a plan and follow through.

Hints:

- **Immediate:** Schedule a follow-up meeting(s) to assure progress. Begin to develop a timeline and a clear to do list with who is responsible for each item.
- **Short-term:** Watch for training and educational programming to develop a shared background and understanding and open the conversation in the congregation. Share the [WRJ says STOP Resource Guide links](#) with leadership so that it can also be a resource for them. The [Materials and Resources](#) part of the guide provides a wide range of options as a starting point, including the Reform Movement’s extensive offerings of trainings, educational materials, and support in developing ethics codes and *britot* (covenants) and other materials from WRJ’s SRE Network partners.
- **Long-term:** Keep the conversation alive with continuing oversight of and investment in the culture of the congregation. Include a plan for regular review, updating, and reminding, and bring new members and staff into the conversation.
- Keep all interested parties posted on the WRJ says STOP Initiative and webinars, and opportunities as well as additional materials through the URJ and WRJ.
- At the right time in the process, depending on the current congregational or communal atmosphere, consider working on an Ethics Code, or *brit*, in collaboration with leadership.

If you have questions for WRJ’s Advocacy team, email us at advocacy@wrj.org.