



**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

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- 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)



# 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

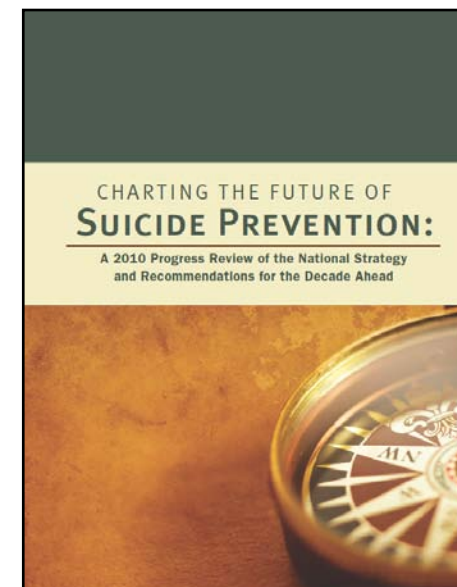
What are all of the  
ways you're  
communicating to the  
public?



# 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

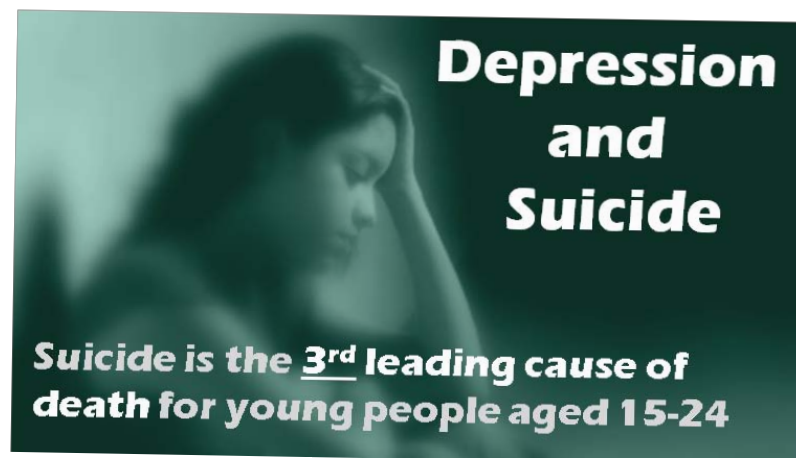
**BULLYCIDE**

## 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?



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

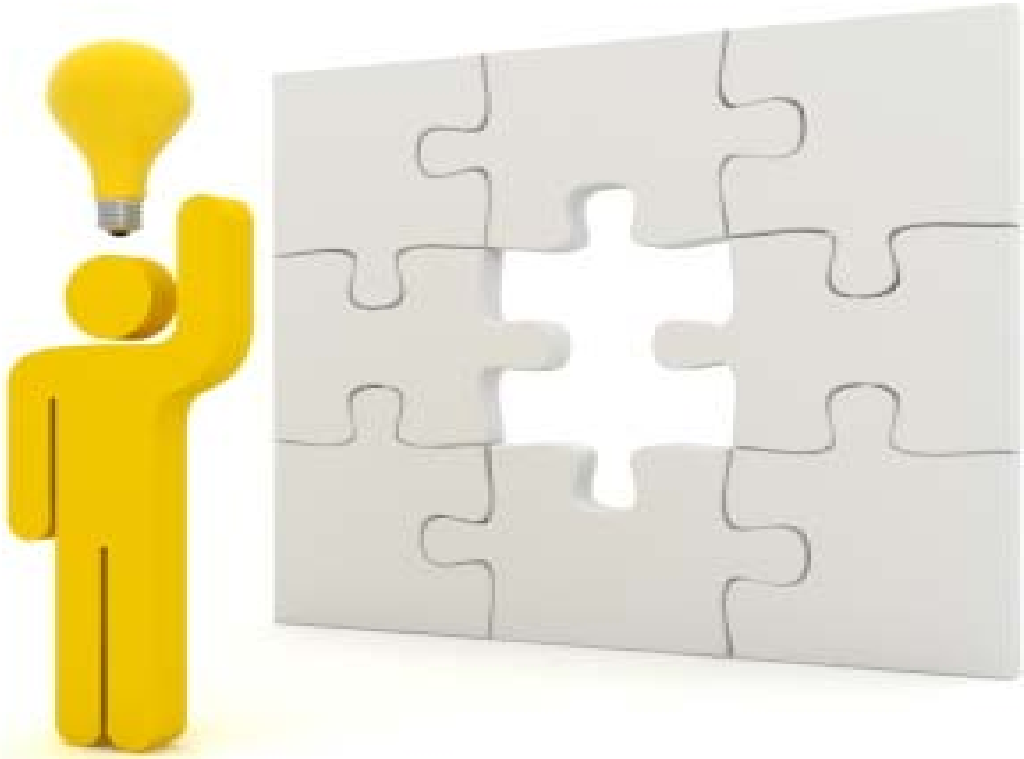
LANDMARK MENTAL HEALTH REPORT DOCUMENTS DEVASTATING EFFECTS, SIGNIFICANT STIGMA AGAINST SUFFERERS





