Each September, World Suicide Prevention Day and National Suicide Prevention Week provide special opportunities to bring our message of prevention to millions of people around the world. This year, we have an exciting new resource to help us engage the public in suicide prevention and enlist them in supporting the cause that means so much to so many of us. The new resource is the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention’s Framework for Successful Messaging.

The Framework is a web-based resource developed to support the Action Alliance’s priority to “change the national narratives around suicide and suicide prevention to ones that promote hope, connectedness, social support, treatment, and recovery.” It will help everyone who communicates with the public about suicide – educators, researchers, policy makers, practitioners, and advocates – to create messages based on the best available evidence about safe, effective, and helpful communications. The Framework should be used when developing any message for the public, including educational materials, newsletters, event publicity, and fund-raising appeals.

The Framework outlines four critical issues to consider when messaging to the public about suicide. These issues are:

**Strategy.** Successful messages are focused and intentional. Understanding the audience and tailoring messages to their context is key to successful messaging. It is important to ask ourselves questions such as:

- Why we are messaging?
- How does the message fit into our overall mission and connect to other suicide prevention efforts?
- Who is the audience for this message?
- What channels will best reach this audience?
- What do we want the audience to do in response to the message?
- How can we frame the message to achieve this result?
Safety. Safety focuses on avoiding potentially harmful message content. We have made great strides in ensuring that we do not unintentionally raise the risk of suicide by, for example, discussing the data on suicide risk in ways that normalize suicide or imply that there is nothing that can be done to prevent suicidal behavior. We have worked hard to spread this message to our colleagues in mental health services and journalism, and must continue to consciously ensure that our own messaging is both safe and helpful.

Positive Narrative. We need to ensure that our messages “accentuate the positive” about suicide prevention and offer solutions rather than focus on the problem of suicide. There are many ways to promote a positive narrative; the best approach will be guided by your strategy. Our messages can help the public envision prevention by including concrete actions that the audience can take to help prevent suicide; sharing stories of coping, resilience, and recovery; describing the successes of prevention programs; helping people access valuable resources; and sharing what we know about effective prevention.

Guidelines. It is important to consult recommendations and best practices that apply to your particular messages. The Guidelines section of the Framework website links to a variety of resources, for example, guidelines for telling personal stories, discussing LGBT suicide, reaching young people, and creating culturally specific messages. Additional guidelines will be added over time.

As we prepare for World Suicide Prevention Day on September 10 and National Suicide Prevention Week September 8-14, let us be intentional about our messaging. By considering Strategy, Safety, Positive Narrative, and Guidelines as we craft our important messages, we can engage the public to take action and join us in our quest to prevent suicide and save lives. I urge everyone who creates suicide prevention messages to visit the Action Alliance Framework for Successful Messaging [1] and take advantage of this unique resource.

Planning and Implementing: Communications and Outreach, Safe/Effective Messaging

Links within this resource