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Message Matters: Talking About Health Equity

We know it is possible to <u>prevent</u> sexual abuse, assault, and harassment. For many years, the National Sexual Violence Resource's (NSVRC) work has focused on messaging strategies to communicate that sexual violence is preventable and help others picture what prevention can look like (National Sexual Violence Resource Center [NSVRC], n.d. a).

As our work has focused more on <u>community-level prevention</u> strategies and approaches beyond just changing individual attitudes and behaviors, we have heard from our partners how challenging it can be to talk with their communities about health equity (NSVRC, 2024).

What is Health Equity? Why Does it Matter?

Health equity means increasing opportunities for everyone to live the healthiest life possible, no matter who we are, where we live, or how much money we make (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation [RWJF], n.d.). Improving the health of our communities means recognizing not everyone has the same needs. People start from different places and may need different kinds of support. To create equitable opportunities for optimal health, we must remove obstacles and increase access to education, income, employment, community safety, and social support (NSVRC, 2024).

To learn more about best practices in <u>prevention messaging</u> check out NSVRC's tools and resources (NSVRC, n.d. b).

How Can We Create Effective Messages About Health Equity?

When creating messaging (NSVRC, 2018), we:

- Think specifically about who we want to reach (our audience) and what we want to get across (our message)
- Zoom out to a "**landscape**" view that looks beyond individual behavior to show the role of society and systems
- Use plain language, especially for insider terms
 We learned that terms like "sexual violence" and "prevention" are jargon

that can confuse and alienate. Many related concepts are difficult for the communities we are trying to reach to understand.

In this resource, we are applying strategies to talk with our communities about health equity by aligning our messages with the values of specific audiences we are trying to reach (NSVRC, 2018).

How Values Can Help Us Communicate

Values are the beliefs and principles that guide our behaviors, decisions, and actions. Values share what individuals and groups see as important and right. When crafting messages, we can start from a place of connection by identifying what our audience values. This resource gives examples of how to use the values that are relevant to the communities you are working with to reach them with your message.

How to Use This Resource

- Think about your audience. Who are you communicating with?
- **Identify a shared value.** Many communities and people hold many different values. Choose one and strategize how to frame your message with a focus on what our audience values.
- What, why, and how? Remember the goal of what you are trying to communicate, why it matters, and different ways you can share this message. Some sample messages can be used as-is, but you may also want to customize what you say or how you say it.
- **Reflect.** How did it feel to talk about health equity in a different way? What was effective? What would you want to change for next time? Consider writing down phrases, terms, and examples that got through to your audience.
- **Keep practicing.** Share your message insights with coworkers and others you know are having these conversations in their communities. What do you think you can simplify, adapt, and improve?

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If your audience values **SAFETY**, you might say:

- "This work is an important part of creating safety, respect, and dignity for all. Everyone should feel safe in their community."
- "Our neighborhoods/communities/children are safest when everyone is able to meet their basic needs."
- "We are all more connected than we think. Policies that support thriving communities increase safety for all people."

Focus on: how systems work together using success stories; connections to other important topics (like opioid use, robust public transportation, suicide, teen dating violence, alcohol and tobacco use, affordable food and housing, bullying, accessibility, HIV prevention, and economic well-being); how policies and policymakers contribute to promoting the conditions that are needed to create safety for all.

Communities that may share this value: policymakers, law enforcement, parent groups, schools, faith communities

Moving to a landscape view could look like: moving from an individual view of personal safety to a broader view of safety as a community goal and responsibility.

"Safety isn't just about looking out for ourselves. Looking out for others makes us all safer. In safe communities, no one gets left behind."

If your audience values HEALTH, you might say:

- "We can work together to help people live their fullest lives."
- "Sexual violence creates burdens on healthcare systems and can be exhausting to deal with. But we can change our systems to help everyone access the care they need to be healthy."
- "There are so many things that impact our health. Working to prevent sexual violence can make a big impact on people's health physically, mentally, emotionally, and long term."
- "We all want our kids to be safe, healthy, and thrive. Unfortunately, violence impacts everyone and all communities in some way. Violence can lead to worse health outcomes. Parents, caregivers, and schools can be instrumental in creating a positive shift in our culture."

