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for Health and Well-being

Developing Behaviourally Informed Communications



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Behavioural Science Unit:

The Behavioural Science Unit at Public Health Wales provides specialist expertise on behavioural science, helping to support the application of it, to improve health and wellbeing in Wales. The Unit is part of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Collaborating Centre on Investment in Health and Wellbeing.

For further information, or support around the application of behavioural science to improve and protect health and wellbeing and reduce inequity in Wales please get in touch.

Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg / This document is available in Welsh

Some tools in this guide have been previously published, and are owned by others. Their content has been translated, with retention of some of the originally published language and design. Of note are pages 7-11, which have been adapted from the 'Principles of Behaviour Change Communications' guide, details of which can be found in the references and additional resources page.

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Developing Behaviourally Informed Communications

Introduction

A behaviour is an action, it's something that we do that's measurable. If you're striving to get individuals or groups within the population to start, stop or change a behaviour this guide can help. Behavioural science can make a powerful contribution to our efforts to improve and protect health and wellbeing.

Communications that have impact are often a critical component of policy and intervention development, as well as contributing to the maintenance and improvement of quality services. Designing and delivering public sector communications through a behavioural lens simply increases the chances of meeting policy objectives and making a difference.

This brief 'grab-and-go' guide is for anyone who needs to influence behaviour through communications. Throughout the guide, we share with you what we're looking for when we review communications from a behavioural science perspective. We advise using a 'SCALE' approach to help strengthen communications through the application of behavioural science. The guide aligns with existing communications professional standards such as the OASIS framework, more details can be found in the 'references and additional sources' section.

Contents

S	Specify Be specific about what you are asking people to do	4
C	Consider Explore the barriers and facilitators	6
A	Assemble Write your content	10
L	Layout Consider your layout	17
E	Evaluate Plan your evaluation	18



User Guide

This guide can be used at any point whilst you are designing your communication. It's most effective when used right at the start.

This document is an editable PDF so you can type your thoughts and answers into the boxes provided for further discussion with your team.

S

Specify

Be specific about what you are asking people to do

This first step will help you to be as specific as possible about the behaviour your communication is going to address.

Addressing a specific behaviour (e.g., if you're 65 or over, click the link below to book in for your flu vaccination before the 30th of September) is more effective than describing a general behaviour (e.g., it's important to get vaccinated).

Who needs to adopt the behaviour?

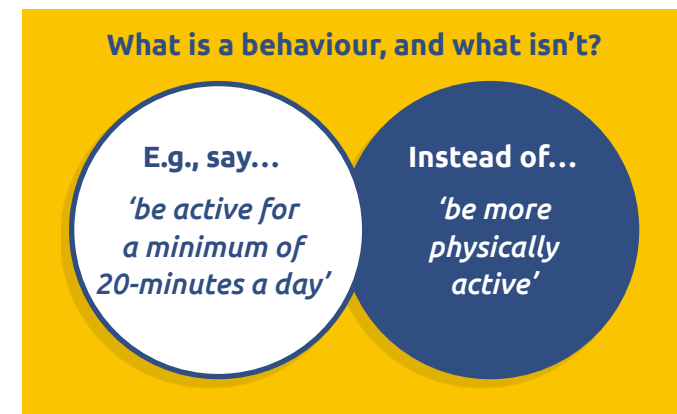
What is the behaviour we want them to do?

Gender:

Age:

Ethnicity:

Disabilities:



How will they do it?

Are there multiple steps?

One:

Two:

Three:

Where will they do it?

Once you've answered the questions above, you have a clear objective for your communication:

The objective of the communication is for

[target audience]

to

[behaviour]

by

[how/where/when]

When will they do it?

Why should they do it?

C Consider

Explore barriers and facilitators

To elicit desired behaviours amongst your target population it is important to understand what is stopping them from engaging in the desired behaviour. A behavioural diagnosis will help to identify the key aspects that your communication should focus on. The scale of your diagnosis will depend on available resources including time, and the quality/needs around the communication being designed. You may choose to:

Discuss what your **collective experiences** tell you about the barriers and facilitators to adopting the behaviour



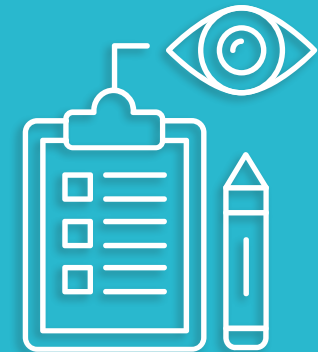
Research what local sources (research, guidance, reports) reveal about the barriers and facilitators to the behaviour



Collect insight from your target audience via appropriate networks



Commission a piece of research to gather insight data on a larger scale



A behaviour change framework, such as a COM-B, can support your behavioural diagnosis. The model suggests that there are three conditions that need to be met before behaviour change takes place: capability, opportunity, and motivation.

