

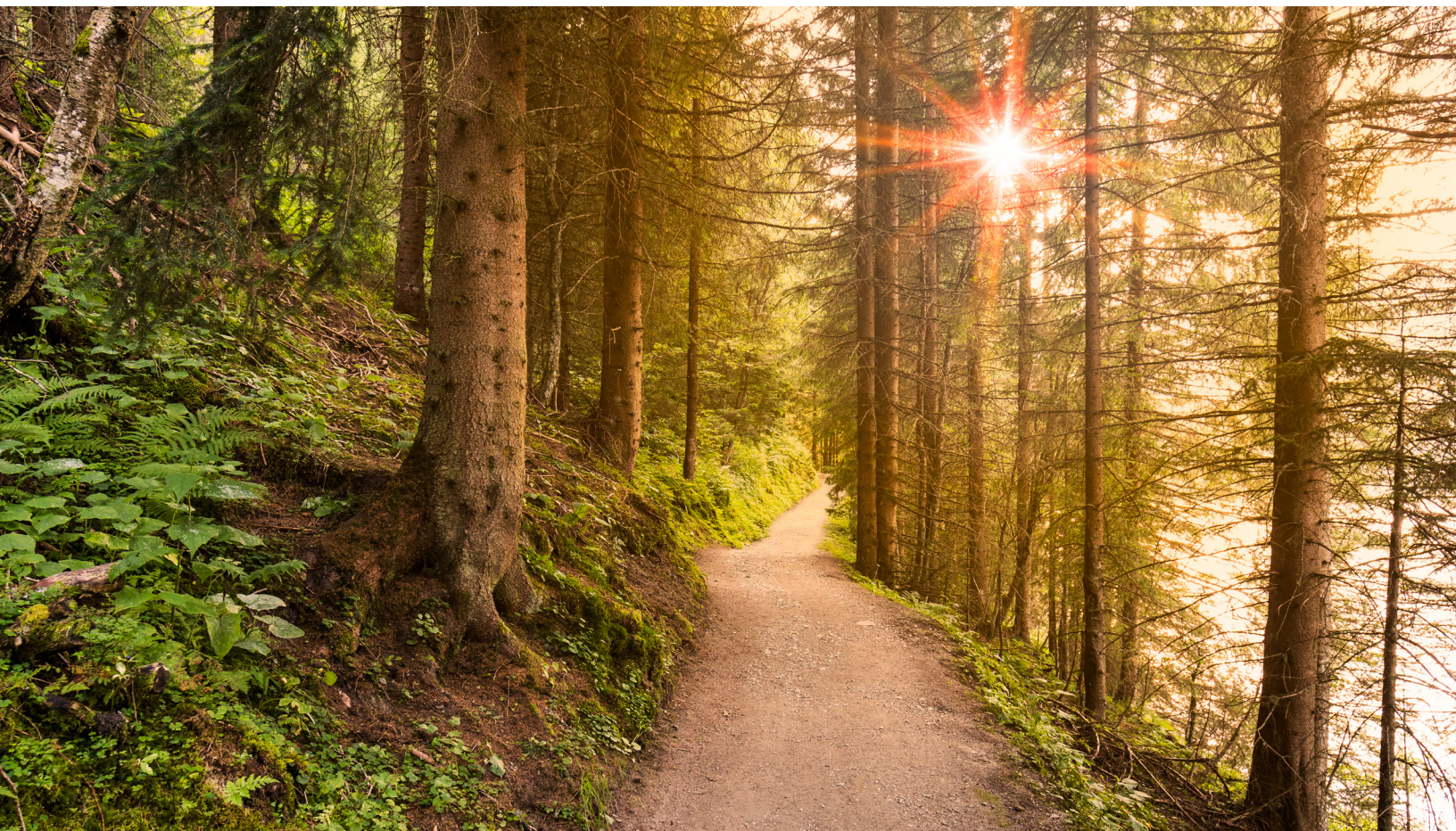


Where we're going and where we've been

Making the case for preventing sexual violence

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berkeley **media** studiesgroup

Preface

Our work brings us into contact with the realities of sexual violence every day – including the reality that prevention is possible. We know sexual harassment, abuse, and assault can be prevented at all stages of life. We know each of us has a stake in building and maintaining safe, stable, thriving communities. But if that’s true — and we know that it is — then why do we always seem to be talking to ourselves?

Why does prevention get lost?

We know that prevention is a multifaceted, layered and sustained endeavor, and it can be difficult for people to grasp that sustained, small actions can result in big cultural changes. Prevention is difficult to communicate, and thus, it often remains unseen and misunderstood. As a partnership with over 70 years of collective experience, RALIANCE believes we’ve never been closer to a cultural breakthrough.

One big reason prevention gets lost is communication. We embarked on this project with the Berkley Media Studies Group (BMSG) because we knew something needed to change in the way our field communicated about sexual violence – and what to do about it. We partnered with BMSG to develop message strategies to get us closer to this destination.

The way we communicate about sexual violence can make a big difference in how our intended audiences understand the problem and what to do about it. Making the case for prevention demands that we go beyond the scope of the problem and articulate what to do about it — not just after the fact, but also what needs to happen to prevent abuse and assault in the first place. Preventing sexual violence across the lifespan demands collective action from everyone – including, but not limited to, sexual violence prevention experts. Our communication needs to reach beyond our own field of experts and resonate with public audiences. That, in turn, means we need to think differently about language and framing our topic.

So how can we get better at communicating about prevention? As we moved ahead in our journey with BMSG, we quickly realized how important it is to illustrate what prevention can

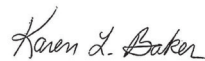
look like. We need to show that it goes beyond education and individual behavior change, and illustrate that prevention can mean changes to how the institutions and organizations that make up our society operate – because those organizations and institutions have the power to create safe environments and help change expectations of behavior. That’s illustrated beautifully in a story we heard from a colleague who works with people who have committed sexual abuse in child-serving organizations. She recounted meeting, in the course of her research, someone who had been found guilty of abuse in all but two of the institutions where he’d worked. During an interview, she asked him what made those two sites different. He said he only touched children at organizations he felt he could get away with it. And at those two sites, he realized immediately that everything — from the content of his orientation materials to the way the buildings were laid out — told him he wouldn’t be able to get away with it there.

That story was a lightbulb moment for us. We wondered: How can we inspire leaders at every level — as well as the general public, funders, voters, and all the people who need to be part of preventing sexual violence — to make every organization or institution a place where no one thinks they can get away with sexual assault or abuse?

The book you are about to read is the end result of years of work to answer that question. It was made possible with generous support from the National Football League. Their support demonstrates the leadership needed across every sector to end sexual harassment, abuse, and assault. The issue of sexual violence impacts every industry in our society, and each one can do their part.

Thank you for joining us as we continue on this journey.

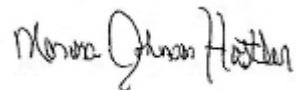
In Solidarity,



Karen Baker



Sandra Henriquez



Monika Johnson Hostler

RALIANCE Managing Partners

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, we want to express our deep gratitude to RALIANCE for making this guide possible. RALIANCE is a national partnership dedicated to ending sexual violence in one generation. RALIANCE's key partners are the National Sexual Violence Resource Center; PreventConnect, a national project of the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA); and the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence (NAESV), with a multimillion-dollar seed investment by the National Football League.

It would take many, many pages to list all of the reasons we are grateful to the RALIANCE team. Suffice it to say, for their ongoing dedication, their content knowledge, their insights, and their unflagging commitment, we thank them all, especially Karen Baker, Laura Palumbo, Kristen Houser, Julie Patrick, David Lee, Sandra Henriquez, Brian Pinero, Terri Poore, Monika Johnson Hostler, and former staff person Lindsay Mapp. Thanks also to the Glover Park Group.

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Finally, we want to express how honored we are for the opportunity to connect with and be part of the passionate, committed, and brilliant community of people engaged every day in the hard and real work of preventing sexual harassment, abuse, and assault across the lifespan. It has been a true pleasure and privilege to be on this journey with you.



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Who we are

Berkeley Media Studies Group (BMSG), a project of the Public Health Institute, is dedicated to expanding advocates' ability to improve the systems and structures that determine health. BMSG analyzes news to learn how the media characterize public health and social justice issues, and harnesses lessons from that research to help advocates become strong voices in national conversations about health, safety, and justice. Since its founding in 1993, BMSG has partnered with a wide variety of organizations and individuals to build the capacity of public health professionals and community decision-makers to achieve common health goals.

RALIANCE is a national partnership committed to ending sexual violence in one generation. RALIANCE was founded in 2015 by the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence (NAESV); the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC); and PreventConnect, a national project of the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault (CALCASA), through a multimillion-dollar seed investment by the National Football League. Every day, RALIANCE makes prevention possible by advancing research, influencing policy, supporting innovative programs, and helping leaders establish safe workplaces and strong communities.



Introduction

“And so my story begins . . .”
- Daniel Defoe

The story of the guide you are reading now began with a question: “What will it take to reframe sexual violence to focus on prevention?”

This guide is the result of the five-year journey to answer that question, led by Berkeley Media Studies Group, with support from RALIANCE, a coalition of three leading sexual violence prevention organizations (PreventConnect, a national project of the California Coalition Against Sexual Assault [CALCASA], The National Alliance to End Sexual Violence [NAESV], and the National Sexual Violence Resource Center [NSVRC]) with seed funding from the National Football League.

We knew from the start that it can be challenging to talk about prevention, partly because sexual violence includes actions and behaviors that range from sexual harassment to rape to child sexual abuse to sex trafficking. Then, there’s the question of how to define prevention, which can be challenging even for experts with decades of experience. That might be because prevention efforts tend to be less visible than work to support victims of past abuse or assault. And sexual violence makes many people feel upset, overwhelmed, and anxious — which means they often want to avoid talking about it, especially when they feel powerless to stop it from happening.

Despite those challenges, we know that getting better at communicating about preventing sexual violence is an important step on the journey toward a future where abuse and assault are rare — and, when they do happen, are taken seriously. We are encouraged by some high-profile successes toward that goal. For example, in 2014, former President Barack Obama established a national task force and launched the nationwide “It’s on Us” initiative to address sexual assault on college campuses across the country. In late 2017 and throughout 2018, when we were writing this guide, The Time’s Up movement highlighted work happening across the country to prevent sexual harassment in workplaces, after the #MeToo movement, created by activist Tarana Burke, showed how many people experience sexual harassment, abuse, and assault.



The field excels at communicating about how to support survivors and change the way communities and institutions respond to assaults. But effecting change in our communities and our institutions so that the assaults don’t happen in the first place is more difficult, and harder to communicate about. That’s because prevention is about changing schools, communities, places of worship, the media, the military — all the systems that structure our society. And as a culture, we are good at talking about what individuals should do, but we’re much less

comfortable talking about how to change systems or institutions. Consequently, even though stakeholders working to end sexual violence across the lifespan have identified many promising practices to create and maintain schools, workplaces, and other settings where sexual violence doesn't occur, experts often struggle to communicate effectively about these strategies.

Our challenge, then, was to explore how to help supporters and leaders communicate about preventing sexual harassment, abuse, and assault with as much conviction and power as they communicate about supporting survivors and keeping people safe.

With that goal in mind, we provide guidance and research-informed recommendations to help all supporters communicate effectively about prevention with decision-makers in any context. We neither aim to answer every question or resolve every disagreement. Our position is that everyone will benefit if leaders working across the spectrum of sexual violence get better at making the case for the specific change they want to see. This guide is for anyone who wants to help audiences see and move toward that broad, lasting change.

The thinking behind this guide

When people talk about prevention, they typically focus on people changing their own behaviors: taking self-defense classes, for example, or managing how much alcohol they drink. These approaches or other personal safety steps may reduce the risk of sexual violence for some. But if we are to arrive in a world where everyone is safer, where sexual violence isn't tolerated, and where healthy, consensual sexual behavior is the norm, then we need to change systems, structures, and institutions. And experts, advocates, and other stakeholders will need to be able to help community members and decision-makers understand those changes and see what prevention can look like in different settings.



Although the general public can be an important audience, it's often not the group that needs to be activated to make change happen in institutions. We assume that those who use this guide are targeting people who make decisions in institutions — such as funders, administrators, community leaders, school boards, or others with the power to make change. Some people may use this guide to communicate more effectively with their colleagues in the field. This guide is designed to help reach all of those audiences, and more. And since sexual violence stirs strong emotions — and frequently falls in the middle of charged debates — throughout this guide, we explore the challenges and opportunities that readers may encounter when communicating not only with supporters and like-minded groups, but also with people who may not be receptive to talking about prevention or about sex and sexuality in general.

How we wrote this guide

We at BMSG are not experts in sexual violence prevention, but we are experts in developing communication strategies to help build support for large-scale changes that improve public health and well-being. For this guide, we applied that expertise to the information that experts in sexual violence and sexual violence prevention have shared with us.

Our process is iterative and grounded in the expertise of the field. We have gathered data in multiple ways over our years of research, including interviews, media analyses, and listening sessions, always centering the experiences of those who are most deeply involved in prevention work.

Any unattributed quotations in this guide come from the interviews or conversations we had at meetings and conferences. We also gathered sample strategies, data, and examples of systems change from reports generated during the last few years by researchers and other groups in the field.

