Lobby Question

When you tell people that you work in prevention…

- How do you describe what you do?
- What type of questions do they ask?
Why Is It So Hard to Talk About Prevention?

A Strategic Approach to Crafting Effective Messages

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Today’s Agenda

- Introduction: Why Does Framing Matter?
- Anticipating Public Thinking on Substance Use
- Elements of a Well-Framed Message
- Thinking About Evaluation
- Q&A
Please share...

What is an example of a prevention message that has resonated with you?

✓ What did you like about it?

✓ What made it memorable or persuasive?
FrameWorks is on a mission...

to advance the nonprofit sector's capacity
to frame the public discourse on social problems.
Why does framing matter?
What is a Frame?

Frames are sets of choices about how information is presented:

What to emphasize, how to explain it, and what to leave unsaid.
Which frame works? It’s an empirical question.
When a Frame “Works,” It Moves Thinking in Multiple Ways

**Knowledge**

Adolescent substance use is a public health issue and health care professionals have a role to play in addressing adolescents’ use of drug and alcohol.

**Attitudes**

Our society can work together to reduce adolescents’ use of drugs and alcohol.

**Policy Support**

Health care providers should be required to have conversations about substance use with adolescents during routine visits.
Frames Can Drive Broad Social Change

Communication → Discourse → Thinking → Policy

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This theory of change has been applied to many issues

- **National Human Services Assembly** - how to build support for a range of social services and reframe the conversation about supporting healthy development across the lifespan

- **Jacksonville Partnership for Child Health** - cross-sector, inter-agency network working to build support for child mental health as a key to reducing disparities in child outcomes

- **Nellie Mae Education Foundation** - How to engage New England in a more productive conversation on education reform, especially personalized learning

- **DentaQuest Foundation** - how to advance oral health as a public health issue
You need a communications strategy when...
You Say...They Think

AAA

Expert/Advocate

BBB

Public
Oral health problems could be completely eradicated through widespread prevention efforts.

Yes, if people would just brush, floss, and get to the dentist, they wouldn’t have bad teeth.
Adolescent substance use and experimentation is a serious issue that deserves serious attention. We need to focus a lot more of our attention on preventing use and making sure that we have better early intervention services.

Sure, experimentation might be a little bit risky—I mean we don’t want kids driving drunk—but really this is a normal part of being a teenager! I did this stuff when I was a kid and look how I turned out. Is this really that big of a deal?

You Say...They Think CULTURE!

Expert/Advocate

Public
Anticipating Public Thinking
Cultural Models Help us “Think Fast”

- Cultural models are cognitive shortcuts created through years of experience and expectation. They are taken-for-granted and largely automatic assumptions.

- People rely on cultural models to interpret, organize and make meaning out of all sorts of stimuli, including experiences, feelings, thoughts...and your communications.
A Peek Into the Swamp of Adolescent Substance Use
Adolescence
- Bounded Risk
- Perforated Family Bubble (Cognitive hole around brain development)

Experimentation with Alcohol & Marijuana
- Natural
- inevitable
- Acceptable
- Dangerous

What's in the *public* swamp of...

Adolescent Substance Use?

Effects
- Behavioral Effects (and nothing else)

Context
- Social Pressure
- Parental Normalization

Motivation
- Willpower
- Fatalism
- Scare Them Straight

Emotional Distress
- Escape
- Talk Therapy and Counseling
What cultural models, or assumptions, about adolescent substance use are active in this example?

It is common knowledge that the drinking age in the United States is 21. However, by age 13, one third of boys and about one fourth of girls have tasted alcohol. Even scarier, excessive alcohol consumption leads to more than 4,300 deaths annually among people under 21.

A) Substance use as escape
B) Social pressure
C) Use is normal; use is dangerous
Cultural Models: The Basis of Strategic Communications

Multiple models available

Some are more productive than others

Choose the cues that activate productive models
Building effective messages
Properties of a Well-Framed Message

• Responds to cultural models by dislodging unproductive assumptions about substance use

• Uses *values* to explain why this issue is important

• Connects the dots between prevention, positive or negative outcomes, and public health

• Builds a sense of efficacy without relying on a crisis tone
Values

A broad category of cherished cultural ideals: enduring beliefs that orient individuals’ attitudes and behaviors.

Values help to establish why an issue matters and what is at stake.

As a frame element, values do the work of:

- Priming people to take a collective approach
- Tapping emotions that work for policy thinking: curiosity, concern, and can-do

ME vs. WE
Field Notes: Prevention as a value

• Focuses attention on early interventions; early interventions can save the health care system money in the long term.

• Limitations:
  o Doesn’t counteract assumption that substance use is natural or inevitable
  o Participants still focus on the role of families
  o Doesn’t help participants see medical settings as appropriate places to address substance use
Field Notes: Other Values

• **Ingenuity/Innovation:** To tackle the challenging problem of adolescent alcohol and drug use and abuse, our country needs innovative methods and a forward-thinking approach. Seems to help participants the efficacy of innovative programs.

