
Steps for Developing Key Messages

- 1. Gather background information.** Review content and effectiveness of existing relevant materials used in your context as well as researching effective GBV messaging used in other parts of the world. Reach out to other organizations or groups such as the [GBV Prevention Network](#) to see what recent information has been produced.
- 2. Create a message design team.** Identify members of the GBV team, key stakeholders including community leaders, women, and girls' representatives, etc.) and other appropriate people to help design messages, talking points and communication materials. Set time aside to host a design workshop so that GBV practitioners and stakeholders can come together and participate in message development and design process. Where possible, invite graphic artists and/or media experts to the design workshop who can contribute ideas and perspective related to reaching audiences.
- 3. Determine the core content.** Using the information gathered and desired changes identified, identify content that should be included in key information, education, and communication materials.

To help determine core content, ask:

- What changes or actions are we seeking in relation to GBV prevention?
- Why should the community take this action?
- What core content and actions are most compelling or should be prioritized?
- Which messages are most appropriate for leader to communicate?
- Which should be avoided or addressed at a future date?

- 4. Draft key message.** Effective messages are clear, accurate and appealing. Each message should make one or two points. Messages should be framed in terms of the benefit. Refer to the following message design checklist to help guide message development.⁶

Keep the messages simple:

- Make it easy to understand
- Make it short (simple and to the point-less is more)
- Avoid jargon (use known language and terminology)
- Keep focused on a specific problem
- Keep it action-oriented and solution focused
- Make the message or talking points appealing and interesting

Know the audience:

- Address the audience's values, norms and beliefs.
- Address the audience's needs and priorities as they relate to GBV.
- Consider the tone that most appeals to the audience.

⁶ Adapted from Compass, How-to-Guide; How to Design SBCC Messages

Invite the audience to reach their own conclusions:

- Do not present every detail.
- Allow the audience to use their own thought processes.

Present positive alternatives or solutions:

- Keep messages focused on the benefits or positive behaviors rather than using scare tactics or dramatizing violence for greater impact.
- Provide positive alternative behaviors, attitudes, and values.

Lastly, appeal to **people's emotions**. The goal of making messages “emotional” is to make the audience care – because that is when they are most likely to take action.⁷ The best way to do that is to appeal to the things that really matter to them or motivate them.

5. Pretest messages. Share the key messages with a small group of people for their reaction and opinions. Prepare test versions of the messages. (See **Tip Sheet: Pretesting Communication**)

- Pretest messages.
The goal of pretesting is to answer the following questions:
 - Is the material/message easily and correctly understood?
 - Are the pictures and the language culturally and socially appropriate?
 - Is the message relevant to the target audience?
 - Is there too much or too little information?
 - Is the source appropriate and credible?
 - Does the target audience like the material?
 - Would the target audience take action based on the material?
 - Would they talk about it with their friends?
 - Is there anything that could vex/offend the audience or someone in their community?
- Revise the messages based on pretest results and the teams' opinions.
- Finalize messages in preparation for developing materials.

People can quickly become confused by mixed messages and saturated by multiple activities targeting an array of different issues. Coordinating with the other sectors will allow for the development of a cohesive and holistic plan that may be better accepted by community leaders.

⁷ People in Need. (May 2017). *The Behavior Change Toolkit for International Development Practitioners*.