Finally, with all the data we had already collected as a starting place, we commissioned Goodwin Simon Strategic Research (GSSR), a public opinion research firm, to help us understand underlying attitudes around sexual violence and sexual violence prevention, to identify barriers and potential opportunities for communicating more effectively, and to develop messaging approaches that help to build support for efforts to prevent sexual harassment, abuse, and assault. The Goodwin Simon team conducted focus groups and online surveys to test the strength of various communications approaches to building support for efforts to prevent sexual harassment, abuse, and assault. That research informed the recommendations we make in this guide.

Testing support for sexual violence prevention

Why we tested

In working on this message guide, we collected excellent ideas about how to explain prevention from the many experts, researchers, practitioners, and community leaders from around the country who participated in our meetings, attended our research presentations, agreed to interviews, and otherwise shared their thoughts with us.

But those ideas also raised questions, such as: Which stories and storytellers help people with the power to make change in institutions and organizations voice support for prevention? Who should deliver messages to activate decision-makers and others around stopping sexual abuse and assault before it happens? What values, stories, and pieces of information motivate people to want to act to prevent sexual violence?

What we explored

The answer to these questions is beyond the scope of a simple questionnaire or conversation. We commissioned Goodwin Simon Strategic Research to develop a multi-part public opinion research process to understand the mindsets of people who work in places that could institute prevention policies and practices. The research was designed to develop and test persuasive messages to increase support for sexual violence prevention at the institutional level and to explore how people understand sexual violence and what to do about it. Our starting point was a seemingly simple question: Do people believe it is possible to create environments where sexual violence doesn't happen?

We asked GSSR to focus the research on college and youth-serving organizations, since field experts prioritized these systems for change in our conversations with them. GSSR also polled people connected with those institutions, such as parents, students, volunteers, and alumni, among others.

GSSR conducted the research in multiple phases, with each phase building on what we learned before. The qualitative and quantitative research included in-depth interviews, in-person and online focus groups, and a national online survey.

How to use this book

“I wish I’d had this guide when there was a great opportunity to reframe a national conversation.”

“I’ll definitely use this guide when I’m talking to funders.”

- Voices from the field

Our hope is that leaders and community supporters will use this guide as a resource for ideas whenever they need to talk about preventing sexual violence. Some users might read the guide start to finish; however, we expect that many people will more likely browse the contents and then return to specific sections for ideas when they develop their own communication approaches. With that in mind, we’ve designed the guide so that users can:

- Focus on one goal at a time. Preventing sexual violence demands investments in time, energy, and resources that can take a very long time. This guide should aid those who are working on a variety of smaller, incremental changes as well as bigger overall objectives.
- Find guidelines to help them frame preventing sexual violence as an achievable goal for everyone, regardless of where they start.
- Focus on decision-makers (that is, anyone who has the power to create change in institutions, systems, and communities), as well as those who can influence them.

The bulk of the message advice gathered here is in Chapter 2, which explains guidelines for developing effective value-based messages and why some types of messages are more effective than others. But messages exist in contexts and for specific purposes, so we also address how messages are connected to broader strategy questions:

- Chapter 1 describes overall strategy, the reason messages are developed, and the context in which messages are delivered. We start there because before you can have an effective message, you need to know your overall goal and have a plan for achieving it.

- Chapter 2 offers concrete advice on constructing messages that help people manage complicated emotions about sexual assault and move them toward supporting prevention.
- Chapter 3 brings the puzzle pieces together, applying what we’ve learned about communicating effectively about sexual violence prevention to specific examples of systems-level change.

In the course of our research, we found that a journey is an effective metaphor for understanding what moves hearts and minds towards prevention. No one, and no organization, starts out being “perfect” at prevention. Most people, even experts, are on an ongoing journey towards preventing sexual abuse and assault. The words you are reading now are a destination of our own journey towards understanding what prevention could look like, and how to help people communicate about it. But it’s not the final destination. These words will be improved upon as you put them to use and adapt them to your overall strategies. In other words: Take what you find here and use it as your own.

We wrote this guide because sexual violence doesn’t have to be a fact of life.

Prevention is happening every day, but it won’t become the norm unless more people know about it, engage with it, and take responsibility for becoming a part of it.

We hope the ideas we’ve collected, tested, and expanded here will make it easier for you to communicate about prevention, and that you’ll use them to help your audiences see communities free from sexual violence as a right, a privilege, and a responsibility.

Let’s get started.



Chapter 1

Mapping the route: Developing your overall strategy

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While we worked on this project, we heard again and again from experts and community leaders who wanted to know the “magic words” that would help them convince audiences that prevention is possible and that their approach is the right one. Each time, we would tell them the same thing: What you say and how you say it is definitely important — but your message about preventing sexual assault flows from the specific procedures, programs, or cultural changes you want to see, not the other way around.

Message is never first

The first step is knowing what you want to change, how to change it, and why it needs to be changed. As part of your strategy, you’ll also have to determine the audience you want to influence, and then the messengers that will have the greatest impact for that audience.

Messages will be delivered in political and cultural environments that affect how people hear and receive them. That’s why messages have to be flexible. Your communication strategy is always filled with “moving parts” developed from strategy (which changes), delivered by messengers (who change) to a target audience (which

might also change) against a political or cultural backdrop (which is also constantly changing).

In short, communicating effectively about how to prevent sexual harassment, abuse, and assault depends on your overall strategy, which you can think of as the roadmap to reaching your goal. Having a clear overall strategy can increase your effectiveness and efficiency by helping you be precise about your communications so you can allocate time, money, and effort only where they will truly help advance your goals.

Questions to help you develop your overall strategy include:

1. What is the change you want to see?
2. Who has the power to make that change?
3. Who can you mobilize to exert pressure and communicate for your cause?

These questions will determine not only what actions you take, but also how you communicate about them.

Before we dive into how to answer each of these questions, it's important to think about who gets to ask them in the first place. Who are you already working with, or will you bring on board to work with you, to achieve your goal? How will they be involved in the work?

Sexual violence hurts everyone, and preventing it helps everyone. However, in conversations with practitioners and field leaders, we heard from many people, including those from groups who are most victimized, that they have been left out of prevention efforts for different reasons such as their race, their immigration status, their physical abilities, their gender presentation, or their sexual orientation.

To paraphrase Andrea Jenkins, a transgender politician and activist, as you think about how to bring different partners on board and lift up the voices of those most affected by sexual violence, remember that not everyone will be satisfied with just

a seat at the table. Often, you may find that people want to set the table — and that needs to be part of your overall strategy. Your team or coalition may already be well-developed and representative, or you may need to widen your circle before you can develop your overall strategy for preventing sexual violence.

One way to think about being inclusive, equitable, and just in developing your overall strategy is to ask questions like:

- Whose perspectives need to be part of the strategy from the beginning?
- How can you center the voices of people most affected by sexual violence, including those who may be often left out of the conversation for whatever reason?
- Whose voices are usually not part of the conversation you want to have? Do they need to be?

You may want to think about unlikely allies that you could bring to the table. In our work to write this guide, we spoke with prevention experts who noted the importance of including stakeholders from groups that are often overlooked in prevention work. For example, consider at the outset of your work how you can involve communities of color, disabled people, LGBTQ organizations, and other historically marginalized groups.



What is the change you want to see?

Sexual violence can feel like an impossibly big and complex problem to solve. To be effective, we know that prevention has to be built into every part of society. Because experts are uniquely aware of the complexities of preventing sexual violence in all

the places it occurs, it's easy for them to get frustrated with incremental change. But to solve a problem as big as sexual assault, we need far-reaching strategies that many people can see themselves being a part of. Those kinds of strategies tend to require incremental progress, so we focus on communicating effectively about what Cordelia Anderson of Sensibilities Prevention Services describes as “Gulliver strategies:” small actions that, taken together over time, can topple a giant.



It can be challenging to make a concept as big as sexual assault prevention concrete by naming tangible solutions. Sometimes it's frustrating because if we're naming one thing, we are not naming another. But the fact is, in most instances, we can't push for everything in every moment. And, in fact, it can be helpful from a messaging perspective to remind audiences that your effort is one among many needed to address this important problem. We can have a big picture, but in the here and now, we must be specific.

As you think about your overall strategy, identify not just the problem you want to solve, but also clarify how you want to solve it. The temptation is often to focus energy and resources solely on raising awareness about sexual assault, the thinking being that if people just paid attention, the right answers would emerge and the problem would be solved. Unfortunately, that's rarely how change happens. Making real, sustained change is about channeling awareness into action, which means that your audience (be it the general public, funders, opinion leaders, members of a school board, etc.) needs to be mobilized around a specific solution or set of solutions.

Your job is to name those solutions as precisely as you can.

You'll know your solution is specific enough if you can answer the five Ws listed below (though you won't necessarily need to include all five in every message):

- **Who** should take action?
- **What** should they do?
- **When** should they do it?
- **Where** will it happen?
- **Why** is this the right approach?

For example, you know that engaging men and boys as well as women and girls is important if you're going to create a campus environment where sexual violence doesn't happen. But just saying "engaging men and boys" is awfully vague — it could mean almost anything. How will you encourage university administration to really do it? Let's walk through our questions with one example:

- **Who** should take action?
University administration and campus stakeholders.
- **What** should they do?
Engage men and boys, along with women and girls, through the It's On Us campaign, and ensure that male spokespeople are prominent in the materials.
- **When** should they do it?
As part of freshman orientation, welcome back to school, and homecoming and parents' weekend activities built throughout the year – including during the "Greek life" rush process.
- **Where** will it happen?
In classroom electives and campus activities, and at campus police, student health, and LGBTQ centers.
- **Why** is this the right approach?
Because men and boys, as well as women and girls, need to be involved in building a culture of prevention and respect on campus.

During our conversations and listening sessions with experts and leaders from around the country, we heard about two specific places where it was easiest for people to name and describe systemic change that was happening or could happen to prevent sexual

violence: on college campuses and in youth-serving organizations. As a result of what we learned, many of the examples and suggestions we include in this guide focus on approaches that are centered in those locations (see Chapter 3 for examples of possible strategies identified by RALIANCE and other field experts).



You can have a broad or multi-part solution, but for the purposes of developing your strategy, you don't need to have a complete set of actions planned that will end sexual violence forever. Instead, you can focus on the next concrete step you and your partners are working toward, such as securing resources for research, reducing the density of bars near a campus, or changing the images of women and children that a business uses to market its products. Keep your immediate objective in focus, but also know that though it is one immediate step, you are on the road to the large-scale sexual assault prevention action you seek.

Most people who work in sexual violence prevention will have many areas of concern and many approaches to solving the problem. Sometimes the priorities will be determined by the opportunity of the moment. For instance, at the time this guide was being written, the #MeToo movement, a campaign created by activist Tarana Burke, became a global social media movement in response to workplace sexual harassment. The way the movement captured the attention of the media inspired many groups to take advantage of the “moment” to advance their work around workplace assault and harassment.

The key to being strategic is always to be clear about which approach to making change is your priority today — and why.

Who has the power to make the change?

When you talk about solving a problem, you're talking about responsibility: Who is, or should be, responsible for making the change we want to see?

Selecting your target audience makes your work more efficient and directed: You don't have to educate everyone about why your approach is worthwhile. Instead, your goal might be to persuade a few key decision-makers, like the board of directors for a local youth-serving organization, to adopt your approach. Communicators call this "narrowcasting."¹ The idea is that you want to reach a specific, usually small, audience. That's your primary target. Your secondary target is the group that can reach your target. In this case, it might be the staff of the organization or others who could influence the board of directors. It may be that the group will want media coverage because of the pressure that will put on the board. Members of the general public would get exposed to the issue and might learn about how to prevent sexual assault even though they are not the primary target audience.

Be as specific as you can about identifying and naming the person or people with the ability to make change. Think about questions like:

- Is your target a person or a group of people — for example, the representatives of an institution?
- Who has the power to influence your target audience? Think about parents, educators, alumni, voters, accrediting bodies, funders, and others.
- What is your relationship with the target audience? How do you have power or influence with them? Is it as a neighbor, colleague, voter, consumer, stockholder, or some other way?
- What tactics might be most effective to reach your target?
- What motivates your target audience to act?
- What would happen if your solution made someone else responsible for solving the problem (say, a parent advisory group)? Who would be accountable? Would that help you?

You may also identify other questions unique to your particular goals.

As you're choosing your target audience, think about what they may already know or believe about sexual abuse prevention. Think also about the political and cultural environment you're in. What factors could shape how your target audience receives your message? For example, what stories are in the news? What events are happening?

Who can you mobilize to take action?

We often hear, "Sexual violence affects everyone," which means that almost any group you can think of could be a champion — that is, someone who can be mobilized to apply pressure on your target audience and effect change. That's important because creating change often requires long-term pressure on the person,



Photo courtesy of Juan Gonzalez at The Bottom Line UCSB

body, or organization that holds the power in an institution. As just one example, students at the University of California, Santa Barbara, organized a dramatic sit-in in the chancellor's office to demand that the school improve its handling of sexual assaults on campus. Though the sit-in ended with a signed set of agreements that the school promised to pursue, students weren't satisfied with how their concerns were addressed. They kept the pressure on, and staged an additional action two years later, which ended with school administrators signing and committing to

a comprehensive strategy to "improve campus and University of California systemwide sexual assault resources and policies."²

Based on the change you've identified, what role could different groups play, either in a visible, outward-facing way or in terms of providing background assistance that could help move the work forward? What spaces do members of these groups want to occupy?