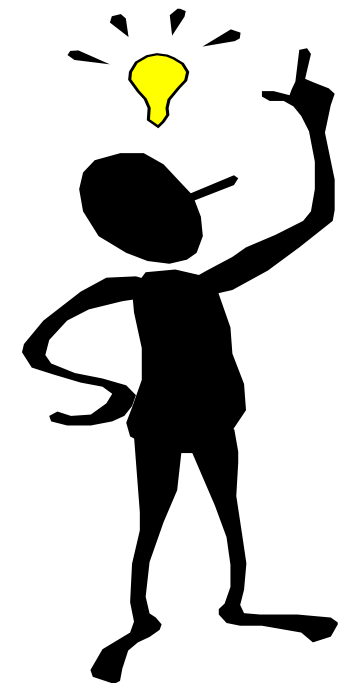
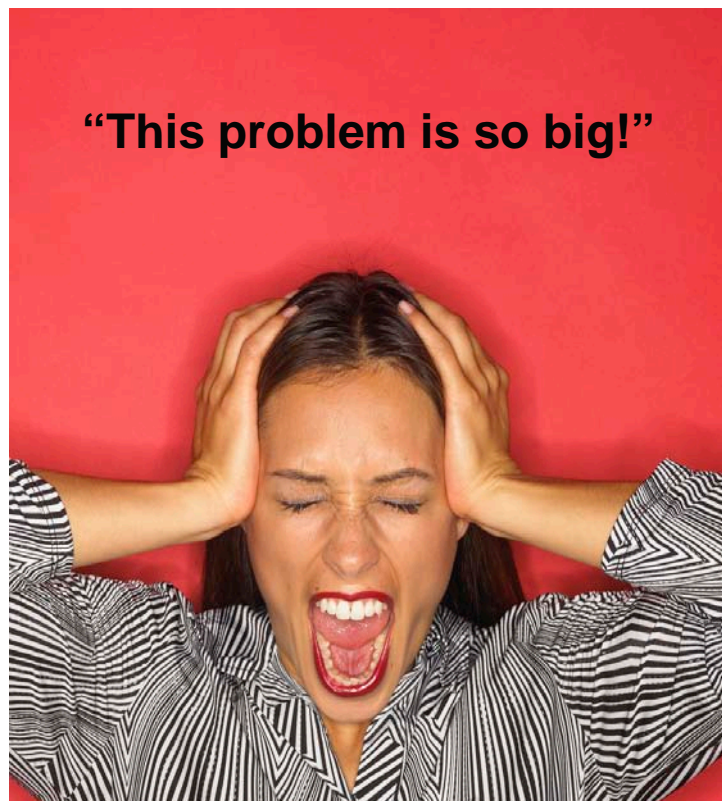


# Show of Hands: Where Are We on “Awareness?”





Changing behavior is more complicated than this:



*I know just what to do!*

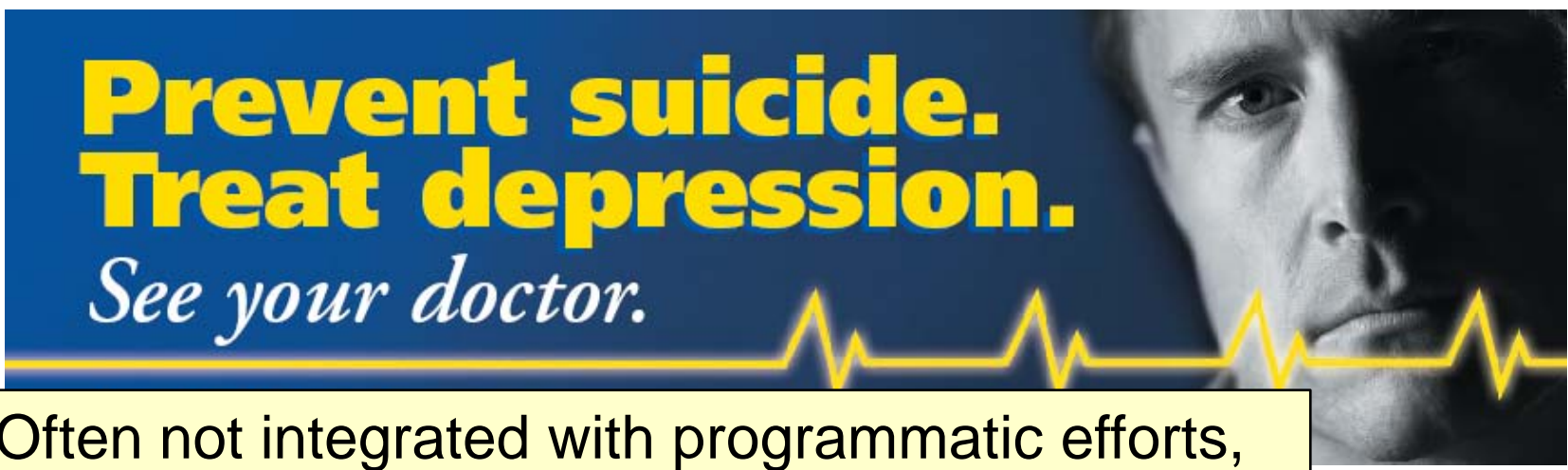
What makes messages more likely to lead to action?



Undefined audiences & goals

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."***



Often not integrated with programmatic efforts, e.g. clinical training

## SUICIDE AWARENESS FOR MEN

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



**There is hope & help.**

Content undermines the prevention message

## 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**.

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



- 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](http://www.SuicidePreventionMessaging.org)**

# Strategy

- Should we use communications?

Think it through, to ensure **benefits > costs**



~~We need posters!~~



= **Decide “why” before “how”**



# Careful Planning is Key



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







- 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



**Positive  
Narrative**



Counter the “negative narrative”:

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



## **Stop Veteran Suicide Now**

After war, our heroes face a lifetime of struggle. Like and share this status to raise awareness about the epidemic of Veteran suicide.