COM-B: Capability

Capability refers to an individual's psychological and physical capability to engage in the behaviour

In communications, capability typically refers to the audience having the awareness, knowledge, and skills to enact the intended behaviour. A “capability barrier” occurs when a person cannot enact a behaviour due to not possessing the necessary awareness, knowledge, or skills. Communications that intend to encourage behaviour change by promoting awareness or providing educational information aim to address capability barriers. Generally, capability barriers may be the easiest to address using communications; it feels like the natural job of communications to inform and educate audiences.

Questions to consider:

Knowledge & Skills

How **aware are they** of the behaviour and what constitutes it?

How well do they **know how** to do it?

How well do they **understand the benefits** of doing it or costs of not doing it?

Physical & Mental ability

How **confident** are they that they can do it?

How far do they have the **cognitive, perceptual** and **psychomotor skills** to do it?

How far do they have ability to **make judgements** needed to do it?

How far do they have the **self-regulatory capacity** for it?

How far do they have the **physical strength** and **stamina** for it?

Example

Your target audience may not be aware of the benefits physical activity can have on their mental and physical health, or they may not have the physical ability to do the activity suggested in the communications

COM-B: Opportunity

Opportunity refers to the external factors that make the behaviour possible or prompt it, such as the physical and social environment.

In practice, this refers to things like having the time, resources, tools, and money to enact the desired behaviour. An “opportunity barrier” occurs when a person cannot, and so does not, adopt a behaviour due to something outside their control - for example, lacking the money to pay a fee for a service, or lacking access to a computer to use an online tool. Typically, communications alone cannot easily address physical opportunity barriers, as these sit outside of the control of the audience. It is particularly important to explore opportunity barriers, as communications alone may not be sufficient to remove these barriers and drive behaviour change.

Questions to consider:

How far is it **considered ‘normal’** within their social environment?

How far are there **formal rules** stipulating the behaviour?

How much **support** do they have in their social networks to do it?

How many **prompts, cues** and **reminders** for them to do it are they exposed to?

How well can they **afford** it?

How far do they have **access to resources or equipment** that facilitate or enable it?

How far do they have the **time** to do it?

How easily do they have access to **places** where they can do it?

Example

Your target audience might not have the time to do more physical activity, or they may not have access to a space where they can be physically active

COM-B: Motivation

Motivation refers to the thoughts that direct behaviour including habitual processes, emotional responding and decision making.

It is helpful to think of motivation as the beliefs and attitudes that drive enthusiasm, or lack of it, to enact a behaviour. A “motivation barrier” occurs when a person does not enact a behaviour due to not wanting to do it, or not believing that they should do it. Communications that intend to encourage behaviour change by evoking emotion, highlighting risks of inaction, or changing opinion about the importance of a behaviour will typically be aiming to address motivation barriers. Motivation barriers can be addressed using communications, to encourage people to change their beliefs or attitudes towards a behaviour.

Questions to consider:

How **worthwhile** do they think it is?

How much **enjoyment** or **satisfaction** do they expect to get from it?

How far is it **provoked by an emotion** or a drive state?

How far do they expect it to **reduce any mental or physical discomfort**?

How well does it **fit** with their self-identity?

How strong is their **intention** to do it?

How far is it a **habit** or **routine**?

How strong a **priority** is it over other things they could be doing?

Example

Your target audience may have had previous negative experiences when being physically active, or they may find it difficult to replace old habits with new ones

A

Assemble

Prioritising Information to Include

Within any piece of communication, there will most likely be **key pieces of information** that must be included e.g., an appointment time, a contact number or a referral number. The aim is to keep the piece of communication as short as possible, sign-posting to additional information where appropriate. In the box below, make a note of the key information that needs to be included in your piece of communication.

What key information needs to be included in your communication?

Behaviour Change Techniques

Once we have identified the key information to include, we can begin to think about the Behaviour Change Techniques (BCTs) we may want to use within our communication. BCTs are the 'active ingredients' of an intervention - they bring about behaviour change.

BCTs that help to address opportunity barriers are different to those that help to address capability barriers. Therefore, it's important that we use the behavioural insights we gathered during step two 'Consider' to help us decide which BCTs to include. The boxes below will help you to identify relevant BCTs, based on the insight you've gathered.

Physical and Psychological Capabilities

e.g. physical skills, knowledge, cognitive and interpersonal skills, memory/attention/decision processes, behavioural regulation

Barriers identified/Prioritised

Potential Behaviour Change Techniques

Include?

Encourage action planning by the reader (e.g. planning how they will get to their appointment on time)

Educate reader about relevant tools or technology which can support the behaviour

Clearly describe who needs to do what differently, when and how

Give clear, step by step instructions on how to do the behaviour

Provide information about the benefits of doing the behaviour

Provide information about the health consequences of doing the behaviours

Emphasise the consequences of doing the behaviour enough to make it / them memorable

Explain the consequences of not doing the behaviour

Provide information about the social and environmental consequences of the behaviour

Provide information about the emotional consequences of the behaviour

Provide a graphical demonstration of the behaviour

What might your chosen BCTs look like within your communication?