Focus on: there are many things beyond our personal choices that influence our health; our personal health choices are shaped by our environment; there are many different types of health; so many things influence someone's ability to be healthy

Communities that may share this value: health care, parents and caregivers, community members, people who are not connected with sexual violence as a topic of concern, those who are working in any aspect of health improvement

Moving to a landscape view could look like: moving from a view of individual health behaviors to a more widescale view of all the things that can impact health.

"Health starts with access to resources to meet our basic needs and contributes to physical, mental, emotional and social well-being. It's not just about recognizing the negative health impacts of sexual abuse, assault, and harassment. It's critical to recognize that our efforts to prevent abuse are promoting the health and well-being of everyone in our community.

If your audience values CONNECTEDNESS, you might say:

- "Together, we can connect communities through understanding, learning, and action."
- "Our community looks out for each other."
- "Social connection and belonging are human needs that are tied to our overall health, wellbeing, and survival."
- "To protect the well-being of our community, policymakers can promote the conditions that are needed to build thriving & connected communities."
- "Ensuring everyone has access to resources is about looking out for ourselves, our neighbors, and our family. It's about protecting the well-being of our community and supporting each other."

Focus on: belonging; community supporting and looking out for each other; shared responsibility and social connections

Communities that may share this value: young people/youth, rural communities, program staff

Moving to a landscape view could look like: moving from focusing on differences to similarities and shared humanity

"Too often we focus on the differences that divide us rather than recognizing our shared humanity and connection to one another. You do not need to agree with someone to be able to be a caring neighbor and community member. We all have a core need to connect with others, and when we focus on creating communities where everyone knows that they belong, we are all safer."

If your audience values JUSTICE AND FAIRNESS, you might say:

- "Everyone deserves fair access to things that make us healthy, and you can be part of the solution."
- "You matter! What YOU do, and the choices YOU make matter. We all have the power to make choices that impact our own lives and the lives of others."
- "We should all have the ability to be as healthy as we want, and we can work together to make this a reality."

For this group, focus on the <u>difference between equity and equality</u> - sometimes a solution for one person may not be a solution for someone else. Different needs call for different amounts or types of resources (NSVRC, 2023).

Communities that may hold share value: young people, organizing groups, policymakers, law enforcement.

Moving to a landscape view could look like: instead of thinking about giving everyone the same thing, true fairness means that everyone gets what they need.

"Individuals and communities are all different, so it makes sense that we might have different points of view about what fairness and justice look like. That's why it is so important to listen to the lived experiences of others and recognize ways our own point of view is shaped by our history and lived experiences. Other people or communities may have more or different needs to create fairness and justice, and that is okay."

If your audience values CARE AND COMPASSION, you might say:

- "Your work is an important component of creating safety, respect, and dignity for all."
- "Witnessing and/or experiencing violence has the potential to be lifealtering. No one in our community deserves to struggle and suffer."
- "Through respect, connection, and shared responsibility, we can work towards a future where sexual assault is not tolerated in our communities."
- "We can say we care about each other, but it is just as important to show that care through actions that make life better for everyone."

Focus on consideration for others and their experiences, dignity of each person

Communities that may share this value: program staff, faith communities, healthcare providers

Moving to a landscape view could look like: showing care is about building supports that everyone needs, and we don't have to wait until after abuse has happened to show it! Showing care is also about building the supports that are needed for everyone to achieve their health goals.

"Everyday expressions of care and compassion help us to model the respect and dignity we all deserve. We can show we care about others and our communities when we play a role in preventing sexual abuse, assault, and harassment."

If your audience values **KEEPING TRADITION**, you might say:

- "Ensuring everyone has access to resources is about looking out for ourselves, our neighbors, and our family. It's about protecting the well-being of our community and upholding the values of fairness and support for each other."
- "When we look at our traditional messages, they tell us the importance of looking after one another."
- "Our community has always believed in taking care of one another stories like [fill in the blank] show it."
- "We have the resources within our traditional teachings."
- "Culture is prevention and prevention is within us. ALL indigenous people have been impacted in some way or another by sexual assault, but this is not the way of our culture."

Focus on: respect, self-determination, living our values

Communities that may share this value: tribal communities, rural communities, school communities, neighborhoods, faith communities

Moving to a landscape view could look like: traditional values are more aligned with the essential elements of health equity, like increasing opportunities to achieve health goals, than opposed.

"We can embrace the ways our culture's values and teachings show us to live with respect and connection toward all, and understand that preventing sexual abuse, assault, and harassment is a way to protect and preserve tradition."

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