Like · Comment · January 16 at 02:41pm

*(Note: not a real post)*



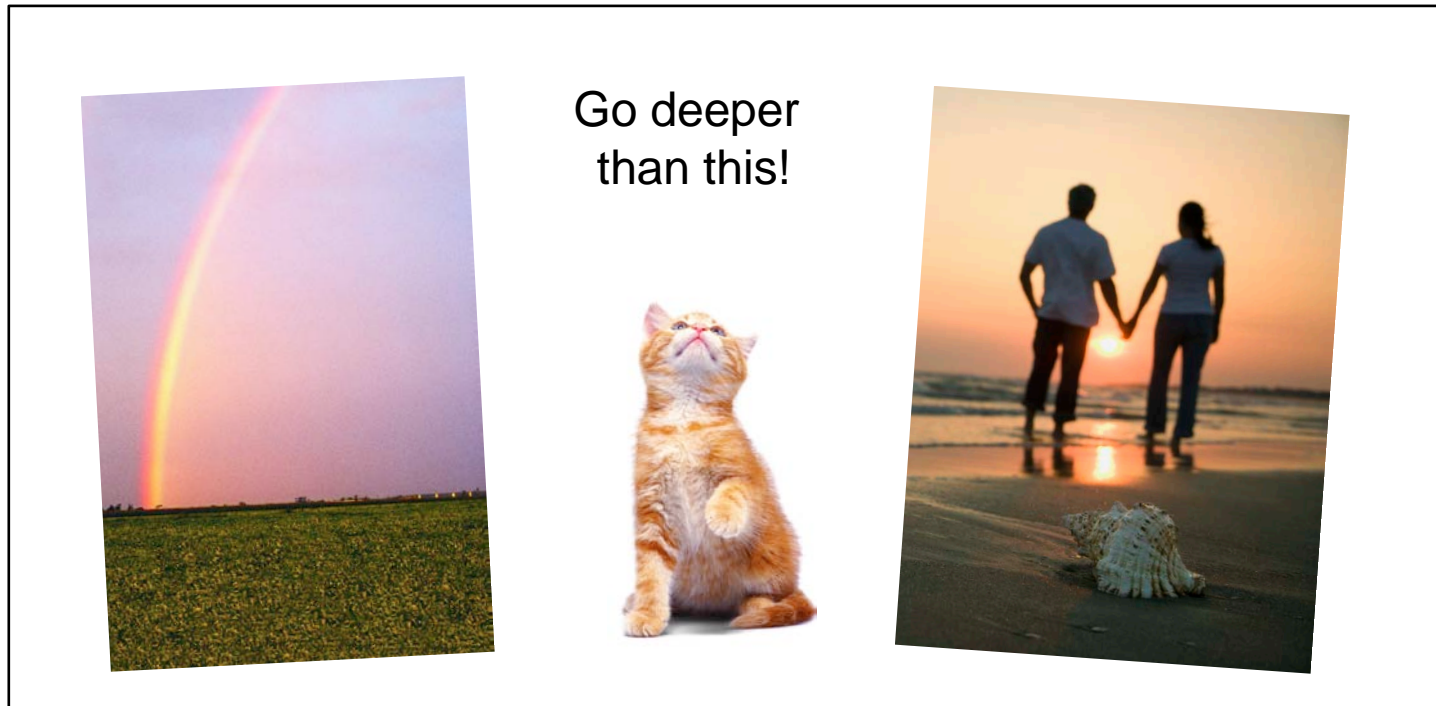
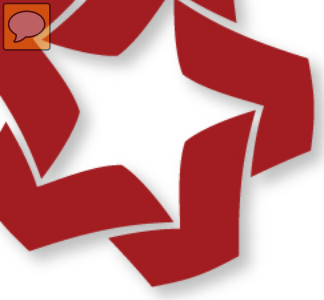
# In Every Message: Help the Public to *Envision* Prevention



- 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!



  
**Positive  
Narrative**

- 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*.



NH #Suicide Prevention Project Focuses on Gun Shops [abcn.ws/12SCQgN](http://abcn.ws/12SCQgN) Remember help is available, just a phone call away  
800-273-8255



**Positive Narrative**

**PRA Parent Helps Their Child Thanks to Information Learned at Work**  
Posted on October 23, 2012 by Anonymous

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

 **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline '1-800-273-TALK (8255)'** shared a link.  
March 30   
Are you living with depression? A new study shows how strong social connections can help. <http://ht.ly/uWsn2>

*Pinterest*

**\$11 ANSWERS ONE CALL FOR HELP**




**CLICK HERE TO DONATE**

Eleven dollars answers one call for help on our 24-hour crisis hotline (954-761-1133)

**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 post it up on the wall somewhere handy at home.



**Make this list work for you**  
Use a highlighter pen to mark the skills that work best for you & add your own ideas over the page

Distraction    Conversation, listen to talk    Pros

**MAKE THE CONNECTION**  
Shared experiences and support for Veterans

Hear real stories from Veterans like you at:  
[www.MakeTheConnection.net](http://www.MakeTheConnection.net)



# Guidelines



- Many best practices exist.
- Use them! (when appropriate to your message)



# Examples

*(Some not specific to suicide)*



**Guidelines**

## Messengers

*Best Practices for  
Survivor/Attempt Stories*

## Goals

**Stigma Reduction**

## Channels

*AAS Video  
Guidelines*

*Working with  
the Media*

*Creating Your  
Organization's Social  
Media Strategy Map*

## 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

Global nav →



## Messaging to the public about suicide?

**The Framework is for you.**

The *Framework for Successful Messaging* is a research-based resource that outlines **four critical issues** to consider when messaging to the public about suicide.

**Message to the public about suicide?** Strategy Safety Positive narrative Guidelines

**YOUR Message Matters!**

It's not just a *framework*, it's a *movement!*

→ Sign on and take action.

**We've Signed On**

Suicide Prevention Resource Center

Jack Benson Reingold

**WHAT** it's About

The *Framework for Successful Messaging* is a resource to help people messaging about suicide to develop messages that are strategic, safe, positive, and make use of relevant guidelines and best practices.

It was created by the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention as part of its focus on changing the public conversation about suicide.

**WHY** it's important

Because **messaging matters!** Certain types of public messaging about suicide can increase risk among vulnerable individuals.

