

# Module One: Going Up Stream

## Stepping Stones of Personal Accountability



Since 1970 women have been organizing and responding to sexual violence in effort to make social change. In that time there have been many efforts from changing laws to opening crisis centers. Making the community more aware of sexual assault largely has been “risk, injury, prevention” models where potential victims and/or victims are the target audience of the education work. Since 2005 there has been a push to do further organizing to get men involved in the prevention work so we have visible male role models and other men standing up against what is largely men’s violence against women.

In order to be effective male allies with women men must spend a bit of time reflecting on what it means to commit to a process of change. Understanding that it’s a process is crucial. We are not born with the ability to make social change but we all can acquire the knowledge to identify social problems and work toward making the world a better place. This article serves to be a starting point in which to understand the steps to changing individual actions and work toward making contributions to address sexual violence.

### Going Up Stream

Storytelling is a time-honored teaching tradition. We use stories to speak of struggles, hardships, and perseverance alongside stories of inspirational change, success, and determination. Sharing these stories gives people a perspective on the issues they are confronting, allowing them to see the potential for change, while at the same time grounding them in the here and now as they work to create an ideal society. The following story has been told many times at conferences and trainings to demonstrate the different ways people look at problems and how they respond to them. This story is now being use to illustrate another point. This is the story of *Three Sisters*:

*One day three sisters were out traveling through the woods when they heard the sounds of screaming and crying. They followed the noises until they came to a river. To their horror, they saw that it was filled with hundreds of little children being swept away by the fast moving current. As they looked both ways up and down the river it looked as if this had been occurring for some period of time.*

*The first sister immediately jumped in the river and frantically began pulling out as many children as she could and bringing them to the shore. She looked to her*



*other sisters and called for them to help her, braving the waters and carrying her burdens alone quickly exhausted her energy. The second sister quickly realized that the efforts of the first sister were only limited to assisting the number of babies she could grab. In an effort to be more efficient she began calling to the children to watch her and began teaching the children how to kick their legs and flop their arms so they could swim and save themselves. The third sister had stood on the banks of the river and watched all this. She turned and started walking upriver, to which the two other sisters, tired and desperate, called out “where are you going? Come in and help!” The third sister responded, “I am helping. I’m going upriver to find out what is causing all these children to fall into the river.”*

The literal meaning to this story is quite obvious. The first sister jumps right in to help with the crisis. Rather than thinking about what is happening this sister believes she is doing the right thing because she sees that the children need immediate help. Her philosophy is that we are responsible to help others and this is the first thing we must do. The second sister realizes that there are only a few babies can be saved by helping them out of crisis so she tries teaching the babies new skills so they can help themselves. Her philosophy is that by teaching self-sufficiency we can help people help themselves in overcoming their problems. Many service programs focus on teaching skills that better equip individuals to deal with the environment that surrounds them. The third sister examines the problem of babies in the river and the efforts of her sisters and wonders why it happening. She looks for the cause of the problem and believes that by finding the source of the dilemma we can change the environment that is creating the crisis. Her philosophy is that by examining the roots of the problem there won’t be issues downstream. In this story all three responses are appropriate according to each sister’s understanding and way of thinking. Each is a valuable response yet we all must understand what is happening upstream as we do our respective work.

To make social change each response must work in connection with each other. In the story of the Three Sisters each is working independently of each other struggling to prove that their own individual response is the best. When you work in competition with others your measure of success is limited to just doing a fraction better than your competitors and you lose sight of the big picture. Each Sister performs an action that is essential to large coordinated effort – but can only work if each is response has the same purpose and goal. Social change means we must **make effective programmatic changes**: to create services that involve those affected as part of defining effective solutions, **educate community**: to foster change people’s attitudes and beliefs, and **change institutional responses**: by addressing policies and practices that perpetuate the problems we are trying to change.

#### **Make effective programmatic changes:**

To “*create services that involve those affected as part of defining effective solutions*” primarily refers to those who are recipients of the service. When we speak of engaging men in sexual



violence prevention we broaden our definition of ‘affected’ and look at the ways men are socialized to view gender roles and sex in society and how that leads to the objectification, exploitation, and oppression of women. On a secondary issue, the programmatic change of engaging men allows men to examine how they are affected by societal norms and pressure as part of the process to become effective leaders and allies in addressing sexual violence.

