

BEYOND THE HEADLINES



Media Communication Companion Guide

Welcome to the Beyond the Headlines: Media Communications Training Companion Guide. This guide is a resource meant to complement the online training and summarize key points. This document provides you with supplemental questions, resources, activities, and information.

Key Questions

Questions in this guide are meant to help you reflect on key points and strategies in the online training.

Resources

CDC's Violence Prevention Resources for Action

These resources present strategies to prevent ACEs and child abuse and neglect. CDC's [Violence Prevention Resources for Action](#) help communities and states prioritize and implement prevention activities based on the best available evidence.

Prevent Child Abuse America's Theory of Change

Prevent Child Abuse America (PCAA) developed a valuable "[Theory of Change for Primary Prevention in the U.S.](#)" One of the key strategies in the Theory of Change is to shift the narrative around prevention. The units in this training provide actionable tools to support this strategy. PCAA also has other [resources available online](#).

Plain Language

For more information about plain language, go to [PlainLanguage.gov](https://www.plainlanguage.gov)

Quick Navigation

UNIT 1

Navigating Media Communication Basics

This unit explores the essential elements of effective media communication, covering key topics such as thorough preparation, identifying your audience, and evaluating media requests.

Key Questions

What are key steps to take when preparing for media engagement?

How do you identify your audience and understand their needs and interests?

UNIT 1

WHAT ARE THE BASICS OF COMMUNICATING WITH THE MEDIA?

Before engaging with the media or journalists, be sure to prepare by updating:

- Website(s)
- Bio and headshots
- Data and statistics
- Social media profiles

Take time to understand your audience by asking:

- Who is your audience?
- What information can you gather about them?
- What are their concerns?
- What appeals to their interests?
- What would you like them to think, understand, remember, feel, or do?

Ask questions to find out more about what the journalist is hoping to report. Questions to ask include:

- What topics do you want to discuss?
- Who else are you interviewing?
- What sources are you using for your data and information?
- What is your deadline?
- When do you expect your story to run?

UNIT 2

Effective Messaging Essentials

This unit explores how crafting impactful messages is key to public health. In this unit, you will learn how to filter your message into sound bites, leverage the primacy/recency effect, and master the 27-9-3 rule.

Key Questions

What are the characteristics of a clear and impactful message?

How can you make your message more engaging and persuasive?

What data, anecdotes, or analogies could support your message?

UNIT 2

HOW CAN I CRAFT AN EFFECTIVE MESSAGE?

Getting started, remember that an effective message:

- Is relevant to the intended audience.
- Is concise and easy to say.
- Can change thinking or beliefs.
- Is inclusive and non-judgmental.
- Leads to action.

Main Point(s)

State your conclusion first.

- Lead with aspirational values and make the story about “us” not “them.”
- Start with children and their needs rather than stigmatizing or blaming.
- Focus responsibility on sectors and systems (it’s not parents alone).
- Use plain language, short sentences, and simple words.

Supporting Evidence

- Support your points or calls to action with facts.
- Make numbers personal by using ratios (“one in six”) instead of percentages (“17%”).
- Tell a story—share an anecdote, endorsement, or analogy to illustrate your point.
- Use metaphors that imply change is possible (e.g., brains are plastic, not concrete).

UNIT 2

HOW CAN I CRAFT AN EFFECTIVE MESSAGE?

Solutions and Calls to Action

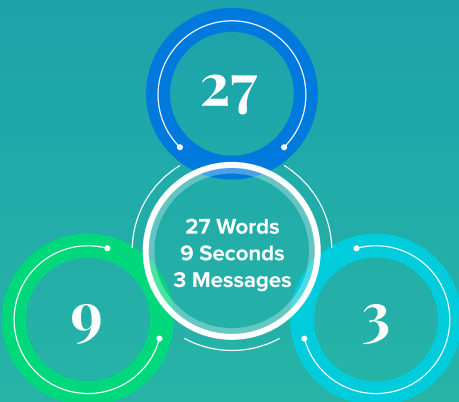
- Describe an evidence-based solution.
- Leave people feeling like change is possible.
- Express what you want people to do after they hear your message.

Before engaging with the media or journalist, be sure to prepare by planning to respond to questions or pushback:

What are the hardest questions a journalist could ask about your topic? Write down the most challenging questions you can think of.