Conversely, communications can be a powerful tool to promote resiliency, encourage help-seeking, publicize prevention successes, and encourage actions that help prevent suicide.

**HOW** it's Unique

It's for *suicide prevention messengers*, rather than the media.

It addresses "public messaging": any communications released into the public domain. From posters, PSAs, and social media to websites, newsletters, fundraising appeals, event publicity, press interactions, public talks, and advocacy efforts, each contributes to the public's perceptions about suicide and suicide prevention.

### GET STARTED

<p>Learn about the Framework elements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Strategy</li> <li>o Safety</li> <li>o Positive narrative</li> <li>o Guidelines</li> </ul>	<p>Visit the Examples Gallery.</p>	<p>Sign on and take action.</p>	<p>Read why and how the Framework was developed.</p>
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**Not looking for guidance on *public messaging*?**  
See resources for other types of suicide prevention communications.

# Action Alliance Framework for Successful Messaging

What is the Framework?

Strategy

Safety

Positive Narrative

Guidelines

Examples



## Four Framework Elements

### Strategy sub-menu

What is the Framework?

**Strategy**

Safety

Positive Narrative

Guidelines

Examples

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)

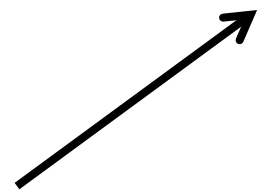


## Key Planning Steps

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**

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





# 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**

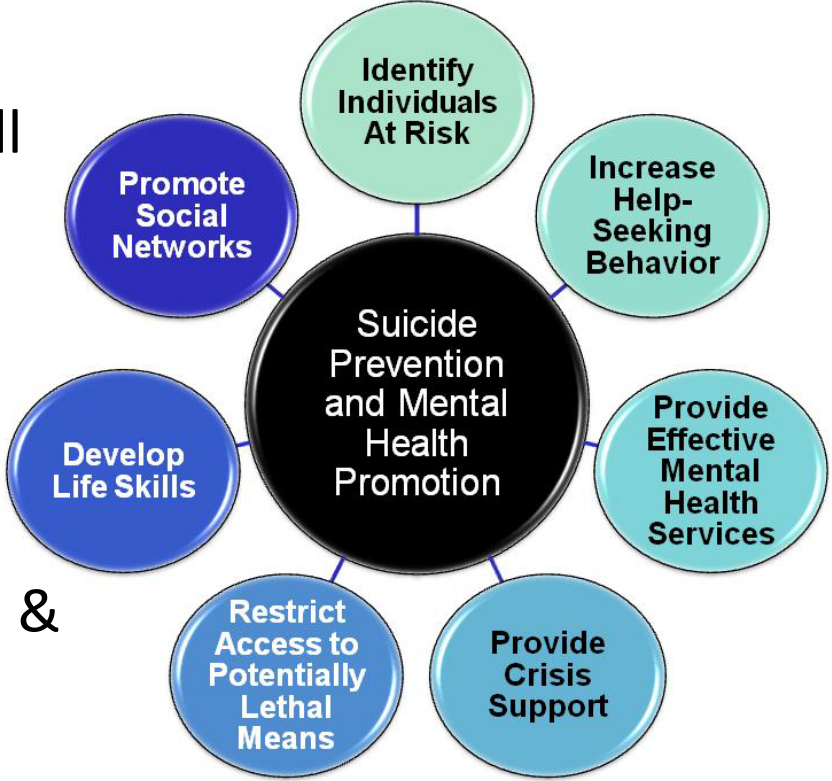


-- Making Health Communication Campaigns Work; Abroms & Maibach; Noar; Goodman; Chambers et al. 29



# Tied to overall program for change

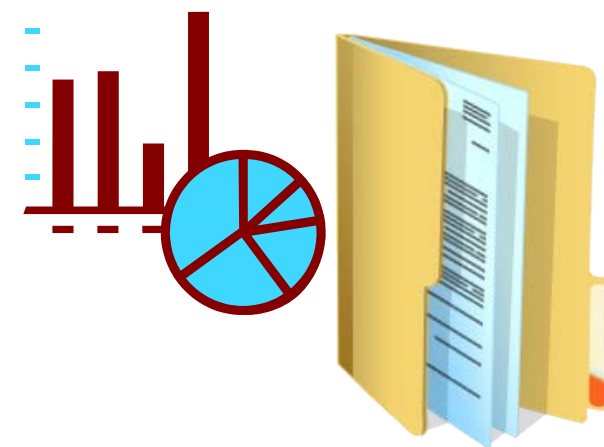
- Communications integrated into overall strategic plan
- Defined communications objective
  - Advances a programmatic goal
  - Realistic about what messaging can & can't do
  - Consider messaging + other programmatic components





# 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





# 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
- Etc.

## Organizational Goals

- Fundraise
  - Increase name recognition and reputation
  - Recruit volunteers
  - Increase participation in an event
- Etc.