For instance, parents and community residents could:

- Act as spokespeople
- Call meetings with decision-makers in their spheres of influence
- Ask to see copies of institutional procedures

- Take individual action and bring together groups to influence outcomes
- Participate in trainings, activities, and workshops

Researchers could:

- Collect, analyze, and interpret data that could help make the case
- Make the case for filling gaps in the research
- Serve as experts on specific issues

Staff members and administrators (for example, from college campuses) could:

- Support climate surveys and information gathering and supply data
- Facilitate introductions to people who have experience with instituting prevention plans
- Share procedures and protocols
- Leverage resources and connect with content experts to advance sexual violence prevention
- Elevate partnerships with community-based groups, such as rape crisis centers or LBGQTQ centers

Survivors, loved ones, and supporters could:

- Act as spokespeople
- Reach out to decision-makers in their spheres of influence
- Identify approaches that were (or would have been) helpful, had they been in place
- Participate in focus groups, steering committees, and review teams to ensure accountability occurs

Focus on how to identify, train, and mobilize potential messengers, since your spokesperson affects how your message is received. Who can help you deliver your message? You may need different spokespeople for different types of messages or targets. The possible combinations of spokespeople are your “messenger mix.”

For a messenger to be persuasive, the audience has to identify with them. That is, your audience needs to see them as someone they share experiences or values with. If your audience does not identify with the messenger — which is to say, if your audience doesn't feel that the messenger is “like them” in some important way — even the most powerful story will fall flat. What values and experiences will your audience share with your messenger? During our message-testing research, for example, we found that administrators tended to connect with speakers who talked about their own lived experiences of implementing prevention programs in youth-serving organizations or on college campuses — regardless of the age, gender, or race of the speaker. In other words, a key way people identified with messengers was through the role the messenger had in an institution.



Depending on your overall strategy, you may need to consider as messengers men and women; people from different ethnic and racial backgrounds; people of different ages; young people and old; people with a range of political affiliations; parents, administrators, and staff; people of faith; and survivors of sexual violence. That's because one messenger might be effective for one audience segment, but ineffective for another. For example, the public opinion research showed that male messengers can be particularly effective for other men.

Let's imagine you are trying to make the case for increased funding for prevention training in a local YMCA, and you need to make the case to the board, which is fairly diverse and includes many local residents. Your messenger, a local Latina mother and business owner with kids who attend the YMCA, may differ from the audience in key respects (like age, gender, race, status as a parent, etc.), but

could be able to connect with many people in the target audience if she can speak about her own experiences as a resident of the community. She could explain why, as a local, it's so important to her that the children who are the future of that community be protected and nurtured wherever they are, including at the Y.

In some situations, depending on your goals and overall strategy, you may find that experts — like researchers or practitioners — are the best spokespeople. In other cases, you may want to bring forward real people who have been directly impacted in some way, either by sexual harassment, abuse, or assault, or by some type of prevention program or effort. At BMSG, we call these people “authentic voices” because they bring the power of their personal experience to what they say. “Authentic voices” not only describe their personal experiences, but they also advocate for change. Sharing personal experiences can be an exceptionally powerful way to illustrate why prevention matters.

Whatever your goal and approach, think about the connections you have with different interested groups you want to mobilize around prevention, identify the range of roles that fit their strengths and limitations, and bring those who should be part of shaping the overall strategy into the process early.

Recapping overall strategy

Consider one example to try out these ideas.

Imagine that you want to make the children in your city safer, and you know that youth-serving organizations are a big piece of the puzzle, because that's where many children spend their after-school hours. But your city is so big, and there are so many places where children spend their time. Where should you start?

What is the change you want to see? More than 10,000 children use after-school programs, sports clubs, and other services that are supported by the city's parks and recreation department. Most have very minimal protocols in place to prevent abuse or assault — and some don't have anything on the books. You want each site managed by the parks and recreation department to have a comprehensive plan around prevention including, at minimum, staff training.

Who can make the change? Who from the parks and recreation department has the power to make the change

you seek? Are there people from other departments or areas of city government who'll need to be involved? You discover that a parks and recreation advisory committee makes recommendations to the city council about issues related to the department. Advisory committee members are appointed by the mayor, but city council members are elected.

Remember to think about the political and cultural environment you're in. For example, let's assume that the city is experiencing a budget crunch — but that local elections are coming up, and several members of the city council are up for reelection.

Who should you mobilize? You're lucky enough to have strong partnerships with researchers who could talk about the value of prevention programming, as well as a large network of concerned parents and community residents anxious to speak up. Based on what you know about your target audience, from whom do they need to hear your plans? Since your first goal is to reach the appointed members of the advisory committee, it may be that you don't need to prioritize having community residents who are voters as spokespeople right now. However, they may be engaged with you in the campaign behind the scenes now and be important voices out front later, when you get to the city council.

The message you decide on, and how you convey it, will flow from answers to these types of questions and others that come from your overall strategy.

Conclusion

We now have the foundation for developing the overall strategy that will guide what you do next. Name the change you want to see and how you want to achieve it, identify who has the power to make it happen — your target audience — and recruit the allies and partners who will be part of the process, as messengers or in other roles. As you make your decisions, consider who is at your table and whose voices and experiences should be lifted up and brought forward.

The overall strategy you develop is the map that will shape everything that happens next — including your approach to communications. With your plan in place, your journey toward an effective prevention strategy is well underway, no matter the road conditions up ahead.



Chapter 2

Getting underway: Developing effective messages about preventing sexual harassment, abuse, and assault

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We've seen that your overall strategy, which is fluid and tailored to the needs of your organization or institution, guides everything that you do. But once you've mapped out your strategy, what will you say?

In this chapter, we'll summarize some key recommendations, informed by our message-testing research, that will help you develop what you want to say. With effective messaging, we can help people manage their existing emotions and attitudes about sexual violence, understand that prevention is possible, and become ready to take part in it. These key recommendations can be organized into two parts:

1. Message components — We found that messages that contain these six components were particularly effective at communicating about sexual violence prevention.

- Evoke shared values
- Acknowledge negative feelings, like discomfort, fear, or lingering doubts

- Describe a journey toward change, its starting point and pivotal moments
- State the problem precisely
- Illustrate success
- Name concrete solutions

The sequence you use to order these components can make a difference in how your message is received. Leading with shared values is a good idea because it gives people an entry point into a difficult conversation they may not otherwise feel ready to have. Evoking shared values and acknowledging difficult feelings like fear or disgust early on can also help the messenger quickly build connections and credibility with the audience, who are then more likely to be receptive to the message.

As we will see, some of these “components” may show up more than once and in multiple stages of your messaging approach. For example, “acknowledging negative feelings” may also be the starting place on the journey.



2. We also found that there were “**rules of the road**” to keep in mind at every stage in your message:

- Speak plainly
- Focus on conduct, not character

To start, let’s consider the six message components in turn.

Message components

1. Evoke shared values

People’s deeply held shared values — the principles that guide how they think the world should work — are what they connect with in messages about preventing sexual violence. In fact, people make decisions based on emotional reactions, then develop a theory to justify that choice.³ That includes administrators, decision-makers, or anyone else you hope to influence with your message. In other words, values are the motivating spark that turns communication into action.

The values statement isn’t the whole message or even the lengthiest part of the message, but it is a very important part of it. Bringing forward values helps elevate our audiences’ aspirations to be a person who does good and protects others from harm — the values that we learned through our message research are very strong among administrators and others who work with young people. Without those values-based cues, audiences may instead react based on their fear or disgust of the topic and close down.

Framing our messages around core values — such as innovation, caring for the next generation, safety, and protection — can also help audiences remain open to our ideas and overcome the doubt they may feel about whether prevention is possible.

That’s especially important because we found that, when messengers connected with an institution don’t actually name the values that motivate them to work towards preventing sexual violence, many people connected with universities and youth-serving organizations may assume, based on their past negative experiences, that the institution is focusing on prevention because it has to — not because of a desire to truly make people safer.

The values you want to elevate may change over time (even for the same audience) depending on the circumstances and your overall strategy. For example, one value that many prevention experts from the field raised was “a culture of healthy sexuality” or “the right to be a sexual being.” However, that’s not a value that came up in our message-testing research with people connected to colleges and youth-serving organizations. But

that's not to say that people won't get to that place — as there is more discussion in our society about the role of healthy relationships and sexuality education in promoting sexual health, this value could become important for more audiences. Moving people to a more supportive and engaged place around prevention through the values described above can sow fertile ground for values-based conversations in places where they aren't yet possible.



2. Acknowledge negative feelings, like discomfort, fear, or lingering doubts

We found that audiences who receive messages that acknowledge their discomfort and negative, complicated feelings about sexual violence stay connected and remain open to hearing more. By acknowledging these difficult feelings, we can help audiences manage them, rather than interpreting them as a reason to avoid the subject. We also need to show a path to thinking beyond those feelings to focus on what to do to prevent sexual violence. Once we address the initial discomfort that people feel around the topic of sexual violence and model a path forward, we are better positioned to frame sexual abuse as preventable and shift the conversation toward shared values and action.

Because sexual violence is such a disturbing topic, we have to be careful to do that in a way that does not cause audiences to become so overwhelmed or repulsed by graphic or disturbing details that they shut down.

Here are some examples of what acknowledging fears and discomfort could look like in practice (developed based on language that was tested in the opinion research process) — one from a messenger who is a survivor and the other from a messenger who is not a survivor:

Acknowledging negative feelings

Journey: Turning point

Survivor: *I feel sick thinking about kids getting abused in our community. I was molested when I was a kid, and I live with it every day. That makes it really hard for me to think that we need to try to help with abusers before they hurt someone. Sometimes it makes me feel sick, and scared, if I'm honest. But then I think about how I'd live with myself if I wasn't doing everything I could, everything we can, to make sure other kids don't have to go through what I did. And if that means trying to help those at risk for sexually harming others before anyone gets hurt, then that's what I'll do.*

Acknowledging negative feelings

Journey: Starting point

Journey: Turning point

Evoking values

Non-survivor: *When I think about kids, kids I maybe know, getting abused by adults — it's horrible. I was lucky that never happened to me, but you know, I look at my nieces and nephews, I look at kids I walk past in the grocery store, and I worry. Sometimes that worry makes me get hung up on the idea of trying to provide help and resources to people who could potentially harm a child. But honestly? What I get even more hung up on is the idea of not doing something I know will help protect kids and keep them from getting hurt.*

No matter how effectively you communicate about preventing sexual violence, people's complicated and negative feelings often mean that they are left with lingering doubts. You do not have to fully resolve all of those doubts, or bring them into complete agreement with how you see sexual violence and what to do about it.

In fact, many of the audiences we surveyed pushed back against messengers who used language that felt too lofty. Phrases like “ending sexual violence” or “ensuring there is not another victim” actually weakened arguments for prevention for some audiences, who found the messengers and their messages unrealistic (Of course, there are some audiences for which that kind of aspirational language will be powerful, but those are likely groups who understand the issue well — and have already signed on for the long journey despite the challenges).

Instead, statements that acknowledge difficulty and lingering doubt are far more effective. An example might be (adapted from language used in the message-testing research):

“I don’t know everything about how to build preventing sexual abuse into our programming. My team and I are still learning. But even an imperfect or evolving program is worthwhile — it’s one step on the path to prevention.”



It can also be helpful to be candid first about the challenges that could come up in achieving incremental change, like limited time due to other organizational priorities, the lack of adequate training, lack of staff support, or inadequate funding. While honestly acknowledging those challenges, also talk about what can be done to overcome them, so the audience can see what an effective, real-world solution could look like. Then they can find themselves on the journey to prevention in their own institution. For example, this comment from a staffer at a youth-serving organization who illustrated practical mechanisms for overcoming obstacles resonated with our research audiences:

“When resources are scarce, I think you have to look at what are the potential rewards and consequences, and how do we prioritize them. Because, maybe you might not have the grant, but okay, what staff can be rotated, you know, how can you put some other maybe low-cost things into place?”

3. Describe a journey toward change, its starting point, and pivotal moments

If we acknowledge our audience’s discomfort — and raise people’s anxieties about how bad sexual abuse and assault are — but don’t provide any next steps or pathways toward change that help them channel their fears into action, people may just become overwhelmed and “shut down.” And sometimes, even once people are motivated to help make change, they can get stuck on whether solutions will “really solve anything” or feel that if they can’t completely prevent sexual violence, they aren’t worth pursuing. We can help audiences manage those feelings when we show them that prevention is possible by modeling the journeys that either we or other people in other places — people with whom our audience can identify — have taken to make preventing sexual violence a reality.

That can mean telling stories about people who were once doubtful that sexual violence could be prevented, or who believed that sexual violence is “just something that happens” — without judging them for those feelings. Then, we can show the pathway to change by clearly describing what motivated that person to take action to prevent abuse and assault in their institution and describe what they did.

