“The Power of Tailored Messaging”

Framing messages: tips for normalizing and destigmatizing communications around sexual health education

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Every communication is an opportunity to garner support, influence behavior and create a safe space.

* Personally like to frame challenges as opportunities
* Difficult topics are an opportunity to learn and be creative, for example

# Establish your goals

* Positively influence health-related decisions around HIV and sexually transmitted infections
  + reduce transmission
  + increase treatment of HIV/STIs, when needed
* Reach audiences in rural Alaska
  + share resources
  + increase access to care
* Particularly interested in influencing behavior of youth and young adult males

Identify your primary audienceAlaska Native youth and young adults ages 13-35

## Know your audience

* While everyone on our team is over the age of 18, some of our team members fall within our desired audience
* While all of our team members currently live in an urban setting, some of team members have lived in a variety of community types in Alaska – remote regional hubs (small towns) and villages
* Some, if not all, of team members have relatives who live in remote Alaska – familiar with limited access to resources
* Actively engaged in local conversations, news, current events, etc.

## Identify your key messages

* Medically accurate, judgement-free, inclusive sex education
  + HIGH PRIORITIES: HIV, Syphilis, Gonorrhea, Chlamydia
  + Normalize sexual health practices that promote wellness
  + Encourage youth discussions with caring adults and sexual partners about difficult conversations
  + Increase inclusivity for LGBTQ2S+ audiences
* Intersectionality of disease and the importance of providing holistic health and wellness education
  + Promote healthy relationships, and defining what that can look like and mean
  + Raise awareness of protective factors
    - Culture: Instill pride
  + Raise awareness about mental health skills/healing
    - Affirmations
    - Consent/Protecting boundaries
  + Promote behavioral health resources
* Resources available that empower people to control their own health outcomes for HIV/STDs/STIs
  + Safer-sex supplies across Alaska with the intention of decreasing rates of HIV/STDs/STIs
    - Condoms
    - STI self-testing kits
    - HIV self-testing kits
  + Safer-substance use supplies and information to Alaskans with the intention of decreasing rates of HIV
    - Naloxone kits
    - Harm reduction kits
    - Safe medication disposal systems

# Guidelines

## Strengths-based approach

* Person-first language
* Nurture cultural connections
* Provide a safe place to learn
* Encourage/positively reinforce youth

## Tone

* Motivational/uplifting
* Compassionate
* Thorough without condescension
* Allow space for different values/priorities – avoid preaching
* Humorous – lean into Native Humor

## Culturally based

* Language
* Land (including living things like plants and animals)
* Activities
* Food
* Values
* Tradition
* Knowledge bearers (especially Elders)

## Credibility

* Refer back to iknowmine.org as much as possible
* Cite reputable sources
* Include attribution (image/content credit)

# What does this look like in practice?

## Recognize your bias and other limitations

* Our team has limited resources: staff time, budgets, no designated graphic designer
* We do not have access to Alaska-specific market research
  + I know through my work in advertising campaigns that there are about 525-618,000 Facebook users and 128-157,000 TikTok users in Alaska.
* Our social media followership is not strong in numbers, nor does it reflect our desired audiences
* All our team members are over age 18
* We have no masculine-identifying team members
* We do not have strong knowledge in gender identity or gender-affirming care
* Highly recommend NMAC’s ESCALATE training, which focuses on destigmatizing HIV education and health care practices (many of our team members have attended this training)
  + “ESCALATE” trains and empowers participants to recognize and address HIV stigma within every level of the Ryan White HIV AIDS Program.  
    https://www.nmac.org/programs/thecenter/escalate/
* We have to avoid politicizing topics in our communications

## Sex worker rights post

* epidemiological approach vs destigmatizing approach
* The initial draft included statistics such as how much more at-risk sex workers are to acquire HIV compared to the ‘general population’
* This type of information tends to oversimplify complex stories
* We don’t want to just write compassionately, but we also want to evoke compassion

## Valentine’s seals post

* Timely – posted ahead of Valentine’s Day, while people might be making plans
* Brief reminder about consent and safety
* Inclusive language – avoid monogamous heteronormativity
  + Barrier methods
  + Birth control doesn’t always apply
  + The reality is many people have multiple sexual partners for many reasons

## Vulva health posts

* Spoke with a clinician who shared that many people are not familiar with their own anatomy, which presents a problem when discussing STI symptoms – people don’t know what their own vulvas look like, so are unaware of whether symptoms arise
* When planning visuals, we’re caught between being a conservative company and showing medically accurate information
  + A representative graphic could be viewed as too ‘graphic’
  + Using the usual symbols, such as fruit or flowers, impacts medical accuracy
  + Using fruit and flowers as visuals conflicts with our goals of normalizing body odors and follows gender stereotypes

## Post-Valentine’s self-love post

* Timely – posted just after Valentine’s Day, which focuses on romantic, partnered love/affection
  + Be considerate of varied experiences
* Normalize masturbation and sex positivity
* Example of citing a post in social media

## Kink & Consent post

* Program manager really wanted to a post in observance of International Fetish Day
* Example of focusing on the communication goals we set for ourselves
* Opportunity to delve into consent nuances in an inclusive way

## Oral Dams post

* Chose to lean into humor
* Had fun and it was a pretty smooth process to develop

## Recorded Session

Check out the *Talking is Power!* (3/8/23) recorded session on: <https://www.healthynativeyouth.org/resources-search/?_sft_resource_audience=community-of-practice-presentations>

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