



Framing C19: We're in this together

Topic #1: Deploying a common good frame

It always matters how we talk to - and about - each other. Effective and inclusive communication is especially important during a time of genuine crisis.

You've probably noticed plenty of *us-vs-them* framing rearing its divisive head lately. Labels like *the Chinese virus* that frame the problem as a foreign invader. Stories about the irresponsible and ignorant infecting vulnerable victims.

Us-vs-them framing is dangerous. It can evoke fear, inflame prejudices, and drive hostility and hate.

Common good framing offers an alternative. Here are three strategies for staying in a common good frame when communicating in the toughest times.

1. Connect individual action to the common good by using a broad 'us.'

A narrow focus on personal behaviors can prevent people seeing how the virus works. Use language and examples that emphasize collective action and shared outcomes.

Instead of "how to behave"

"Protect yourself and fight the virus by washing your hands and practicing social distancing. It is not safe or responsible to leave your home at this time."

Try "how this affects us all"

"When we wash our hands and keep our distance, we protect everyone in our community. Let's come together by staying apart."

2. Make an explicit moral argument for addressing specific populations' needs.

Our ideals and principles - and our sense of right and wrong - are powerful motivators. Use language that activates shared values early and often in communications. This will have more impact than bleak facts or upsetting stories alone.

Instead of "vulnerable groups" framing

"People in poverty will be most and worst affected by this crisis. 22 million US children rely on school for meals - will they be going hungry? Tens of thousands of people in the UK sleep on the streets - will they be able to keep their distance from this virus?"

Try "moral argument" framing

"The right thing to do is ensure we all have what we need to be well - regardless of how we earn a living or how much we make. People already pushed to the brink by low wages and high housing costs will be most affected by this virus and an economic slowdown. This is the time to live up to our ideal of justice for all."

3. Look for opportunities to talk about the positive aspects of interconnection.

Social connections are tricky to talk about when it comes to communicable disease. Depending on the framing, the topic can come off as blaming and shaming - or it can evoke a can-do spirit and common cause. Lean toward how much we all depend on each other - not how much we threaten each other.

Instead of "connection as threat"

"We're being reminded of how much our actions can harm others - often in ways we can't see. We can't just continue with life as usual, assuming we are invincible while infecting spaces, surfaces, and other people. Every time we do so, we are contributing to the spread of a pandemic, and to the eventual deaths of people far more vulnerable to this disease than we are."

Try "connection as strength"

"We're being reminded just how connected we all are - and how much we depend on one another. And it's not just the spread of the virus. For everyone who works from home, there are many more who make that possible by working at the hospital, the power plant, the grocery store, the delivery service. This moment shows us how much we all need each other to keep going."

About this series

In this uniquely challenging moment, we need to connect people to the bigger picture. We need ways to explain health, enhance community, and offer hope.

We're pulling guidance from twenty years of framing research and practice to help advocates and experts be heard and understood in a time of global crisis. Every few days, we'll share a few ideas that can help us all amplify the values of justice, inclusion, and interdependence.

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