## Specific communications objective

- Advances existing goal
- Hint: use “increase/decrease” to indicate change
- “Raise awareness” is not specific enough





# Specific audience (Hint: not “everybody”)



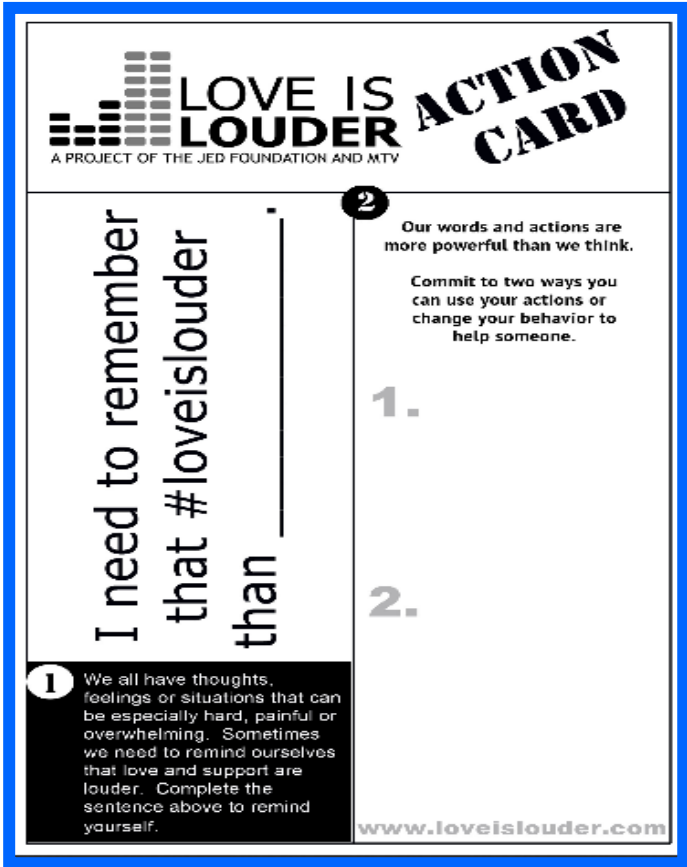
Direct appeal vs. reaching population of interest through another audience



# 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!





## Use audience research to build motivation

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### 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



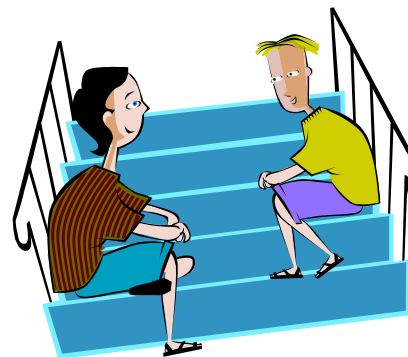
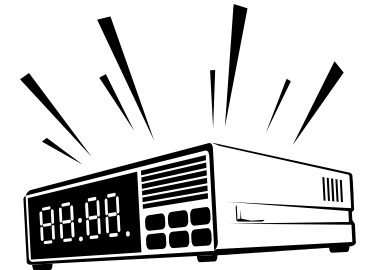
## Keeping Strategy in mind...

- 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*





# 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?





- 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**



# Action Alliance Framework for Successful Messaging

What is the Framework?

Strategy

Safety

Positive Narrative

Guidelines

Examples

## Sign On!

I am signing on as an: \*

- Individual  
 Organization

Name \*

Title

Permission to display name \*

- Yes, please feel free to display my *name only* on the Framework website.  
 Yes, please feel free to display my *name and organization* on the Framework website.  
 No, *do not display* my name or organization on the Framework website.

Company/Organization

\*\*\*Email address \*

## 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 42 content.



# Closing and Debrief



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