

Developing Effective Substance Use Prevention Messaging

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Central East (HHS Region 3)

PTTC

Prevention Technology Transfer Center Network
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Prevention messaging seeks to change behavior by inspiring hope and providing information on the risks of substance use. Implementing well-designed, culturally responsive messaging alongside other evidence-based prevention strategies can increase the effectiveness of each. However, the need for more and better messaging is clear: perceptions of harm for many substances have decreased in recent years and the number of youth who see or hear prevention messages outside school is declining.¹

PURPOSE OF MESSAGING IN PREVENTION²

Reducing substance use requires behavioral and environmental change. Prevention messaging can help by:

- Increasing perceptions of substance use risk
- Changing social norms
- Reinforcing positive behaviors
- Increasing support for prevention services

GETTING THE MESSAGE OUT³

Many communication methods are available to prevention. It's important to understand who you're targeting, so you know **where** to place your message. Common strategies include:



Social media



Phone and tablet apps



Print media



Speaking with caregivers, peers, and trusted professionals



Public service announcements



Text Messaging

THE NEED FOR CULTURAL HUMILITY

How a message is delivered is just as important as **who** delivers it. Incorporating [cultural humility](#) into messaging will ensure that you reach the right populations, obtain buy-in from the community, and respect cultural values and norms. By following this mindset and developing collaborative relationships with community members and peers with lived experience, you can better craft effective, culturally resonant messages.

Reflect on the messages you create, and ask yourself if they are:^{4,5,6}

- **Relevant**
- **Understandable**
- **Actionable**
- **Accessible**
- **Timely**
- **Credible**
- **Trustworthy**



Visual design is a key element of message development. In that spirit, here are prevention messaging tips designed as a website help page.

TIPS FOR CREATING A PREVENTION MESSAGING CAMPAIGN 7,8

- Know the issue inside and out
- Focus your campaign's goals and objectives
- Know the attitudes, beliefs, and environment of your audience
- Test your materials so they resonate with your audience
- Evaluate your success and know when to pivot!

FOR ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON PREVENTION MESSAGING, CHECK OUT THESE TOOLS:

[Prevention Tools: What Works, What Doesn't](#)

[CDC's Health Communications Playbook](#)

PUTTING TOGETHER SOME PREVENTION MESSAGING MATERIALS 11,12

I need help developing prevention messaging materials!

Do:

- Frame prevention as a health issue
- Use real-life examples
- Identify potential consequences of use
- Engage peers as messengers
- Deglamorize substance use

Don't:

- Lecture, guilt, or shame
- Normalize use
- Use scare tactics
- Dramatize substance use

This is super helpful. Thanks!

NOTES

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