People need to understand the why behind the journey, as well as the how: Journeys where the motivation for change wasn’t clear didn’t feel real to the audiences who participated in our research. That means we need to tell our journey stories in ways that help audiences identify with the “travelers.” We found that multi-part stories like this example were particularly helpful for moving the way administrators thought about prevention:

Journey: Starting point

Journey: Starting point, acknowledging complacency

Journey: Turning point

“To be honest, when I first started out in my career, I thought about this really differently than I do today. Early on, of course, I made sure we had appropriate hiring practices, disciplinary protocols, and victim support services in place, but I was pessimistic about how much more we could really do. I guess I felt it was an unfortunate reality that people who commit sexual harm were going to do it no matter what. But over time, that began to shift for me. After hearing about sexual misconduct cases at some similar youth-serving organizations in the last few years, I felt torn up. It didn’t feel like these assaults were inevitable. They felt preventable. And that got me thinking about

why I'd gotten into this work in the first place, and whether I was living up to my values of helping kids live up to their full potential."

Some audiences — particularly audiences that are more conservative — feel even more discomfort, skepticism, and inner conflict about whether prevention is possible. For these people to connect with our message, we may need to tell stories that include more details about the journey and describe more steps in the change process.

4. State the problem precisely

What's the problem you want to solve? How you define the problem affects how people think about solving it. To make your statement of the problem clear and understandable, focus on just one aspect. Once that portion of the problem is being addressed, you can shift your message and goals to focus on another piece, based on your overall strategy.

In trying to communicate about how big, and how important, sexual violence prevention is, it can be tempting to try and say everything that you know about sexual violence prevention any time you have the opportunity to talk about it. Resist that urge, and remember:

It is impossible to be comprehensive and strategic at the same time.

Deciding which piece of the problem you want to emphasize will depend on your overall strategy. Once you have narrowed the problem, you can choose the information to highlight in your message: Table 1 lists facts about sexual violence that we tested in our research that helped many respondents (up to 70%, in some cases) change the way they thought about prevention.

Table 1: Compelling data points about sexual violence

<p>Facts about sexual violence on campuses</p>	<p>32% of college men say they would have sex with a woman “against her will if there were no consequences.” But most do not recognize these actions as rape.⁴</p> <p>Roughly one in five college women and one in 16 college men report having been sexually assaulted while in college.⁵</p>
<p>Facts about sexual violence in youth-serving organizations</p>	<p>Not all offenders are adults. As many as half of those who sexually abuse children are other children or teens.^{6,7}</p> <p>One in four girls and one in six boys have been sexually abused before the age of 18, almost all by someone they know and trust.⁸</p> <p>With proper intervention and treatment, very few young people — less than 10 percent — who commit sexual violence as children or teens reoffend later in life.⁹</p>

5. Show success

People need to know not only that prevention is possible — they also need to know that it works. As one survey participant put it, *“When I hear what others are thinking or doing, it gives me ideas for how it can work in my setting and what I can do with regard to researching what resources are already available, what resources are needed, sources of funding if needed, or how to craft a plan with what we have.”*

Success measures don’t have to be dramatic; in fact, they probably won’t be. Besides, overly dramatic “results” may invite skepticism more than optimism. Think about the measures of success, including data, stories, and examples that will connect with your audience, based on your overall strategy. If you help your audience see prevention as a process, it will be easier for them to see success through outcomes like:

- Tangible change at another site, in another region, or in a local study that will help make the case for your approach;
- An organization continuing to achieve its core mission because prevention activities have not disrupted operations;
- Staff and volunteers getting what they need to do their jobs well and make the organization safer at the same time;
- Young people, parents, and others adapting to and benefiting from changes in the organization that support preventing sexual harassment, abuse, and assault; and/or
- Staff, clients, and others seeing the value of the prevention approach and of supporting prevention in general.

Incorporate examples of success that move you and that will help your audiences make the connection to the places they are trying to influence.



If people see the goals and work of prevention as part and parcel of the work they're already doing, they may be more likely to consider your approach. So, you could evoke the mission of the institution where your audience feels they can make a change and talk about prevention as an ongoing action — not just a single training or press conference, which can be added on or taken away, but instead something that is “baked into” the success of the organization and the work of everyone who is part of it. This message from a high-level university administrator was particularly effective with college administrators and staff in our research:

Steps in the journey

One of the challenges that I've had on the journey of doing this work has not been just bringing the students along; it's been bringing my colleagues along. We have to educate our peers and help them understand why we're doing this and what their role is in it also.

Illustrating success

For me, success looks like a real culture shift where it's socially unacceptable to say and do those things. Where the behavior changes and people don't laugh at it or say, "Hey, that's normal," or "He or she just had too much to drink."

Evoking shared values

It's not easy, but if we're truly committed to these things, we find a way to do it. We shift resources, we cross train people, we

Naming concrete solutions

collaborate with community partners. We do the things that we do every day to run the place. This just is one of those things, and it's not an add-on.



As prevention takes hold across society, there will be more examples of success not only in schools and other youth-serving organizations, but also in the military; in sports organizations; and churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples.

6. Name concrete solutions

Your message supports the prevention strategy you are working toward in the near term. Preventing a problem as complex as sexual violence will require such a wide range of approaches that it can feel overwhelming to pick just one — or it might feel like you are betraying all the other things that must be done in the big picture. But our message-testing research showed that while people don't have many examples of

prevention in action, they are hungry to learn more about what it looks like. Part of what we need to do, then, is show people that prevention matters and help them see that both individuals and organizations (like workplaces, schools, and others) can put systems in place that can prevent sexual abuse and assault. By naming the immediate approach you are pursuing, you will help people see that prevention is possible in the long run, too.

Establishing your overall strategy first is so important. Following that strategy will help you avoid vague phrases like “changing culture” or “training and education.” Those are important ideas,

of course, but people do not have a clear idea of what they mean. In fact, some people who participated in our message-testing research argued that those kinds of vague terms sound like phrases that administrators or politicians use to make it sound like they are doing something about sexual assault without really committing to making a change.

Instead, be concrete — people are more likely to believe sexual violence is preventable when they see tangible examples of prevention approaches in action. One way to help audiences see your prevention solution as reasonable, realistic, and achievable is to narrow the focus from preventing all acts of sexual violence — which can be hard for many people to imagine — to creating environments in which people who might commit abuse or assault do not believe they can get away with it, whether that is in schools, in churches, temples, mosques, and synagogues; on university campuses; in youth-serving organizations; or elsewhere.

People who participated in our research, for example, connected with stories like this one, from a YMCA administrator based in Pennsylvania:

“We went out and we wrote a grant to get cameras to be able to put an eye on every part of this facility and make the building as safe as possible, you know, for our youth. At the time, there wasn’t really an entrance process. The front desk just let kids and people in and out. Now, there’s nobody actually coming in and out of the facility that we don’t know. Kids can’t just move around by themselves. We added more staffing to, again, cover every inch of the building. Each one of our staff that come in, or any of our volunteers that come in, they go through a training process before they can start here. We’re talking about mandated reporting, appropriate touch, safe lifting.”

Evoking values

Naming concrete solutions

This story focuses on one particular type of safety, but it’s very powerful. Why? For one thing, it evokes values of protection and safety. The comments put sexual violence prevention in a broader context of overall safety within the institution, which could help neutralize some of the discomfort and anxiety that people feel thinking about the topic. And the messenger lists specific, concrete actions that audiences who work in youth-serving organizations could see themselves taking. We would expect messages from authentic voices from other realms, like sports or the military, to be similarly powerful if those authentic

voices name concrete actions their organizations could take linked to their institutions' core values.

Rules of the road

At every stage in developing your message, follow two “rules of the road” to keep you on track. These can be applied to any message you are developing for preventing sexual harassment, abuse, and assault.

Rule 1: Speak plainly

No matter who your audience is, it's important that you (or your messenger) speak plainly and avoid “insider” language whenever possible. That can be challenging, since sometimes we may not even recognize the language we're using as jargon. For example, prevention experts often use phrases like “sexual violence” to refer to a broad spectrum of behaviors. But for many people, this term, as well as the phrase “sexual assault,” tend to call up only acts of extreme violence and aggression. Our research found that the catch-all terms don't evoke other types of sexual abuse, harassment, or assault such as situations involving coercion, power, incapacitation, unwanted touching, child sexual abuse, or other kinds of sexual misconduct.

The term “sexual harm,” also a broader term, tended to evoke thoughts of the consequences or aftermath of sexual violence or abuse, not an act itself. It also neglects the reality of how sexual violence actually happens by reinforcing the flawed idea of sexual violence as an isolated event, rather than as part of a continuum of behaviors that can sometimes culminate in extreme violence or assault, but that may not.

All of this means that the shorthand people in the field use with each other to represent a continuum of harm may not communicate that range of behaviors to people outside the field. Though no one phrase is always right in every case, one option is to include multiple terms, such as “sexual assault, abuse, and harassment” when describing the problem. That can feel counterintuitive, especially if we have trained ourselves to be concise or are limited because of character counts on social media. But being specific and speaking plainly is important if broader terminology isn't being understood. When you need to be concise, it may help to use phrases that describe the places

where sexual violence happens or whom it affects. For example, instead of “sexual violence,” you could say “sexual assault on campus,” “child sexual abuse,” or “harassment and assault at work.” Each phrase is a bit longer, but the precision is worth it.

Other examples of “insider” language include phrases like “rape culture” or “toxic masculinity.” Many experts and researchers understand the broader implications of those labels, but people in the audiences we want to reach may not. In fact, during polling we found that sometimes using these phrases triggered negative reactions in audiences who might have otherwise been supportive.

Table 2: Associations with sexual violence terms

This term...	...made people think about...
Sexual violence and sexual assault	Physical violence and aggression
Sexual harm	The impact of sexual violence or abuse after the incident
Sexual misconduct	Unwanted overtures, innuendos, and suggestive conversations
Consent violation	“No means no”

Using plain language, with concrete examples, is much more effective in helping audiences understand complex ideas and come to agreement about the possibility of preventing sexual harassment, abuse, and assault. Across all audiences in our message-testing research, describing (rather than labeling) concepts like rape culture, toxic masculinity, and dismantling oppression was more persuasive (see Table 3 for examples).

Table 3: Examples of “insider” and “plain” language used in message-testing research

(for each, with every audience demographic, plain language was as persuasive as or more persuasive than insider language.)

Term	“Insider language”	“Plain language”
<p>Rape culture</p>	<p>The only way to really prevent sexual violence is to change rape culture, which normalizes and excuses sexual violence and abuse. That includes changing our culture of violence, fostering healthy masculinity, and addressing the inequality of women in our society.</p>	<p>Whether we realize it or not, our culture often sends messages that encourage, excuse, or minimize sexual violence or abuse. This includes increasingly sexualized media, easy access to pornography, glorifying violence, mixed messages about consent, and expectations about how men and women or boys and girls should behave. We can’t stop sexual violence unless we address the broader cultural context in which it occurs.</p>
<p>Bystander intervention</p>	<p>Bystander intervention and bystander education are an essential part of effective sexual violence and abuse prevention and education programs. These trainings teach potential witnesses to prevent or intervene when there is a risk for sexual violence or abuse, including naming and stopping situations that could lead to violence, stepping in during an incident, and speaking out against ideas and behaviors that support sexual violence and abuse.</p>	<p>The only person responsible for committing sexual violence is the person who hurts someone else. But all of us have the ability to look out for each other’s safety. Helping people plan ahead and practice different ways to interrupt or redirect an uncomfortable situation can prevent sexual violence and abuse. Whether it’s helping a person you’re concerned about get to a safe place or leave a situation, explaining that a rape joke isn’t funny, confronting a person who is behaving inappropriately, or getting security involved when someone is being aggressive, choosing to step in can affect how others around us think about and respond to sexual violence and abuse and the behaviors that come before it.</p>

Table 3: Examples of “insider” and “plain” language used in message-testing research, continued

(for each, with every audience demographic, plain language was as persuasive as or more persuasive than insider language.)

Term	“Insider language”	“Plain language”
<p>Toxic masculinity</p>	<p>Preventing sexual violence and abuse requires us to challenge and dismantle toxic masculinity, which equates manhood with being unemotional, aggressive, violent, powerful, in control, competitive, and sexually accomplished. The damage done by toxic masculinity contributes to a culture where rape, sexual assault, sexual abuse, and sexual aggression are directly or indirectly permitted, encouraged, and even rewarded, and where victims are shamed or silenced.</p>	<p>In our society, some of what we’ve been taught about what it means to be a man or a woman is unhealthy. In our culture, men are often taught to always be in control, win at all costs, show no emotion, be the ones to initiate sex, and to pursue sex even when someone is “playing hard to get.” These rigid ideas of manhood suggest that there is something built into masculinity that is aggressive or abusive, and that’s wrong. These myths hurt women and men and contribute to beliefs and behaviors that explicitly or subtly encourage, excuse, or minimize sexual violence and abuse — even among those of us who want to stop it.</p>
<p>Oppression</p>	<p>To prevent sexual violence and abuse, we have to dismantle oppression in all forms. All forms of oppression, including sexism, racism, homophobia, and transphobia, contribute to sexual violence and abuse. Oppression condones violence, uses power over others, excuses unfair treatment and harm, and helps silence or dismiss victims.</p>	<p>People who commit sexual violence or abuse often look for victims who have less power in society. That means that women, people of color, poor people, disabled people, and LGBT people can be more likely to experience sexual violence in their lives than other groups. So if we want to prevent sexual violence and abuse, we have to also address the ways that power and prejudice contribute to a culture where it occurs.</p>

As is true for the phrase “sexual violence,” for some audiences, terms like “rape culture” may be best — that will be a judgment call, based on your overall strategy and what you’ve determined about your audience. Even so, “plain language” tends to work much better for everyone, even those people who are more familiar with nuanced “insider” terminology. Depending on the situation, you might choose to name rape culture, but only after you define what it means in everyday language (see Table 3 for examples). Using plain language means you can reach both insiders and outsiders at the same time, which is good since different audiences often get exposed to the same message, even if they weren’t the primary audience. In doing so, you also help to equip insider audiences to communicate more effectively with those who are less familiar with the topic.