• **Public Health:** As a nation, we must face the fact that adolescent drug and alcohol use and abuse is a public health problem *and respond accordingly*. Helps participants see health at a population level rather than an individual level.
Consider Messages’ Explanatory Power
Framing Practice
Poll Question

How would you rate this image’s explanatory power?

A. Clearly explains the connection between smoking cessation and health.

B. I can see a connection, but I would fill in more information.

C. What’s the problem with walking?
Place facts in a frame
Framed with “facts”

Teens who spent the most unsupervised time with peers were 39 percent more likely to smoke cigarettes, 47 percent more likely to drink alcohol and 71 percent more likely to smoke marijuana than average. Those with the most paid employment were 46 percent more likely to use tobacco and 28 percent more likely to drink. Organized time, such as arts classes at school, religious activities outside school, and community volunteer work, had a very modest protective effect. Kids with the most time in these activities showed a 7 percent to 18 percent lower than average risk of drinking or smoking.

What backfires? Why?

• Statistics alone are not explanatory, and audiences use dominant assumptions to interpret them

• Downplays the role that protective factors can have in addressing or prevention substance use
What’s Changed

- Opens with an orientation to what’s at stake - starts a few steps back.

- Presents prevention as feasible

- Offers an interpretation of prevalence data

To solve the problem of substance misuse in adulthood, we can take steps to prevent substance use in adolescence. For example, activities that build strong protective relationships with adults, like art classes at school, religious activities outside school, or volunteer work, can decrease the likelihood that a child drinks or smokes. In fact, kids with the most time in these activities showed a lower than average risk of drinking or smoking. On the other hand, teens who spend the most unsupervised time with peers are 39% more likely to smoke cigarettes, 47% more likely to drink alcohol, and 71% more likely to use marijuana. Our communities don’t have to take these kinds of rates for granted - increasing the level of organized time with adults can make a difference.
Explain how prevention works
We are joining forces with other advocates statewide to make drug and alcohol prevention and counseling widely available to young people...

Our network of advocates is working together to help young people reach their full potential by making supports for wellbeing more available. Removing barriers to treatment starts with early detection and screenings. More of our youth and families will have greater access to health practitioners when we can catch problems early...
How would you use this introduction in your communications? Offer any comments and examples in the chat box.

Our network of advocates is working together to help young people reach their full potential by making supports for wellbeing more available. Removing barriers to treatment starts with early detection and screenings. More of our youth and families will have greater access to health practitioners when we can catch problems early...
Work in Progress:
Find Effective Metaphors
FrameWorks study of public thinking in Canada found that people believed that addiction prevention was a matter of character, and recovery was a matter of willpower.

Comparing effective treatment to river engineering built support for prevention and multi-modal treatment.

You can see the study on our Addiction issue page.
Reviewing Messages
Check for Unproductive Cues

- “It’s inevitable”, “typical teenager”, “natural”, “of course they’ll try it”, “hopeless”, “vulnerable”
- “Battle”, “struggle”, “spiral”
- “Willpower”, “find the strength”
Check for Frame Elements That Shape Understanding

**TONE** establishes the issue as explanatory and reasonable and for “everyone,” not just those who already agree with the point of view being expressed.

**VALUES** remind people of what’s at stake, helping them connect their existing ideals and principles to an issue.

**EXPLANATORY LANGUAGE** helps people understand how social issues work and reason more effectively about public solutions. Illustrate and illuminate concepts by focusing on aspects that deepen understanding, motivate engagement, and drive policy support.
What is *Prevention* Paired with?

- A value statement that explains why this is important (e.g., *pragmatism*, *efficacy*, *public health*, *ingenuity/innovation*)

- Explanation about what prevention does and how it works

- New ways to consider substance use: a part of public health, aided by protective factors
What Can be Evaluated?

- Communications strategies (e.g., behavior change, policy support, attitude shifts, social salience, policy change)
- Communications tactics
- Dissemination and how well/far your work spreads
A Few Final Thoughts on Evaluation

- Once you establish goals, establish objectives to meet along the way. Plan when to measure, and what to measure as progress.
- Establish a baseline.
- Think about messengers and recipients of messages. Remember, messengers are also a frame element.
Quick Recap

Framing is about making choices about language. We all need to frame.

Anticipating how a message may be interpreted helps plan how to frame messages.

Remember you are not your audience. Be explanatory and think carefully about values. Fill in the blanks about how prevention functions as a solution.

Well-framed messages are a part of any communications strategy.
Thank you.
Questions or comments? Get in touch!

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P.S. We will make this presentation available as a PDF.

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If you have questions or comments, please don’t hesitate to contact:

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