Using the New Action Alliance Framework for Successful Messaging to Create More Effective Communications
2014 Campus Grantee Meeting
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What’s Important About Suicide Prevention Messaging?

Can
- Increase risk
- Undermine prevention

OR
- Promote positive behaviors
- Support prevention goals

Messaging Challenges & Successes
- Turn to the person next to you and each share:
  - One challenge you’ve faced in developing suicide prevention communications?
  - One success you’ve had related to your communications efforts?

National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention:
One Initial Priority (of Four)

Change the public conversation around suicide & suicide prevention:
“...change the national narratives...to ones that promote hope, connectedness, social support, resilience, treatment and recovery.”

Media/Entertainment Outreach
(Journalists, Writers)

Public Messaging
(Suicide Prevention & Mental Health Professionals & Other Messengers)
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What’s Public Messaging?

Defined Broadly
- Any public-facing information
- Campaigns & also social media, newsletters, websites, event publicity, fundraising, public talks, etc.

Does not include
- Private conversations
- 1-on-1 with individuals in crisis
- Doctor-patient interactions
- Sharing in support groups

What are all of the ways you’re communicating to the public?

Need for a Change in Suicide Prevention Messaging

Data Sources
- Research literature
- Charting the Future: progress review of 2001 NSSP
- Public opinion surveys
- Expert Panel, January, 2013

Violates safety guidelines

Emphasis on problem severity

In the U.S. 4 people die by suicide every hour.
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Show of Hands:
Where Are We on “Awareness?”

Changing behavior is more complicated than this:
“This problem is so big!”

I know just what to do!

What makes messages more likely to lead to action?

“KADNAB”TM

Calls to action absent or vague
- Charting the Future

Quote from Expert Panel: “It’s time to shift from
communicating for awareness to communicating for action.”

Prevent suicide. Treat depression.
See your doctor.

Undefined audiences & goals

Content undermines the prevention message

SUICIDE AWARENESS FOR MEN
Depression isn’t a normal part of getting older...

There is hope & help.

Note: not an actual brochure.

FAST FACTS
- Over 30,000 people in the United States die by suicide every year.
- There are 4 male suicides for every female suicide.
- An estimated 1 in 10 U.S. adults report depression.
- The average age of depression onset is 32.

A vast majority of men have visited a physician a short time before their suicide.
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Recap So Far

- Based on this review, what makes for more successful messages?

National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention Framework For Successful Messaging

Four considerations when developing messages:
- Strategy
- Safety
- Positive narrative
- Guidelines

Formal launch upcoming! (Please don’t publicize until then.)
www.SuicidePreventionMessaging.org

1. Set the CONTEXT
2. WHY message?
3. WHO to influence?
4. To DO what?
5. WHAT to say?
6. HOW to reach them?
7. SO WHAT?

Strategy

- Should we use communications?
  Think it through, to ensure benefits > costs

We need posters!

= Decide “why” before “how”
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Safety

Messaging can be harmful by:
- increasing suicide risk among vulnerable individuals
- undermining prevention

“Don’ts” for Public Messaging

- DON’T ...
  - ...show/describe methods or locations
  - ...focus on personal details
  - ...glorify or romanticize suicide
  - ...“normalize” by portraying suicide as common, acceptable
  - ...use data/language implying suicide is inevitable, unsolvable
  - ...oversimplify causes
  - ...reinforce stereotypes, myths or stigma

Positive Narrative

Counter the “negative narrative”:
- Emphasis on problem severity, not prevention
- It’s hopeless; no solutions exist
- Negative “social script” for some groups

In Every Message: Help the Public to Envision Prevention

Many possible options:
- Concrete actions the audience can take
- Stories of coping, resilience, recovery
- Program successes
- Available resources
- What we know about successful prevention
  Etc.
Avoid a Simplistic Approach: “Being Positive” is Not a Strategy!

- Use research to plan focused messages with specific objectives, audiences & calls to action;
- Then: incorporate some version of the “positive narrative” about suicide prevention that fits with that message.

You’re On It!

Project Lifeline
HOPE (Hold Onto Positive Emotions)
Promise for Tomorrow
The Hope Initiative
USM Cares
Reach Out. UWF Cares
UFFlourish
Promoting a Caring Community (PACC)
Life Happens, UWM CARES
Na Ki’a O Ke Ola (Guardians of Life)
R U a Lifesaver?