How will you respond to difficult questions?

What evidence will you use to support your response?



*While engaging with the media or journalist
Follow the 27-9-3 rule—get your point across in fewer
than 27 words, 9 seconds, 3 points.*

UNIT 2



It's Your Turn

Try crafting an effective message by applying these tips and following this example.

State your conclusion first

EXAMPLE: Children have tremendous potential—which our society needs—and which we have a shared obligation to foster and protect.

Try stating your conclusion first

Support your points or call to action

EXAMPLE: Toxic stress disrupts healthy brain development. Child neglect is more likely in families that are experiencing an overload of stress. The weight of poverty, especially, can overload parents' abilities to provide supportive relationships children need.

Try supporting your points

UNIT 3

Elevating Your Media Pitch

This unit explores media pitch best practices such as researching news outlets and journalists, highlighting the “how” and “why” of your message, and following up. This will provide you with the tools to deliver well-crafted media pitches that capture attention and drive conversations.

Key Questions

What are the essential elements of a successful media pitch?

How do you research and identify the right media contacts for your pitch?

UNIT 3

CRAFTING AND DELIVERING AN EFFECTIVE MEDIA PITCH

What is a Media Pitch?

DEFINITION: A media pitch is a short message to a journalist or news outlet suggesting a news story.

PURPOSE: Provides an abridged version of the story to determine interest.

CRAFTING A PITCH RELATED TO ACES AND CAN

- **Increase Awareness:** Highlight new research or initiatives
- **Reframe Narratives:** Offer fresh perspectives or solutions
- **Fill Gaps in Understanding:** Use data to provide context and depth
- **Leverage Broad Support:** Showcase endorsements from respected figures or organizations

Understanding Your News Outlet & Journalists

1

Know Your Outlet

- **Media Databases**
- **List of Outlets:** Compile a list of potential outlets.
- **Research Outlets:** Review the “About Us” page for audience insights.

2

Know Your Journalists

- **Research Stories:** Investigate past stories to understand their interests.
- **Communication Preferences:** Determine how they prefer to be contacted (email, text, phone call, social media).

Quick Tips & Summary

Quick Tips:

- Keep it short and engaging
- Tailor the pitch to the journalist’s interest

Summary:

- Understand your audience
- Use data effectively
- Leverage broad support

UNIT 3

STRENGTHEN YOUR MEDIA PITCH

Tip 1: Communicate clear deadlines

Communicate clear deadlines

Emphasize any deadlines or dates of events.

Offer to send additional information if they seem interested.

Tip 2: Attach supporting materials

Attach supporting materials

Providing additional background such as a company brochure, news, release, photo, or even an article published in a noncompeting media outlet can be beneficial.

Tip 3: Consider timing

Consider timing

Given the 24-hour news cycle and competing news priorities, use your understanding of the journalist and their outlet to determine which stories are urgent and which stories can be shared later.

Some pitches may require persistence on busy news weeks, and timing can impact if your story is selected for coverage.

Follow Through

After you pitch to the journalist or news outlet, use the following practices to support the media in publishing your story.

- Agree on a time to call back, if the journalist asks to talk at another time.
- Send any promised information immediately.
- Consider how you can continue to cultivate a relationship with them for future pitches.

UNIT 4

Tips for a Successful Interview

This unit highlights how essential it is for you to convey clear, audience-centered messages supported by evidence. You'll learn what makes an effective spokesperson, how staying on message is vital, and how to consistently return to your key messages.

Key Questions

How do you prepare for a media interview?

How do you handle challenging questions or situations during media interactions?

UNIT 4

An Effective Spokesperson

- Uses clear, audience-centered key messages supported with evidence.
- Understands their audience's perspective.
- Practices their talking points.
- Stays on message, even when handling tough questions.

Importance of Staying on Message

- **Consistent Communication:** Staying on message ensures that your communication remains consistent and clear throughout the media engagement.
- **Core Ideas:** Repeating and highlighting your key messages helps your core ideas resonate with the audience.

Strategies for Staying on Message

Return to Key Messages

- *Repeat Key Points:* Continuously return to your main points to reinforce them.
- *Stay Focused:* Ensure your answers and statements align with your core messages.

