

CREATING MESSAGE CONCEPTS ABOUT THE MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF MEN AND BOYS OF COLOR

Strong messages are powerful tools communities can use to strengthen and focus discussions around the mental health and wellbeing of men and boys. To be effective, however, messages should be shaped in ways that reflect and promote cultural and linguistic competency, encourage people to engage with supportive services, and are relevant and compelling to the communities you want to reach.

Whether you are recruiting people to attend an event, or seeding conversations on your social media and other communications channels, powerful messaging can elevate your materials and marketing efforts. In addition, strong messages can be used to help men and boys give presentations to community leaders and decision-makers, as well as develop relationships with reporters and members of the media to share their stories.

As you develop messages, put yourself in your audience's shoes to better understand how they might process those messages. Make sure you know what action you want them to take as a result of hearing your messages.





KEEP THE FOLLOWING CONSIDERATIONS TOP OF MIND:

AUDIENCE

- **Who is** your intended audience (e.g., youth and young adults, family members, community stakeholders and decision-makers, policymakers, etc.)?
- **Do they** have any experience with the mental and wellbeing of men and boys?
- **How familiar** are they with the topic of mental health and wellbeing of men and boys in general?
- **Are they aware** of what your organization is doing around this topic? (NOTE: If you have multiple audiences, organize your messages by audiences; if you have only one audience, it may be more helpful to organize them by topic.)
- **What other issues** are competing for their attention?

OBJECTIVE AND PURPOSE

- **What is** the purpose of these messages?
- **Why do** your messages matter to your audience/how do they affect the audience personally?
- **How will** the messages support your organization's communications goals?
- **What is** the action that you want your audience to take (e.g., engage in services and supports, increase awareness of your programs, promote your events and share information about your work, etc.)?

FORMAT

- **What are** the best ways to reach your intended audiences?
- **How does** your audience prefer to receive information (e.g., social media, newsletters, emails, website, in-person events, other online resources, etc.)? Do they prefer visuals and graphics?
- **How often** does your audience like to receive communication? Weekly, monthly?
- **What sources** do your audience trust? (e.g., Community organizations, certain individuals in your community?)
- **How will** your messages be shaped to reflect these preferences?

DEVELOP A SINGLE OVERRIDING COMMUNICATIONS OBJECTIVE (SOCO)

It is important to maximize the opportunity you have to present your messages to your intended audience. This is where a "SOCO"— a single overriding communications objective — comes in.

While you can have multiple messages, all of them should support your SOCO. As a result, there will be no doubt in the audience's mind about what you stand for and how you want them to think and behave. SOCOs will help you keep your messaging brief and crystal clear, which is important since only a small percentage of what you say or communicate is likely to be retained.



TESTING YOUR MESSAGES

Testing your messages with individuals from your intended audience can ensure that what you are trying to say around the mental health and wellbeing of men and boys resonates.

Examples of those you might ask to review your messages include:

- Young adult and family groups
- Board members and other stakeholders
- Community partners, including those working in education, social justice, military, and faith-based settings
- Mental health experts and practitioners
- Youth council members
- Funders and financial contributors
- Community business leaders
- Local policymakers
- Staff from your organization

Once you have identified these individuals, ask them:

- What was your reaction to the messages? Would you change anything to make them more relevant?
- How appropriate are the messages, formats, and objectives?
- Do the messages use any offensive or inappropriate language around mental health, mental wellbeing, or suicide prevention?
- Which messages would you be most and least likely to share with a friend? Why?
- Do the messages support Making Connections? Promote mental health? Mental wellbeing?
- What other changes would you recommend to improve the messages?

IDEAS FOR MESSAGE CONCEPTS

- Feature positive, helpful information by offering facts about strategies that promote mental health and wellbeing.
- Reference success stories of men and boys who benefitted from community prevention efforts.
- Include personal stories from those in your community who are thriving because of the Making Connections Initiative.
- Mention timely news articles and offer your organizational perspective to demonstrate your subject matter expertise on the mental wellbeing of men's and boys' issues.
- Highlight your community's rich cultural aspects and how the work you are doing within your organization is culturally responsive.



Making Connections for Mental Health and Wellbeing Among Men and Boys is a national initiative to strengthen communities to promote mental wellbeing. Grantee organizations and community-based coalitions that support men and boys of color; military service members; and veterans and their families in rural, urban, and suburban communities across the U.S. are leading this important work. Making Connections grantees are implementing community-level prevention strategies that reflect community priorities and needs and draw on each community's culture, knowledge, and assets.