Guidelines

- Many best practices exist.
- Use them! (when appropriate to your message)
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Examples (Some not specific to suicide)

**Messengers**
- Best Practices for Survivor/Attempt Stories

**Channels**
- AAS Video Guidelines
- Working with the Media

**Populations**
- Talking About Suicide & LGBT Populations

And more!

For More Successful Messages: Use all Four “Lenses”

- **Strategy**: Define goals, audiences & actions; integrate with other efforts, etc.
- **Safety**: Avoid “don’ts”
- **Positive narrative**: e.g. stories of coping & resiliency; programmatic successes; actions audience can take; available resources & services, etc.
- **Guidelines**: Use message-specific best practices

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Home page
Global nav →

Four Framework Elements

Strategy sub-menu

What is the Framework? Strategy Safety Positive Narrative Guidelines Examples

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Start with Strategy
(At the FW’s center = shapes all other decisions)

Key Planning Steps

1. Set the CONTEXT
2. WHY message?
3. WHO to influence?
4. To DO what?
5. WHAT to say?
6. HOW to reach them?
7. SO WHAT?

Tied to overall program for change

Communications integrated into overall strategic plan

Defined communications objective
- Advances a programmatic goal
- Realistic about what messaging can & can’t do
- Consider messaging + other programmatic components

Informed by audience research & pre-testing

- Types
  - Published literature
  - Local quantitative & qualitative
  - Guidelines, if any

- Purpose
  - Avoid assumptions
  - Picture the issues from the audience’s perspective
  - Detailed understanding allows you to get specific

Systematically planned
- Research inputs at each phase
- Tied to overall program for change

Informed by audience research & pre-testing
- Specific objectives, audience and action
  - Clear, focused message; specific call to action
  - Content & framing uses audience research to build motivation

Appropriate channels and sufficient exposure

Evaluated

-- Making Health Communication Campaigns Work; Aronson & Maibach; Neel; Goodman; Drabinski et al., 2014
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Specific objectives

**Suicide Prevention Goals**
- Increase help-seeking
- Increase access to effective treatments and services
- Increase life skills
- Increase social connectedness
- Restrict access to lethal means

**Organizational Goals**
- Fundraise
- Increase name recognition and reputation
- Recruit volunteers
- Increase participation in an event

**Specific communications objective**
- Advances existing goal
- Hint: use "increase/decrease" to indicate change
- "Raise awareness" is not specific enough

Objective can be very focused

**Specific audience**
(Hint: not "everybody")

Direct appeal vs. reaching population of interest through another audience

**Specific “call to action”**
- Call 1-800-273-TALK
- Sign up for a gatekeeper training
- Read real stories of coping at...
- Join our efforts by (specific action)....
- Post your reasons for living on...
- Help us publicize our project successes by...
- Call your legislator & ask them to vote...

And many many more!
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WHAT to Say?
Use audience research to build motivation

Examples of issues to explore:
• How do they view the issue & action?
• Top barriers to action?
• What would help them to act?
• If unwilling to take that action, what are they willing to do?
• Where do they get info?

• Listen for
  • Beliefs & attitudes (impede/facilitate acting)
  • Misperceived norms
  • Inaccurate info
  • Positive values, protective factors, actions they already take
  • Language they use

Language & framing:
match to goals & audience

Strategic decision: whether or not to use suicide/mental health terms vs. lay language.

Throughout Content Development Process:
Apply Other Framework Concepts

Keeping Strategy in mind...
- Ensure approach & content follows Safety guidelines
- Include some version of the Positive Narrative
- Check for applicable Guidelines

Only Then: Which “Channels”?

Don't assume
Many other options
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Pretest messages and materials

- Ask target audience for reaction
  - Understandability, clarity, language
  - Do they get it?

  Types of questions (e.g.s)
  - Who do you think this is for?
  - What do you think is the purpose?
  - Tell me about the people/setting.
  - Is it personally relevant to you? How?
  - Does it help you to [insert message objectives]?
  - Anything that strikes you negatively?

Evaluated

- Know what you’re trying to change
  - Realistic objectives
  - Logic model

  Build in monitoring of process and outcomes

Sharing Examples & Discussion

- Strategy is systematically planned. At each phase:
  - Use research & theory
  - Follow applicable Guidelines

  Tied to overall program for change

  Informed by audience research & pre-testing

  Specific objectives, audience and action
  - Clear, focused message; specific & realistic call to action

  Content & framing uses audience research to build motivation, is
  Safe, builds in the Positive Narrative

  Appropriate channels and sufficient exposure

  Evaluated
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