Rule 2: Focus on conduct, not character when talking about people who commit sexual abuse and assault

To prevent rape and sexual abuse, we must talk about the people who commit these acts. But the beliefs that many people hold about the individuals who commit sexual violence can make it hard to talk effectively about sexual violence prevention. The good news is that if our language and messages consistently focus on the *conduct* rather than the *character*, we can help people understand that prevention is possible.

Terms like “rapists,” “predators,” “abusers,” or “perpetrators” can reinforce the idea that people who commit sexual violence

and abuse are all depraved, distant, or somehow “other.” If we see sexual violence as something that only “bad people” could possibly do, it makes it harder to see family members, friends, coworkers, classmates, and others as potentially part of the problem. Then it is harder to see and talk about the solutions that could stop those family members, friends, coworkers, or classmates from hurting someone else.



One option is to take a page from other areas that use “person-first language” and focus on holding people accountable for their actions instead of on labeling them. That means talking about *people who commit sexual violence*, *people who abuse others*, and *people who cause sexual harm*, rather than rapists, offenders, abusers, or perpetrators.

You can also shift your audience’s thinking by helping them see how conversations about people who commit sexual violence can happen within families and communities who talk about difficult issues early. Audiences in our message research particularly connected with comments from the mother of a college-aged young man, who noted:

“There are so many mixed messages young men get about what it means to be a man that might lead them to harm other people, even unintentionally. I realized we hadn’t really even had a conversation with him about what consent means. Would he know what to do

if he saw one of his frat brothers engaging in inappropriate sexual behavior? Would he be bold enough to call it out? My husband and I realized we'd talked a lot about how to protect our daughters from being a rape victim but hadn't done enough to talk to our sons to ensure they don't commit sexual violence."



Telling stories about early interventions without using “insider” language is another way to help people move beyond thinking only about “bad apples” whose behavior can’t be changed. For example, our research audiences connected with comments from a clinician who works with young people who act out sexually when she said:

“Whatever trauma these kids have experienced, I believe we have a duty as people who work with youth to try to address the impulses that may be leading them towards abusive sexual behavior. These kids need to be protected from themselves, too. Their potential to become [people who abuse others] is not pre-destined.”

Just as with your language choices, there will be audiences for whom these types of efforts to change perspectives around people who abuse will not be effective. In fact, some victims’ representatives we spoke with were offended by phrases that

they saw as minimizing the harm and violation of sexual violence. You'll need to decide how to frame people who commit sexual violence based on what you know about your audience, your own beliefs and expertise, your overall strategy, and other factors.

Conclusion

With careful planning, communication can help people move through their discomfort about sexual abuse and assault so they can actively support prevention. There's no one message — or even set of messages — that works all the time for everyone. Fortunately, there are steps we can take that will make our communication more successful, in any context. At times it can feel difficult and frustrating — but we know from the research that carefully constructed messages can make a significant difference in how people view prevention and their role in it.

In brief, we need to: start from a place of shared values; acknowledge negative feelings; be thoughtful, clear, and concrete about describing the problem and solution; illustrate that prevention is possible; and always speak plainly and focus on conduct, not character. Messages constructed this way will show our audience that stopping sexual abuse and assault before they happen is possible and that we all have a stake in prevention, wherever and whoever we are.



Chapter 3

Where the rubber meets the road: Putting it all together

In this chapter

Making the case for prevention in ...

- Youth-serving organizations **44**
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Communicating effectively helps us get where we want to go. When we're talking about sexual violence prevention, our destination is communities, organizations, and institutions without sexual harassment, abuse, and assault. To get there, effective communication about preventing sexual violence must happen in the context of specific systems and environmental changes.

This chapter makes our messaging recommendations concrete by showing what that can look like in practice and providing opportunities for you to think about how the recommendations apply to your own work. We have developed sample messages to provide examples in different contexts. We use objectives for sexual violence prevention that were identified by RALIANCE as key areas for future progress through structured conversations with prevention stakeholders, practitioners, and opinion leaders engaged in sexual violence prevention work around the country.

Many of these messages apply to the prevention work of youth-serving organizations and college campuses, since these are places field experts identified as priorities for change, so they were also primary areas of focus for our message-testing



research. Because preventing harassment, abuse, and assault doesn't start, or end, with any one organization or type of organization, we also take the same message structure and apply it to prevention in other contexts, such as in faith communities and the military. We hope that no matter where you are doing prevention work, these sample messages are a useful starting point that spurs your thinking about how to apply the message guidelines to make the case for the specific change you want to see.

The language in the sample messages reflects BMSG's adaptation of the messages tested by GSSR. Due to local variations, not every prevention strategy will apply

everywhere. Whatever prevention strategy you are pursuing at the moment, use your knowledge of the context and community you are working in to apply the lessons we've shared about keeping your prevention messages tangible, leading with shared values, and modeling journeys toward action. Adapt, customize, and expand upon the messages so they will be most effective in the context of your overall strategy.



Sample goal: Sexual harassment, abuse, assault, or exploitation is not tolerated in schools and other youth-serving organizations.

Sample objective one

All youth-serving organizations are supported in new or existing work to implement policies and practices to maintain safe and nurturing environments that make it highly unlikely that someone could perpetrate sexual abuse or exploitation within the organization.^{10,11}

Possible audiences: Funding agencies, licensing and accrediting institutions, insurers

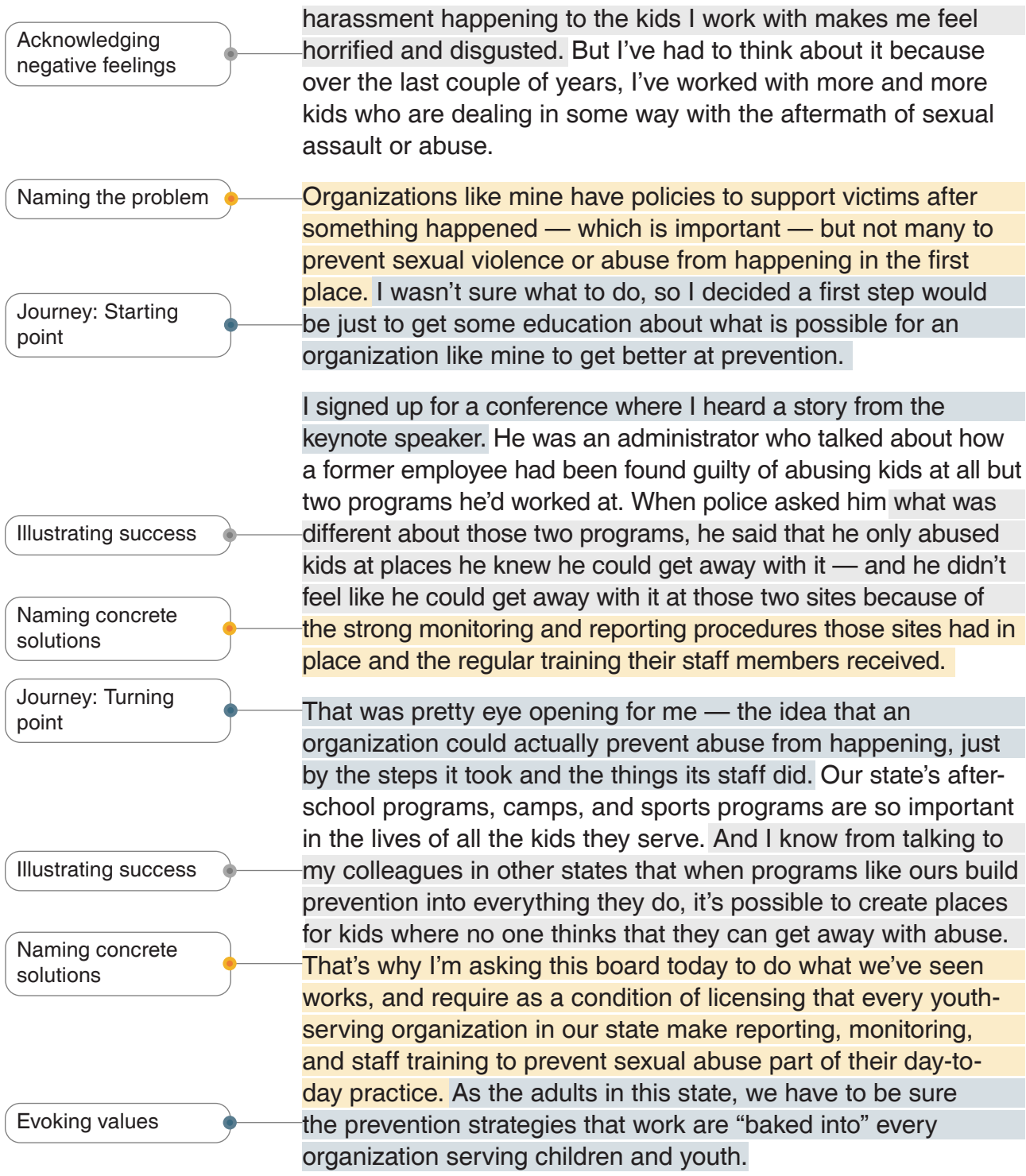
Possible messengers: Researchers who have studied the effectiveness of such policies, educators who have experience with the approach, staff and administrators from youth-serving organizations, parents

In this sample message, our messenger is a local educator giving testimony to the state licensing institution:

Establishing credibility

Evoking shared values

Sample message: I've spent years working with children and teens because I am committed to the children who are the future of this state. Thinking about something like sexual abuse or



Sample objective two

Mechanisms exist for youth-serving organizations to address sexually inappropriate and abusive behaviors in children, adolescents, and young adults.¹²⁻¹⁴

Possible audiences: State and local leaders, licensing agencies, school officials, program directors, funders, clinical training program officials

Possible messengers: Educators, researchers and clinicians, program administrators who have successfully implemented policies such as training for staff to recognize and respond to inappropriate or potentially problematic behavior by students in their care, parents whose children participate in youth-serving programs (including parents of children who have received services for problematic behavior)

In this sample message, our messenger is a parent who is speaking to state leaders in a public forum who are considering legislation to mandate education for a program to educate those who work with young people about how to identify children who display problematic behavior:

Evoking shared values and establishing credibility

Acknowledging negative feelings, Journey: Starting point

Establishing credibility

Describing inappropriate behavior in a way that doesn't alienate

Naming the problem

Using data to illustrate the problem

Sample message: My husband and I try to make every decision thinking about what will keep our kids happy, healthy, and safe. That's always meant asking a lot of questions, sometimes about topics that make us uncomfortable — but we watch the news, and we know that bad things can happen in this world. When we selected their after-school program, we remembered to ask questions about who'd have access to the kids, how well guarded the playground was, how staff were screened — things like that.

I thought we'd covered all our bases, but then a few months ago when I went to pick up my kids, a staff member told me that another child in the program, J, had touched my child inappropriately while the teacher's back was turned. We were upset, of course, and immediately started taking steps to support our kids and figure out what the program would do next. But I kept thinking about all the time I'd spent trying to make sure my kids were safe — and that I had never, ever thought about the possibility of another child being responsible for doing something inappropriate sexually with my kids. As we researched how to help our children and tried to decide what to do next, I learned that it's pretty common for child sexual abuse to be perpetrated

by other children. Many times these children have been victimized themselves or are acting out inappropriate things they've seen or experienced.

Changing the perception of who commits abuse, evoking values

The times I've met J, I always thought she was a sweet little kid, if a little high-strung. While I didn't want her to hurt my kids again, she's just a kid, and I also wanted her to get the help she needs — especially if someone has been hurting her, too.

Illustrating success

The good news is that I found out when we step in early and help kids who act out sexually, we can interrupt behaviors before they become entrenched and make all kids safer. For instance, research shows that with proper intervention and treatment, very few people who commit sexual violence as children or teens reoffend later in life. Finding that out was a real turning point for me. I realized that if we really want to stop child sexual abuse from happening, we've got to deal with it early on — to protect both the kids who might be abused, but also kids like J, who might cause harm themselves.

Journey: Turning point

Evoking values

Naming concrete solutions

One way we can do that is to make sure every teacher, counselor, administrator, and tutor who works with young people in this state is able to identify sexually problematic behavior in youth — and take action to address it. That's why today we are asking you to support the current proposal to support educating adults who work with young people every day, to identify and take action to help kids whose behavior is problematic. Frederick Douglass once said, "It is easier to build strong children than repair broken men." We can do that in this state — but we need your help.

