A New Tool for Safe & Effective Messaging: the Action Alliance Framework for Successful Messaging

2014 State & Tribal Grantee Meeting

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What’s Important About Suicide Prevention Messaging?

Can
- Increase risk
- Undermine prevention

OR

Can
- 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?
Change the public conversation around suicide & suicide prevention:

“...change the national narratives....to ones that promote hope, connectedness, social support, resilience, treatment and recovery.”
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
In the U.S., 4 people die by suicide every hour.

Emphasis on problem severity

Violates safety guidelines

University president calls student suicide an epidemic

BY URSULA REUTIN on May 30, 2012 @ 5:37 am (Updated: 9:09 am - 5/30/12)
What’s the collective message? Do these make suicide seem preventable?

Depression and Suicide

Suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death for young people aged 15-24

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

LANDMARK MENTAL HEALTH REPORT DOCUMENTS DEVASTATING EFFECTS, SIGNIFICANT STIGMA AGAINST SUFFERERS

Full-Day Event

Suicide Prevention: Why Can’t We Find Answers?
Show of Hands:
Where Are We on “Awareness?”
Changing behavior is more complicated than this:

“What makes messages more likely to lead to action?”

“I know just what to do!”
Quote from Expert Panel: “It’s time to shift from communicating for awareness to communicating for action.”

Prevent suicide. Treat depression. See your doctor.

Often not integrated with programmatic efforts, e.g. clinical training
**SUICIDE AWARENESS FOR MEN**

*Depression isn’t a normal part of getting older...*

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**Content undermines the prevention message**

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**FAST FACTS**

- **Over 38,000** people in the United States die by suicide every year.

- **There are 4 male suicides for every female suicide.**

- **Over 60 percent** of all people who die by suicide suffer from major depression.

- **An estimated 1 in 10** U.S. adults report depression.

- **The average age of depression onset** is **32**.

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**A vast majority of men have visited a physician a short time before their suicide.**

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*Note: not an actual brochure.*
Based on this review, what makes for more successful messages?
Four considerations when developing messages:

- Strategy
- Safety
- Positive narrative
- Guidelines

Formal launch upcoming! (Please don’t publicize until then.)
www.SuicidePreventionMessaging.org
- Should we use communications?
  
  **Think it through**, to ensure benefits > costs

= **Decide “why” before “how”**

We need *not* posters!
Careful Planning is Key

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<td>Set the CONTEXT</td>
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“How” decision is here
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
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*. 

Go deeper than this!
NH #Suicide Prevention Project Focuses on Gun Shops abcn.ws/12SCQgN Remember help is available, just a phone call away 800-273-8255

**PRA Parent Helps Their Child Thanks to Information Learned at Work**

A loved one has attempted suicide. Now what? Attempt survivors explain what family approaches put them more at ease. ow.ly/jpBMJ

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline '1-800-273-TALK (8255)' shared a link.**

March 30


**Coping Skills**

Coping skills help us get through difficult times - they can give us an important break from mental and emotional distress, and sometimes they are literally life-saving.

Keep this list of coping skills handy for when you need it... folded up in your wallet or bag or past it up on the wall somewhere handy at home.

**Hear real stories from Veterans like you at:**

www.MakeTheConnection.net

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Guidelines

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

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

**Channels**
AAS Video Guidelines  Working with the Media
Creating Your Organization’s Social Media Strategy Map

**Goals**
Stigma Reduction

**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
Action Alliance Framework for Successful Messaging

Four Framework Elements

Strategy sub-menu

- Overview: Strategy
- Principles of Effective Communications
- Key Planning Steps
- Tips for Messaging Strategically
- How Strategy Fits Into the Framework
- Resources: Strategy
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?

“How” decision is here
Research-Based Principles of Effective Communications

- 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**

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-- Making Health Communication Campaigns Work; Abroms & Maibach; Noar; Goodman; Chambers et al. 29
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
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
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!
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
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
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**
YOUR Message Matters!

Sign on today! We’re asking individuals and groups to join this important initiative that will help to change the way suicide and suicide prevention is viewed.

Make a Commitment
- Sign on to the Framework initiative to indicate your commitment to developing messages that are strategic, safe, convey a positive message, and follow available guidelines. Individuals and organizations are welcome.

Support Your Commitment with Action. Examples:
- Use the Framework and the resources on this site as a guide when developing all of your public messaging.

- At every opportunity, use your voice to contribute to a Positive Narrative about suicide, one that emphasizes solutions and action as opposed to describing the problem in unsolvable terms.

- Create a set of standards or policies to guide messaging across all of your efforts. For example, decide that as a matter of policy, you will not forward or repost news articles that include potentially unsafe content.
Closing and Debrief

- Questions?
- Takeaways?
- What is one thing you can do to improve your communications work?