A large part of the resistance to engage men in sexual violence prevention comes from the unknown. We don’t know what to do with them nor does the sexual violence field have a large prevention effort. Certainly there are events like “Take Back the Night” and public messages like “No Means No” then there is the periodic up cropping classes teaching the new fad of self-defense techniques. Not a whole lot of opportunity to engage men in a meaningful way when their best opportunity to make a contribution as someone new entering the movement is spending Tuesday night wearing a padded suite and getting kicked in the groin for two hours. Unless you are a college age kid, possibly gay, queer, transgendered, who receives training through a rape crisis center and gets the opportunity to volunteer there mostly working with male victims there is not a whole lot of opportunity available, so we have to create it.

### **Educate community:**

In order to foster change people’s attitudes and beliefs we have to engage in meaningful conversation. Meaningful in that we have starting a dialog with the men, and others, in the community rather than engage in debate. The adversarial approach doesn’t sway many people to your side. Often it entrenches people in their position and they stock pile arguments like missiles during the Cold War ready to launch in order to defend their position and win the fight. Being mindful in how you challenge beliefs is crucial in keeping people at the table discussing the issues.

Men must be made aware of the depth of the problem to understand what it is and what they can do about it. While it would be nice to see large groups of men speaking out publically about sexism and violence against women that ability has to be fostered carefully. However, starting with a base line in asserting that ALL men must strive to be the best person they can be as our culture dictates we set out with the expectation that all men look at making individual changes in their lives. Then those who are willing and able speak to family and friends, others move on to public speaking, while some may take on institutional issues of sexism.

### **Change institutional responses:**

When referring to institutions we can talk about governments (tribal, local, state, federal), churches, corporations, schools and just about any large structure or system that governs people’s lives. Institutions establish or reflect underlying social norms so when we look to make social change within them we are looking to embed a particular value or code of conduct into an organization, social system, or society as a whole. By changing policies and practices of institutions we set a general tone of intolerance toward a specific behavior and establish a standard in which we expect people to live.



This is where the “top down” approach will connect with the “bottom up” form of organizing – and again, neither are successful independently. Take seat belt laws as an example. One may argue that by changing laws that is totally a top down method that is enforced by police giving you a ticket for not wearing one and the courts making you pay a fine. However, someone had to inform the community about the law change, and it wasn’t just word of mouth from people who were pulled over going to uninformed relatives saying, “Hey, did you know it’s illegal to drive without wearing a seatbelt?” Not only are their commercials stating the law there was news reports, changes in driver education training, parental and peer enforcement (people reminding you to buckle up).

**Defining social change<sup>1</sup>:**

Social change means to build community-based responses that address underlying social problems on an individual, institutional, community, national and/or international level. Social change can change attitudes, behaviors, laws, policies and institutions to better reflect values of inclusion, fairness, diversity and opportunity. Social change involves a collective action of individuals who are closest to the social problems to develop solutions that address social issues.

**Social Programs versus Social Movements**

<b>Characteristics of a Social Program</b>	<b>Characteristics of a Social Movement</b>
Defined structure and formal entry	Wide support base and informal entry, anyone can join
Static and linear	Dynamic and evolving
Fits a specific social issue	Overlaps into many social issues
Directed by criteria or law	Self-directed by awareness of an issue
Planned outputs and defined benefits	Necessary outcomes
Hierarchical control	More difficult to control
Responsibility to the organization	Responsibility to the issue, movement

**Stepping Stones of Accountability**

The Stepping Stones of Personal Accountability are designed to help men understand the personal journey they will take and as they engage with other men a tool to identify where other men are at.