Evoking values

At any given time, a messenger would be focused on just one specific strategy based on their overall strategy. The sample message above would also work with other specific strategies. Instead of the specific strategy highlighted above, the parent could have focused on:

- A research program to create treatment standards for young people with sexual behavior problems;
- Programs to get young people who exhibit inappropriate sexual behavior the help they need;
- Work to create standards for treatment and licensing for the people who provide counseling and care to kids with sexual behavior problems,

- Our project to establish restorative justice practices in our school district that will help support kids with sexual behavior problems while they get the help they need.

Sample objective three

Schools and other youth-serving organizations are equipped to provide quality, research-based, and developmentally and culturally appropriate education on healthy relationships, consent, and sexual violence prevention, including resources for victims of past abuse and assaults.¹⁵⁻¹⁸

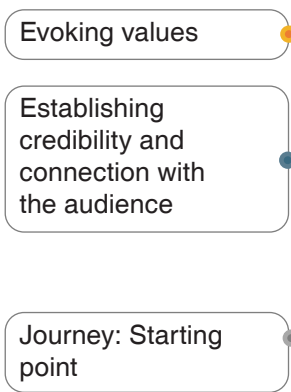


Possible audiences: Funders, researchers, public health organizations, education leaders, local school administrators and school boards, organizational partners

Possible messengers: Parents, community residents, students, teachers, researchers and evaluators, faith leaders

In this sample message, our messenger is a mother who lives in the community who is reaching her audience, the local school board, by writing them a letter.

Sample message: As parents, we’re always thinking about what we can do to make sure our kids have a better life than we did. My husband and I grew up in families with a lot of traditional ideas about what it meant to be a man or a woman. There was a cultural understanding that “boys will be boys.” When we had children, we knew we wanted to pass on important parts of our culture and traditions, but we also wanted to do some things differently when it came to raising boys and girls.



Journey: Starting point

When my daughter went to college, we sat down with her and talked about everything from parties to safe sex. With her



As with the message above, depending on the overall strategy, a different specific strategy could be inserted in the message, such as:

- Supporting research to expand existing curricula to include conversations about healthy relationships, consent, and sexual violence prevention;
- Supporting research on how to develop and deliver curricula about healthy relationships, consent, and sexual violence prevention that takes into account the needs of kids from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds;
- Offering schools support to make it more feasible for them to educate students about healthy relationships, consent, and sexual violence prevention.

Sample objective four

There are resources to support evidence-based sexual violence prevention programs, basic research, and program evaluation in youth-serving organizations.

Possible audiences: Local, state, and national leaders, foundations, other grant-giving organizations

Possible messengers: Researchers, evaluators, program administrators, teachers and administrators, parents, students

In this sample message, our messenger is an administrator speaking to a statewide foundation at a summit it convened on youth development:

Sample message: I started working in after-school programs when I was kid. I had a lot of supportive adults who helped me grow and learn — and I wanted to be that for other children. I started as a coach, then developed broader health programs and finally, I have served as the CEO of the largest network of after-school programs in our state for the last 14 years. I’ve seen a lot of changes in how we approach tough issues like sexual violence, abuse, and harassment. In my early days, we certainly knew about sexual abuse and assault, but no one talked about it, and certainly not with our kids. It felt too uncomfortable, and we didn’t really know what to do about it.

Today we know a lot more, and our young people benefit from it. They are part of programming that doesn’t shy away from tough subjects and takes developmental factors into account. Our staff brings them the information they need to navigate the world, such as information about healthy relationships, consent, and bullying.

Naming concrete solutions

We also recognize the importance of helping to equip parents so that they can have these conversations. I know our organization is lucky to have a board that insisted we find ways to make safety a top priority, one we talk about with staff, but most importantly with the children and families we serve. Sometimes that means taking steps like hosting a meeting about a new curriculum, or providing our staff with extra training to help them talk with kids about issues that we're still learning about, like online and smartphone safety.

Naming the problem

What we need to know now — and what other organizations in this state need to know — is whether we are using the best tools available to support kids and keep them safe. We can find out, but only with research, and that takes resources. That's why today, we're asking for your help in enabling organizations that serve kids to provide their staff with the training and evaluation resources we know are important for preventing sexual violence. We hope you'll help us fight for the resources to keep getting better at being the supportive, caring adults all our children deserve.

Naming concrete solutions

Depending on the overall strategy, the administrator could have instead mentioned other specific strategies such as:

- Supporting research on how youth-serving organizations like mine can most effectively keep kids safe;
- Enhancing evaluation so we as a field have a better idea of what works and what doesn't when it comes to prevention programming.



Sample goal: Sexual harassment, abuse, assault, or exploitation is not tolerated on college campuses.

Sample objective five

Campuses can provide comprehensive training and coursework to students about sexual violence, healthy sexuality, and consent.

Possible audiences: College campus administrators, institutional governing boards, campus organization/student body leaders, athletics governing bodies

Possible messengers: Students, future students, parents, alumni, staff, administrators, donors

In this sample message, the messenger is a student who is also a survivor speaking to the institutional governing board of her college campus.

Sample message: Like all my friends and classmates, I'm proud to be a student here — but when I was dealing with the sexual assault I experienced on campus, I realized that sexual assault prevention is one area where we're not doing all that we could be.

Evoking values

Naming the problem

Acknowledging negative feelings

After I was assaulted, a big part of me didn't want to think any more about what had happened and just put it behind me, but I

Journey: Starting point

Journey: Turning point

Naming concrete solutions

Illustrating success

had so many questions about what had happened to me. While I was searching for answers, I started researching what my college and other schools were doing to stop sexual assault. When I saw what other colleges are doing, I realized that we could be doing more. For instance, when I enrolled here, we all took an online training about sexual misconduct, but other colleges have multi-week, in-person programs where they talk about what consent means and train students and staff to recognize problems and step in if something doesn't seem right. On those campuses, students feel safer because they know lots of people are looking out for them and don't tolerate things that can enable sexual assault, and they have more skills to identify problematic behavior and step in if something doesn't seem right — before anyone gets hurt.

Naming concrete solutions

Evoking values

I'm here today — as a student and a survivor — to ask you to build up our prevention programming by providing training to make sure that every student is able to speak up or get help when they see behavior that potentially puts others at risk for sexual violence. We're leaders in so many areas — let's excel at preventing sexual assault and creating a campus where all of us are safe and respected.

Depending on her coalition's overall strategy, the student could have mentioned other strategies such as, for example:

- Creating coursework for first year students so every student has an opportunity to talk and learn about issues that are going to be part of our lives here, like consent and what it looks like.

Sample objective six

Campuses train staff and clearly delineate their role in prevention on an ongoing basis.

Possible audiences: College campus administrators, institutional governing boards, staff labor organizations/unions

Possible messengers: College campus administrators, institutional governing boards, staff labor organizations/unions, parents, students, alumni

In this sample message, our messenger is a college administrator who is speaking to a panel of fellow administrators who are reviewing and revising current campus policies:

Evoking shared values

Acknowledging negative feelings

Journey: Starting point

Journey: Turning point

Naming the problem

Building identification with audience

Naming challenges

Evoking values

Illustrating success

Naming concrete solutions

Evoking values

Sample message: I got into this work because I wanted to help students live up to their full potential. When I first started out as the Dean of Residential Life, like many of us, I was pessimistic about how much we could really do to prevent sexual violence. But over time, after sitting on the disciplinary board for a few on-campus sexual misconduct cases, I realized that these assaults seemed preventable. And that got me thinking about why I got into this work in the first place, and whether I was being true to the values that led me here. I began to look into what other colleges are doing and think about how my campus could be proactive, instead of just reacting to sexual harassment and assault.

As college administrators, we may not be able to end sexual violence everywhere, but we can do something to make our schools safer and provide supportive learning environments where rape and sexual misconduct are not seen as an inevitable part of student life. That's going to take all of us — not just one department or administrator. We've seen at other schools that when everyone feels involved in the prevention process, campuses are safer — and that makes them more successful. So let's clearly delineate each faculty and staff member's role and responsibilities in preventing sexual violence on campus. We owe it to our students to make our campus a place where they can feel safe enough to learn, graduate, and grow to their full potential.

Sample objective seven

Campuses develop and maintain best practices for colleges and universities to implement research-informed sexual violence prevention programs that are comprehensive and culturally relevant.¹⁹⁻²¹

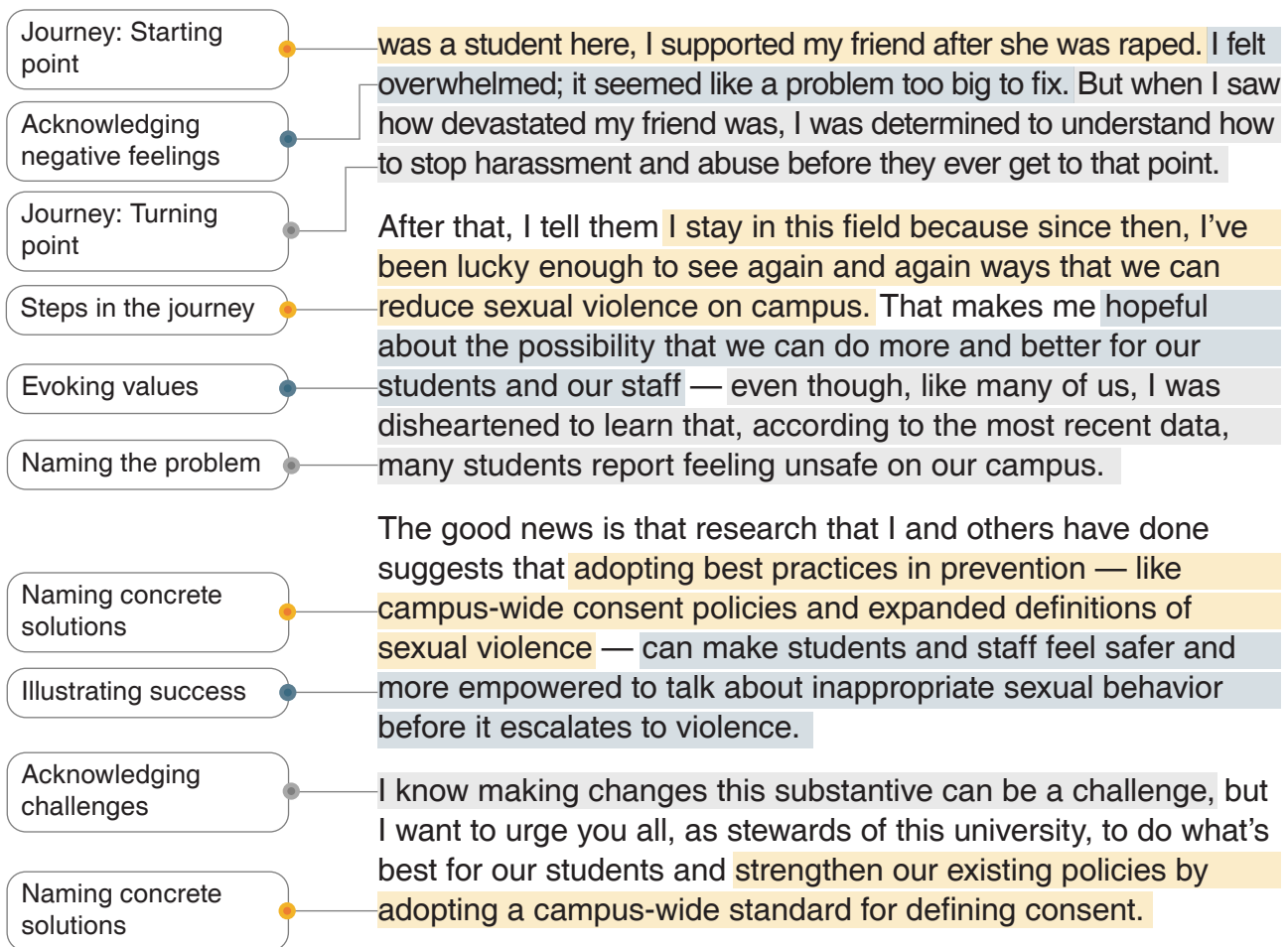
Possible audiences: College campus administrators, institutional governing boards, campus legal departments, state leaders

Possible messengers: Students, parents, alumni, researchers, staff, administrators

In this sample message, our messenger is a campus faculty researcher speaking to her institutional governing board as it considers campus policy.

Sample message: Sometimes people ask me why I've decided to dedicate my life to researching how to prevent sexual violence and make society safer. I tell them I started because back when I

Evoking shared values



Depending on her overall strategy, the faculty researcher could have mentioned other strategies such as:

- Expanding how we define sexual misconduct to include the whole range of problematic sexual behavior so people are better empowered to intervene;
- Agreeing to a survey of our students, faculty, and staff to understand what they know about what we're doing and what we could do better;
- Supporting this initiative to partner with experts in our community who can help us ensure that what we're doing to prevent violence is in line with the most up-to-date research — and help us improve if it isn't.