Highlight Important Information

- *Emphasize Key Ideas:* Use strong language and emphasis to make important information stand out.
- *Clarify Core Messages:* Highlight the most critical aspects of your message to ensure clarity.

Use Strong Language

- *Be Assertive:* Use confident and strong language to convey your points effectively.
- *Avoid Ambiguity:* Ensure your language is clear and unambiguous to avoid misunderstandings.

UNIT 4

STAYING ON MESSAGE: EXAMPLES

Tentative Language

● “I imagine...”

● “We may...”

● “I think...”

● “We’re trying...”

Strong Language

● “The research tells us...”

● “Here’s what we are committed to...”

● “We’re focused on...”

● “What we have done is...”

Benefits of Staying on Message

- **Clarity:** Strengthens the clarity of your communication, making it easier for the audience to understand your points.
- **Interview Control:** Helps keep the interview on course by preventing deviations from the main topics.
- **Audience Engagement:** Increases the likelihood that your core ideas will be remembered and acted upon by the audience.

What to Say When You Aren’t Sure

In moments of uncertainty during an interview, it is essential to maintain composure and focus.

If you are asked a question you aren’t sure how to answer:

- Know that you don’t have to answer every question.
- Explain your reason for not answering. For example:
 - “I am not familiar with that study.”
 - “We didn’t look at that.”
- Offer to get back to the interviewer with an answer or provide contact information for an expert.
- Avoid discussing hypothetical situations.
- Do not say “no comment,” which can be interpreted as withholding information.

UNIT 4

INTERVIEW BEST PRACTICES

Interview DOs

- **Wear** solid colors for on-camera interview.
- **Stand** during radio interview if possible.
- **Pause** to process the full question and prepare your response during radio interviews.
- **Have** your main messages in front of you or memorized.
- **Practice** your talking points out loud before the interview.
- **Show** enthusiasm for the topic.
- **Maintain** eye contact and awareness of your body language.
- **Ask** clarifying questions.
- **Speak** in complete sentences, even when answering questions.
- **Feel** free to start over if you don't like the way something sounds, particularly in a taped TV or radio interview.
- **Think**—take time to think about what you want to say.
- **Anticipate** hard questions and answer them before they are asked.
- **Follow-up** if information is inaccurate.

Interview DONTs

- **Don't wear** patterns or too much jewelry for on-camera interviews.
- **Don't say** anything “off the record.”
- **Don't repeat** negative questions (reword your response to an affirmative statement).
- **Don't speculate** or express personal opinions.
- **Don't use** jargon, humor, or show off your vocabulary.
- **Don't give** misleading information or hide information.
- **Don't let** your guard down (before or after the interview).
- **Don't assume** the policymaker or reporter is knowledgeable about your field.
- **Don't ask** if you can read the story in advance.
- **Don't fill** silence, especially with nervous chatter. Reporters sometimes use silence as a tool, hoping interviewees will fill the gap with more information.
- **Don't say** “no comment.”

UNIT 5



Staying Focused on Your Message

This unit explores two techniques to help you return to your key messages: bridging and flagging. These techniques can help you emphasize key points and address challenging questions.

Key Questions

How can you connect the interviewer's questions with your talking points?

What phrases help journalists and the audience focus on key points?

UNIT 5

Bridging

The bridging technique involves redirecting or guiding the interview toward key points or messages. Bridging allows spokespeople to focus on what is most relevant to their message, even when faced with questions that may not directly address those points.

- “That’s a great question, and it points to the real issue here, which is...”
- “That’s unclear, but what I can tell you is...”
- “It would be more accurate to say...”
- “What I think you are really asking is...”
- “What is most important for the public to know is...”
- “Let me emphasize that...”
- “The bigger/real issue here is...”
- “As a matter of fact...”
- “The key here is...”

Flagging

Flagging involves signaling or drawing attention to a particular point, issue, or topic that you want to address in an interview. It is a way to focus awareness about a specific aspect that is important to you and make sure that it gets the attention it deserves.

- “It’s important for your readers (listeners, constituents, viewers) to understand...”
- “If you only remember one thing from this conversation, remember...”
- “The most important thing to remember is...”
- “The key point we want to share is...”
- “It comes down to this:”
- “The main point is...”