<sup>1</sup> Leadership Paradigms, Inc. <http://www.leadershipparadigms.com/docs/SOCIAL.pdf>



*“When I started doing domestic violence work I thought I was a good guy because I had never hit any of my girlfriends. But after going through a “Power and Control” training I realized I had done many abusive and controlling things. Years later, again thought I was pretty good – then I started doing sexual assault work! I jokingly say that if I knew how much personal effort and reflection it would take to work in the domestic and sexual violence fields I would have never started. But in all honesty, if I someone had even given me a general idea of what to expect it would have been much easier.” – Jeremy NeVilles-Sorell*

We all have different motivators to get into addressing sexual violence. Some will start because they feel a sense of injustice, while others may seek knowledge because of a friend or loved one being assaulted. Our understanding of social issues may start from different perspectives however the pathway is generally the same as to how we get to the point of taking action.

The stepping stone of accountability describes a personal journey to action but it also reflects an organizational or community process of taking accountability. In either case there is usually some event that makes the problem known so that we are now aware and after we sort through the challenges we acknowledge the issue then it’s time to take action. This final section describes this process in hopes of making the pathway of learning and taking action a bit easier for those who follow.

- **Implement solutions**
- **Commit to change**
- **Take a position**
- **Acknowledge reality**
- **Wishful thinking**
- **Excuses**
- **Denial**
- **Unaware**



# Going Up Stream: Stepping Stones of Personal Accountability



*Unaware:* At this step people are usually clueless to what the problems are with sexual assault. While one may hear about rape there is not a connection felt to how it impacts them or those around them and no desire to do anything about it. People accept social norms (complacent) because “it is what it is.”

*Denial:* At this step often people argue the existence of a problem, blame others for being the cause, believe issues are exaggerated, or inaction by doing nothing at all. “Delay is the deadliest form of denial.”<sup>2</sup> By not doing anything one is preventing, thus denying, the opportunity for change to occur for themselves or the community around them.

*Excuses:* Here we see people rationalize why they don’t do anything or possibly even blame the victim for the sexual assault. Their apathy in believing that things will never change or that to make change is sexual assaults that women have to stop being the targets. Changing the way one dresses, hangs out, or if they learned self-defense they will not be raped. They don’t see how they contribute to the problem on a continuum of actions.

<sup>2</sup> Prof C Northcote Parkinson (English Writer, 1909-1993)

*Wishful thinking:* This is where desire for something to is not matched with effort. The burden of responsibility can also be placed on other people or entities like law enforcement, advocacy programs, or religious/spiritual guidance. This could also be an employee who would say something like “we would much farther if only [the boss/the services/funding] would...” People in this step acknowledge a problem exists but don’t necessarily own the problem.

*Acknowledge reality:* Acknowledging reality is simply accepting the uncomfortable truth. This is where one moves into taking personal responsibility and accountability to making change. The level of knowledge and awareness is fairly acute however; people may still be misguided on direction. It can also be easy to regress back to prior steps from here as well – and it may actually be easier to make excuses for sexual violence because the person knows more.

*Take a position:* Being neutral is no longer an option as neutrality still allows society to function as status quo thus continuing to perpetuate the problem. Whether one agrees or disagrees with popular approaches, such as SART<sup>3</sup> teams or Injury Prevention<sup>4</sup> models, individuals must decide on a course of action.

*Commit to change:* Change doesn’t occur overnight so at a minimum each man must commit to being the best person they can be and educate themselves on what they can do to change the social norms around sexual violence.

*Implement solutions:* Accepting full accountability means taking action to address men’s violence against women and end the objectification and subjugation of women through sexual violence.

*“If I’m working with 60 guys, I’m looking for the 20 guys who are ready and really want to make a change – that’s who I’m going to work with. People are always going to have their major issues to deal with poverty, violence, drug, and alcohol addiction and those issues aren’t going to go away soon [for them]. We have to engage men who are ready to work on the things they can change.” – Anthony Frank*

We hope this helps inspires more men to make a commitment and take action for social change.

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<sup>3</sup> SART is an acronym for Sexual Assault Response Team where the intent is to enhance prosecution of sexual assault cases

<sup>4</sup> Injury prevention is an effort to prevent or reduce the severity of bodily injuries before they occur by raising awareness on what causes injury and enhancing skills to prevent them