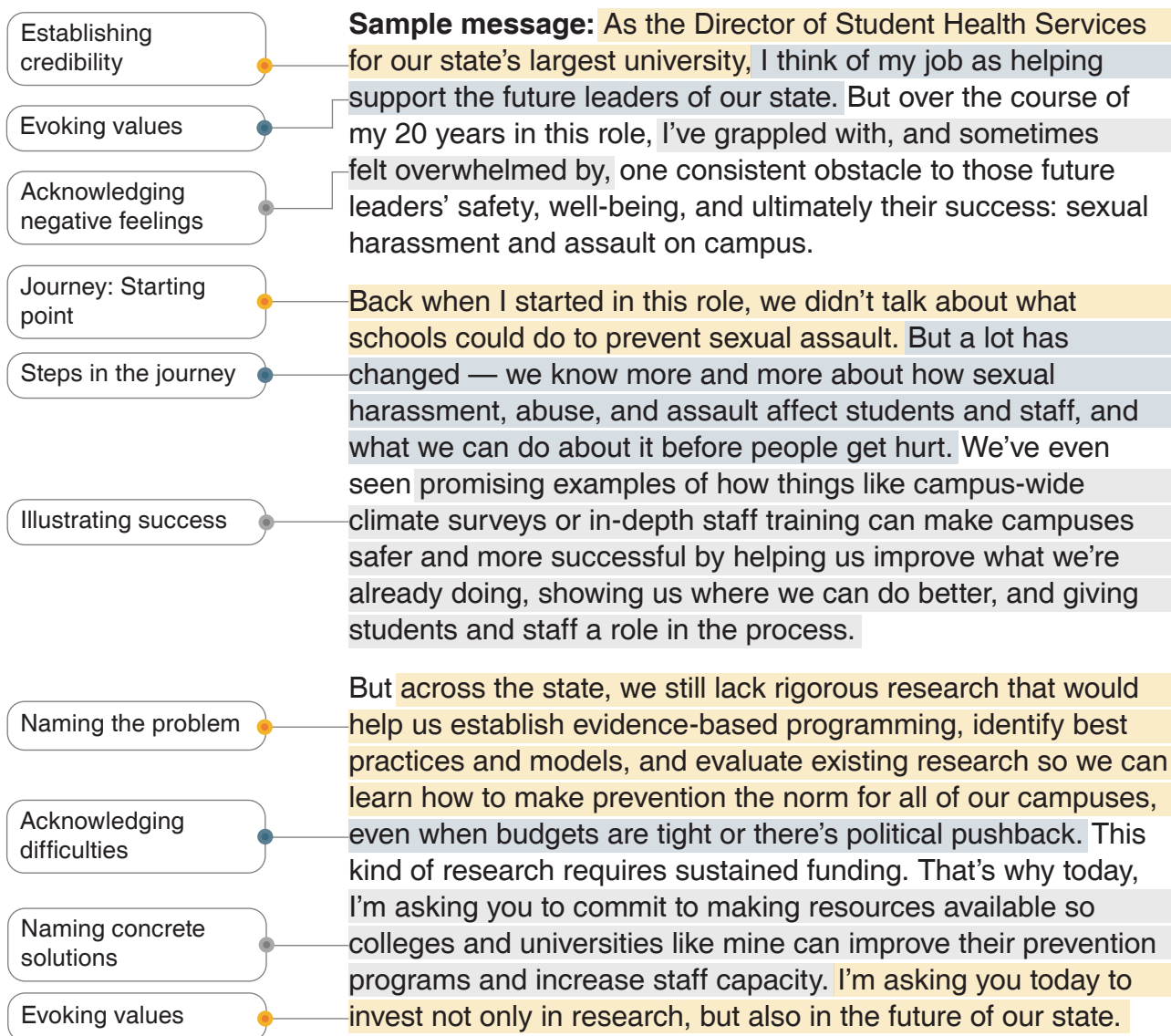
Sample objective eight

There are resources to support evidence-based and evidence-informed sexual violence prevention programs, basic research, and program evaluation on college campuses.

Possible audiences: Local, state, and national leaders, foundations, other grant-giving organizations

Possible messengers: Researchers, administrators, staff, parents, students, alumni

In this sample message, our messenger is a college administrator who is giving testimony to state-level leaders at a hearing on college budget issues:



Depending on the overall strategy, the administrator could instead highlight other strategies, such as:

- Supporting research on effective prevention strategies on college campuses;
- Helping prevention organizations enhance evaluation and monitoring so we can learn what works and what doesn't when it comes to preventing violence on campuses;
- Championing academic research tracks and fellowships that will help support the generation of researchers who will be leading the prevention work of tomorrow.

Sample objective nine

College athletic programs institute policies and procedures that support each individual's role in sustaining positive, safe, and healthy sport and campus environments.

Possible audiences: College athletics organizations and leagues (e.g., NCAA), college sports funders, campus administrators, institutional governing boards

Possible messengers: Coaches, students, parents, alumni, fans, communities

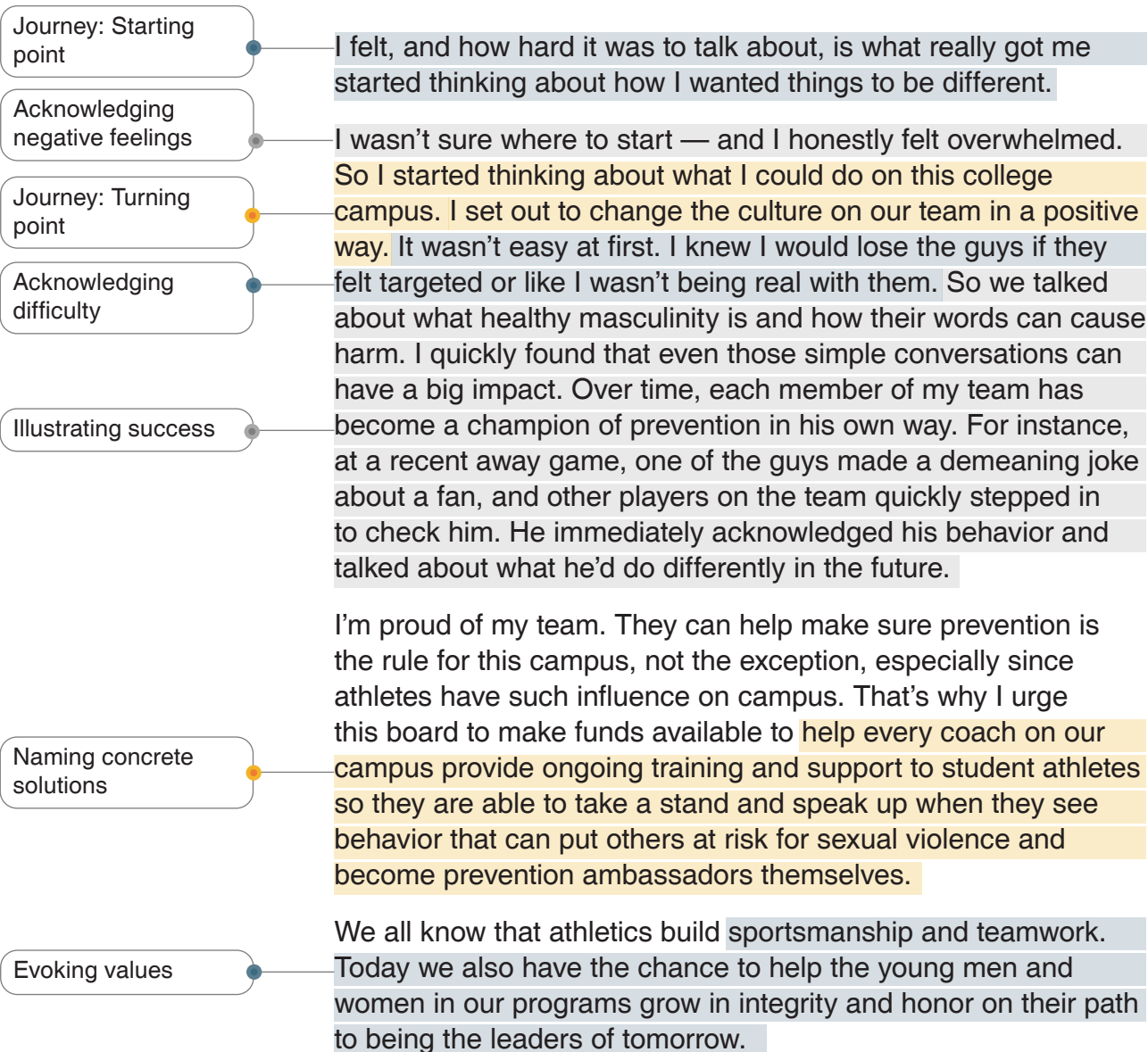
In this sample message, the messenger is a college coach speaking to college administrators about instituting training about sexual assault prevention for all coaches on campus:

Establishing credibility — I became a coach because I wanted to help other young men thrive.

Evoking values — When I was younger, I played on my college's men's soccer team. The supportive coaches I had then helped me learn what it meant to be a man in a healthy, respectful way.

Naming the problem — I've thought about those days a lot lately. It feels more important than ever to support our young men, because they receive so many conflicting messages about what it means to be a man.

Acknowledging negative feelings — When I first started coaching men's soccer, I was taken aback by some of the things that the guys on the team would say on the bus or in the locker room. They said things and used language that was degrading to women. It made me uncomfortable but, I'm sorry to say, I didn't feel comfortable interrupting the chatter as a new coach. But this is more than just chatter. Reflecting on how





Sample goal: All communities of faith are equipped to prevent and address sexual harassment, abuse, assault, or exploitation within their communities.

Sample objective ten

Churches adopt policies and practices that equip leadership and congregants to embed prevention in every aspect of church life and business.

Possible audiences: Church leadership/clergy, church associations and other institutional bodies, board members

Possible messengers: Congregation members, parents, youth members, church leadership, clergy

In this sample message, our messenger is an adult member of the congregation speaking to church leadership about instituting training in sexual assault prevention for church staff working with children and young people:

Evoking values, establishing credibility

Evoking values

Sample message: Every day, like all of us here, I'm doing the hard and real work of living the faith that sustains me — and this community helps me do that. And it's because this community is so important to me that I'm here today to urge us to come together and take action to protect some of the most vulnerable members of our community — our children.

Acknowledging negative feelings

Journey: Starting point

Using data, shifting perceptions of abuse

Journey: Turning point

Naming the problem

Steps on the journey

Naming concrete solutions

Illustrating success

Evoking values

Naming concrete solutions

Acknowledging negative feelings

Evoking values

Until recently, I had no idea that child sexual abuse was so prevalent and widespread. Honestly, I didn't want to know — I was horrified to think of children experiencing any kind of harm, especially sexual abuse. Like many of us, I suspect, I avoided thinking about it and hoped it would never happen to anyone I love.

I attended a training a few weeks ago at work where I learned that one in four girls and one in six boys are sexually abused before they reach the age of 18. I was surprised to learn that most child sexual abuse happens within the circle of family or friends — it is most often perpetrated by people who children trust and are supposed to be safe. That was a shock, but it got me thinking — it is likely people in our church are survivors — or people who commit sexual abuse. Both groups may need our help, but they might not feel like they can say anything. They might be afraid of what will happen if they come forward.

With a problem that widespread — and that severe — I realized I had to do something. I started looking at what congregations can do, and I found that some — even in this area — have had great success with church-wide efforts to train leaders and congregants about how to keep kids safe by having conversations with adults, teens and children about healthy boundaries, enforcing policies to make worship spaces safer, and break the silence around abuse and assault. It's made the churches themselves stronger, and the lessons that people take with them from the church into their homes make our homes and communities themselves stronger and safer for children.

I was moved by the dedication I've seen from other churches. We have a loving congregation that can do the same. That's why I'm asking today that we as a congregation commit to a church-wide training to develop and maintain prevention policies and practices to make protecting children and getting help to those who need it part of the daily work of our community and everyone in it.

I know these are hard things to think and talk about — but for me, it's harder to think about kids getting hurt, survivors being isolated, or someone who is afraid they might hurt another but is also too afraid to get help. What makes this such a special place is the community, the work that we do, and the faith that we sustain together — and that's why we all need to be part of preventing abuse of our children, and we can start right now, today. As people of faith, and a beacon for this community, we can't afford to wait.



Sample goal: Military institutions are fully invested in actively preventing and addressing sexual harassment, abuse, assault, or exploitation in any campus, base, and agency within their purview.

Sample objective eleven

Academy campuses provide comprehensive training and coursework to equip and educate cadets about sexual violence, healthy sexuality, and consent.

