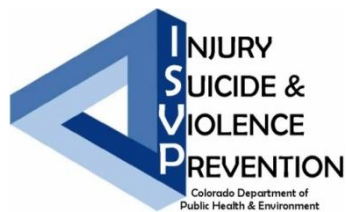


Suicide Prevention Key Messages Office of Suicide Prevention and Suicide Prevention Coalition of Colorado Media Training Session

Key Message Outcomes from Training

Tips to a Great Interview

August 2011



The Importance of Key Messages

Sharing consistent messages about suicide and suicide prevention, when working with the media and other stakeholders, **helps you to become proactive in changing the way suicide, mental health and the like are perceived.** When we all share similar messages and the media and other stakeholders hear these consistent messages over and over and over again, the messages begin to take hold in the minds of those who hear them and read them. When you hit the point where you think, “Wow. I have said the same thing over and over again. I should change my message up to keep people interested,” you have reached the moment that **what you are saying is just beginning to sink into the brains of those who hear it.** Repetition is good. **Consistent messaging shows that a well-organized, strategic voice is discussing the issue.**

The primary message provides an overview of your issue. That is, the primary message is a single statement that provides a summary of your challenge.

You can then support your primary message with secondary messages.

It is paramount that the primary message is supported by secondary messages so people do not try to put too much information into a single statement. The number of key messages are kept to a minimum for simplicity. That is, a 60-second elevator speech cannot say everything you do, support, want to be, etc. Further, well-supported explanations follow when an audience’s full attention is captured.

When considering key messages, consider the following:

- Key messages are geared toward the audience, not you. Speak to your listener(s) in ways that they will understand. This does not mean to “dumb down” what you are saying, but remember your audience does not share your expertise.
 - Avoid jargon and acronyms
 - Use stories and research for support
 - Watch their body language and facial expressions. Does it look like they understand what you are saying?
- Memorize your key messages but be able to use them in a way that works with the particular audience to be reached and your role with the organization.
- Keep key messages short and to-the-point.
- Support key messages with stories, details, facts, testimonials, etc., to expand on messaging as the audience’s attention is gained.

The following key messages were determined by approximately 25 participants in the media training on August 11, 2011. Participants were from a variety of backgrounds, including suicide prevention professionals, mental health professionals, survivors and others.

The messages were created to be used when discussing suicide prevention with the media, including print, radio, TV, Web, etc. However, these same messages should be used when discussing suicide and suicide prevention with other audiences as well, including community members, businesses leaders, policymakers, organizational donors, etc., to ensure that a consistent, shared message is delivered regarding suicide.

Primary Message

Suicide is a health issue that can be prevented.

Secondary Messages

There is hope. There is help.

Suicide is everyone's business.

Learn how to talk about suicide.

Asking for help [when you are feeling suicidal] is courageous.

Know the warning signs of suicide.

Make These Messages Stick Even More

As noted, key messages are simple, direct and short. As a survivor, suicide prevention expert, advocate, mental health professional – or whatever your role – you will want to **“personalize” your story.**

You want to work the primary and secondary messages into your discussion. Assume that those messages will garner additional questions. For example:

- Suicide is everyone’s business may lead to: “I don’t know anyone who has killed him/herself. Why should I care?”
- There is hope. There is help may lead to: “What kind of help?”
- Learn how to talk about suicide may lead to: “How do I know what to say?”
- Know the warning signs may lead to: “What are the warning signs?”
- Asking for help is courageous may lead to: “Tell me more about why asking for help can be difficult,” or “How can a person get someone to ask for help?”

The goal is to create a conversation with the person with whom you are speaking. Engage people so they want to learn more.

And when appropriate, you will be asked to share more about your organization, work, interest, advocacy effort, etc. You want to answer any questions appropriately to get your story out while keeping the primary and secondary messages in mind. Consider the following when you’re preparing for an interview:

What testimonials are appropriate?

What facts/statistics should you share?

Are you talking about youth or suicide in older people?

What should you share about that?

Is this about your specific county/town/region?

Are you representing a specific program?

Are you discussing an event?

What resources should I recommend?

Are there other stories this reporter may be interested in?

Keys to a Great Interview

Always remember: **Deliver messages; do not just answer questions.**

KISS: Keep it Simple, Stick (to the message)

Techniques to keep your interview seamless:

- **Flagging:** “The last point is particularly important...”
- **Hooking:** “In response to your question, the first point is..., the second point is..., the third...”
- **Bridging:** “I’m not an authority on that, but what’s really important here...”

Bridging techniques

Know your key messages and be prepared to bridge to them from any question.

Acknowledge and answer the question, then **bridge quickly to the key message** that best supports the answer.

Possible bridge lines

- That’s an interesting question, and I think I can best answer that by discussing the warning signs of suicide.
- You might also want to know that there is hope out there for people who feel suicidal.
- In addition, our research shows that asking for help is a sign of courage.
- Another way to look at this is from the standpoint of a business that has just lost a team member to suicide.
- I want to make sure you understand that we should talk about suicide and not be afraid to bring the topic out into the open.

Interview Do's

- Focus on your key messages.
- Anticipate the questions.
- Turn negative questions into positive ones.
- If you don't agree, say so.
- Take control.
- Your answer is your answer.
- Consider the audience.
- If you make a mistake, set it straight.
- Know your facts.
- Be yourself.
- Don't speculate.
- Don't let the reporter speculate.
- Don't argue.
- Avoid emotional responses.
- Don't repeat negative language.
- Avoid "off-the-record" statements.
- Avoid professional jargon.

Interview Don'ts

- Fail to listen.
- Follow instead of leading.
- Talk too much or too quickly.
- Give answers that are too short ("Yes" or "No").
- Fail to bridge to key messages.
- Speculate.
- Fill in the gaps in the conversation.
- Answer hypothetical questions.
- Fail to correct false facts or errors.