Possible audiences: Department of Defense, academy leadership, cadets, general public

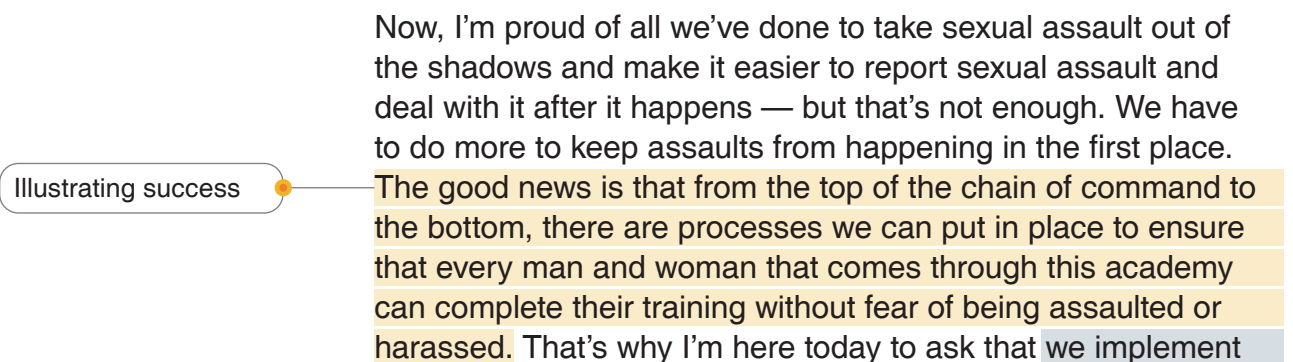
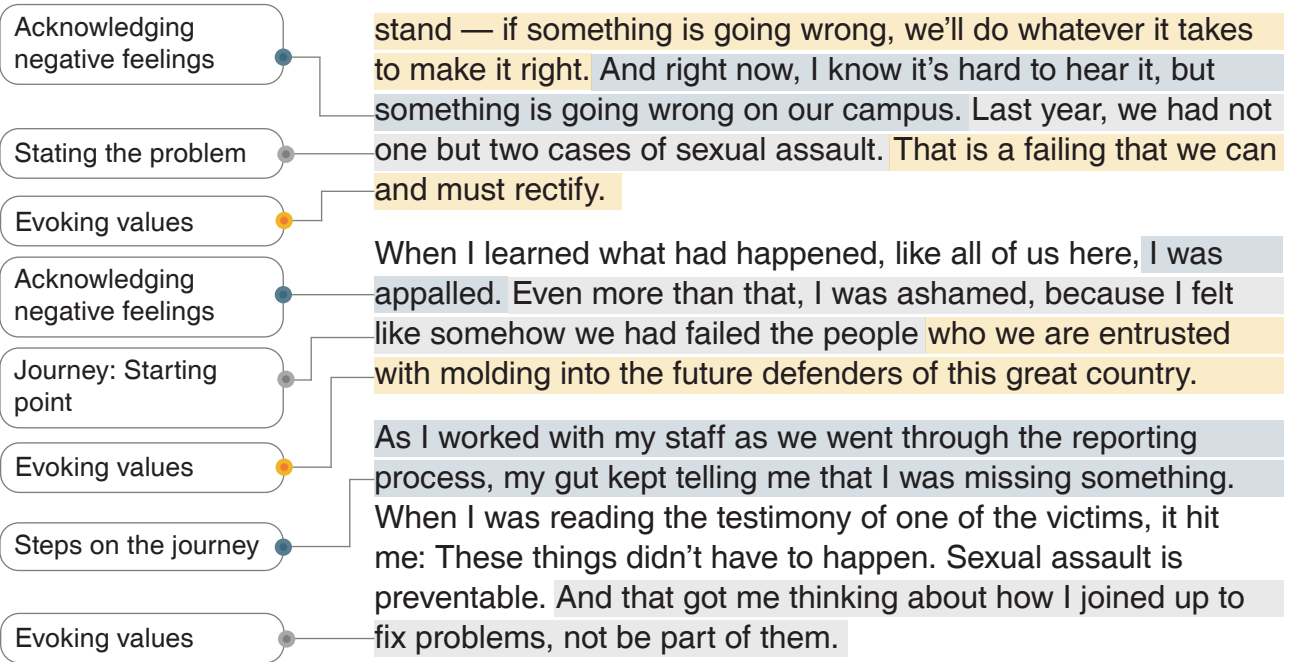
Possible messengers: Students, parents, alumni, researchers, staff, administrators

In this sample message, our messenger is the commandant of cadets who is talking to his superior officers, the head commandant and lieutenants, about establishing training on sexual assault prevention for new cadets:

Sample message: Good afternoon, academy leadership.

One of the things that makes me proudest about serving in the military for the last 10 years is that we don't let problems

Evoking values



Naming concrete solutions

Evoking values

in-depth trainings and coursework for new cadets, as well as yearly refresher trainings for current cadets, to make sure that everyone can speak up when they see inappropriate behavior. That anyone should have to experience sexual assault is an injustice. In the military, where we're building the future of our country, I know we can't and won't stand for that.

Depending on the commandant's overall strategy, he could emphasize other strategies such as:

- Make sure the mid-level managers are following through with trainings through ongoing discussions and communication with their companies.

Now, what might it look like to develop a message about the institution or organization whose policies or practices you hope to change or enhance?

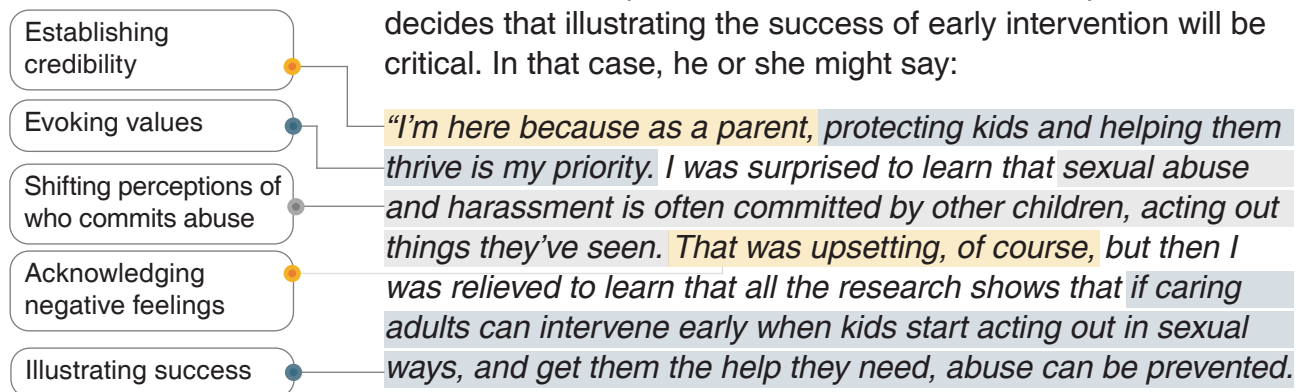
How to make your case when time is limited

Making the case for preventing sexual harassment, abuse, and assault requires time and planning and may demand a variety of messages and messengers. But when you have limited time to share information — for example, in an interview with a reporter in which you want to provide a quick media bite — you might not be able to deliver a message that includes everything in the samples above.

When time is limited, what information should you plan to include? The answer will depend on your overall strategy. Depending on where you are in that strategy, you may want to emphasize one particular aspect of your message — while at other points in time, you can include other pieces. If you are early in your campaign, for example, you might focus on the journey and help the audience see that while it may be difficult and seem overwhelming, your group has seen that change is possible. Later in a campaign, you may spend less time describing the journey and more time saying why now is the right time to enact the solution you are proposing.

Even in a short message, lead with shared values and include a concrete statement of what your solution is and why it's the right one.

For example, imagine that the parent making the case for the importance of early intervention with youth (Goal 1, Objective 2 above) is stopped afterwards by a reporter who asks, “Can you tell me why you’re here today?” The parent knows they can’t repeat everything but wants to make sure to take advantage of the opportunity to have the message they just gave reinforced in the news. The parent has to choose what to emphasize and decides that illustrating the success of early intervention will be critical. In that case, he or she might say:



Naming concrete solutions

Evoking values

That's why I'm here supporting a proposal to ensure every counselor and teacher in our state has the training they need to recognize early warning signs of harmful behavior and know what to do next. That will make every child in their care — and every child in our state — safer."

Here, the speaker didn't have the opportunity to model a full journey, though there is some journey language ("I've learned..."). The speaker shifts perceptions of who commits child sexual abuse, leads with values and reiterates them throughout, names a concrete solution, and, perhaps most importantly for their overall strategy, shows that the solution works. If the reporter asks follow-up questions, the speaker might have the option of including other pieces of the story — more about their journey, for instance, or details of their goal.



Another situation that requires brevity is social media. You can “break up” your message over multiple posts, so your followers or audience can see a complete message over time. And you can vary your social media postings to ensure that you’re not focusing too heavily on one piece of the message. So, for example, imagine that the group building support for licensing changes to support systematic prevention programming (Goal 1, objective 1) knows their primary audience relies on social media. The team decides to build support in the week leading up to their comments to the state licensing institution by posting messages on that platform about how licensing can support prevention.

Based on the group’s overall strategy and understanding of its online audience, the group could develop Facebook posts that incorporate different aspects of the overarching message — over time, the group’s followers will receive many parts of the message.

Sample social media posts

The image displays three sample Facebook posts, each with callouts from a list of communication strategy elements. The posts are presented in a vertical stack, each within a rounded rectangular frame that mimics a social media post interface, including a profile picture placeholder and a dropdown arrow.

Post 1:

- Strategy elements: Evoking values, Acknowledging discomfort, Naming the problem, Acknowledging negative feelings, Journey: Turning point, Illustrating success, Journey: Starting point.
- Text: "To thrive and develop their full potential, children need to be safe and supported. It's hard to think about, but many kids in our state are dealing with sexual assault or abuse. It's easy to feel overwhelmed, but something needs to change. Strong standards in after-school programming can help prevent abuse or assault! Let's do more together — to learn more about what we're doing to support the kids in our state, visit: [LINK]"

Post 2:

- Strategy elements: Evoking values, Illustrating success, Naming concrete solutions.
- Text: "After-school programs, camps, and sports programs help our kids excel. They can also help keep our kids safe and prevent abuse from happening, just by the monitoring and reporting they do and the training their staff members receive. Learn more about how we can make sure after-school programs meet high standards in protecting our kids [LINK]"

Post 3:

- Strategy elements: Acknowledging negative feelings, Evoking values, Illustrating success, Naming concrete solutions.
- Text: "Reading the news can be overwhelming. How can we keep kids safe? We've done it before, from car seats to preventing drunk driving — we can solve big problems when we all work together. After-school programs and camps are one place we can stop sexual abuse before it happens. Learn more about the role that after-school programs and camps can play in keeping kids safe across the state — and how you can join them!"





Acknowledging
difficulties

Naming concrete
solutions

With all that after-school programs do for their students, adding anything else to their workload can feel like a lot! But we know it's possible for them to keep kids safer by including programming and staff training to prevent abuse and harassment. To find out how you can help us make prevention a priority, please join us [LINK]

Conclusion

Everyone reading this guide has specific goals in mind for prevention, from changes in an after-school program to altering how a company does business. To help you get to wherever you're going, we've shown how to apply message guidelines to real-world examples of systems changes that help build and maintain institutions where sexual harassment, abuse, and assault are unacceptable.

As you're planning your approach to strategic communication, remember to:

- Evoke shared values.
- Acknowledge negative feelings, like discomfort, fear, or lingering doubts.
- Describe a journey toward change, its starting point, and pivotal moments.
- State the problem precisely. Resist the urge to say everything you know, because you can't be comprehensive and strategic at the same time.
- Describe your solution in concrete terms that illustrate success.

And always, whatever your approach, stay focused on your strategy and overall goals and follow the rules of the road:

- Speak plainly.
- Focus on conduct, not character.

***So: Where are you going?
And how will you get there?***



Conclusion

Taking to the open road

It is good to have an end to journey toward; but it is the journey that matters, in the end. - Ursula K. Le Guin

When we began work on this project, we didn't know where our journey would lead us. One of the biggest challenges has been defining the destination itself: creating a culture where respect, consent, and healthy sexuality are the norm, and where sexual harassment, abuse, and assault are not tolerated. Effecting that type of cultural change is a long-term process that demands doing everything differently — from how we raise our children to how we run our businesses to how we protect our communities.

It's a long road, with many detours and distractions along the way. It takes committed people working to change one institution or one community, one strategy at a time. But the good news is that in the course of our years of research and collaboration with dedicated stakeholders, researchers, community leaders, and experts from around the country, we've joined with many traveling companions who are eager to become champions of prevention wherever and whoever they are.

Effective communication strategies can help people take the next step, from wherever their starting point is, to see and believe that it's possible to create places where sexual violence doesn't happen. Together, we can create and maintain those environments by:

Focusing on overall strategy and goals: Strategic communication is about more than just saying something — it's about defining the world we want to see and how we want to get there. Communication grounded in an overall strategy focused on both short- and longer-term prevention goals will propel us down the road to prevention.

Developing strong messages: To help audiences move from anxiety and fear toward support for and action to prevent sexual abuse and assault, lead with shared values, model journeys to change, and name concrete solutions, even if they are incremental steps toward larger changes. To keep people open to the possibility of prevention — and the role institutions can play in preventing harassment, abuse, and assault — avoid jargon, focus on conduct not character when talking about people who commit sexual violence, and acknowledge the doubts and negative feelings that many people carry with them about the possibility of prevention.

Applying the lessons in this guide: Knowing the rules of the road isn't enough, of course; you'll also need to put them to use. Practice developing and deploying messages with colleagues so you are ready to use them — with confidence — in the context of the specific change you want to see.

Energizing and activating people around sexual violence prevention can feel daunting, but we are confident that the many dedicated souls we've met along this journey are up to the task.

Prevention is possible. How do we know? It's happening — in organizations and communities around the country every day. We just need more of it. While the successes may not come as fast as we'd like, they are coming, and they matter for all of us. No progress is too small, and when we illustrate those small steps in the right direction, we gain momentum.

We hope you will use this guide to accelerate and amplify those successes in the hard and real work of building safe, just, nurturing communities where sexual abuse, harassment, and assault aren't tolerated — and where we all have the opportunity, in the words of one of our colleagues from an early phase of this project, to “be the change we seek and... begin doing it at any time in our lives.”

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