Social Opportunity

e.g., social influences

Barriers identified/Prioritised

Potential Behaviour Change Techniques

Include?

Provide information about what other people 'like them' are doing

Make it clear that other people are doing the behaviour (if they are)

Include statistics/figures that help to demonstrate a social norm

Provide information about others' approval of the behaviour

What might your chosen BCTs look like within your communication?

Physical Opportunity

e.g., environmental context, resources

Barriers identified/Prioritised

Potential Behaviour Change Techniques

Include?

Encourage the reader to use a prompt or cue to do the behaviour

Make the preferred option the default option

Reduce the 'hassle factor' of completing the behaviour

What might your chosen BCTs look like within your communication?

Reflective Motivation

e.g., intention, goals, social/professional role and identity, beliefs about capabilities and consequences, optimism

Barriers identified/Prioritised

Potential Behaviour Change Techniques

Include?

Include information about why people should complete the behaviour

Explain the immediate benefits of doing the behaviour

Using language that makes people feel empowered to act

Ensure the audience will know the message is meant for them

Use language and words which are familiar to the audience

Prompt planning of the behaviour

Use trusted/credible sources, messengers and/or logos

Clearly describe who needs to do what, when and how

Give clear, step by step instructions on how to do the behaviour

Provide information about the benefits of doing the behaviour

Provide information about the health consequences of doing the behaviour

Emphasise the consequences of doing the behaviours enough to make them memorable

Explain the consequences of not doing the behaviour

Provide information about the social and environmental consequences of the behaviour

Provide information about the emotional consequences of the behaviour

Provide a demonstration of the behaviour

Automatic Motivation

e.g., reinforcement, emotions

Barriers identified/Prioritised

Potential Behaviour Change Techniques

Include?

Reduce negative emotions towards the behaviour

Include logos/signatures from trusted sources

Raise awareness of potential future regret of not doing the behaviour

Explain how doing the behaviour can help set an example for others

Suggest adoption of a different/new perspective about the behaviour

What might your chosen BCTs look like within your communication?

Identified Behaviour Change Techniques

Which BCTs are you going to use?

What might they look like within your communication?



Layout

Consider your layout

Instructions:

Is the required behaviour clear (who, what, when, where and how)?

Does the communication include one or multiple BCTs?

Is the language simple and easy to understand for someone new to the topic?

Does the messaging help the reader to form a plan?

Is there a checklist of steps and/or is the next step to take clear and prominent?

Does the message convey timelines?

Is the text concise, including only the necessary information included?

Does the language empower and motivate the reader to act?

Tone and personalisation:

Is the communication personalised beyond just the recipient's name?

Is the sender's name included with title and contact information?

Is the sender a person who the recipient will recognise, respect and trust?

Is the communication written in the audience's familiar language/words?

Does the language and tone help the reader to recognise themselves as someone who would adopt the behaviour?

Hierarchy:

Is the most important information at the top of the page or emphasized using colour, size variation, and/or additional formatting?

Importance:

Does the language and tone attract the reader's attention and create a sense of urgency to act?

Have you explained why the action should be taken?

Have you highlighted what the reader could lose if they do not take action?

Does the language and tone help the reader identify as someone who would adopt the behaviour?

Are the consequences of 'doing nothing' clear?

Timing:

Are you sending the communication at a time when the audience is likely to have the mental and financial resources to act?

Have you allowed enough time to allow the audience to complete the task?

Is the timing relevant to a calendar event?

Do the number of communications align with the difficulty and urgency of the task?

E Evaluate

Plan your evaluation

Testing comms with your target audience. Reaching out to your target audience whilst you're designing and writing your communication can help to ensure it's fit for purpose. This can be done through a variety of different ways such as questionnaires or focus groups. The purpose of the discussion will often be to establish:

What do the target audience think about the written content?

How do they feel reading it?

What do they think about the style?

Does it change their intention to do what is being asked?

Evaluating your communication. Once the communication has been written, designed, and implemented it's important to evaluate the effectiveness. Even if the communication is part of a wider strategy, or campaign, there are lots of ways a communication can be evaluated. It's important to consider what your communication was trying to address when planning your evaluation. Your answer to this section, should help to focus your evaluation:

The objective of the communication is for

[target audience]

to

[behaviour]

by

[how/where/when]

Some of the most frequently used evaluation methods are listed below. Remember, your evaluation should aim to capture any changes to capability, opportunity, or motivation - depending on which one your communication was designed to address

Pre/Post Comparison

- This sort of evaluation compares a variable (vaccination uptake, for example) before and after the communication has been implemented
- This method can be used to gather data from large numbers of the population
- The evaluation will depend on the data available, or your ability to collect the data if it is not routinely collected
- It's important to remember that it cannot be determined if the changes to the variable are a direct result of the communication, because there will be other changes in circumstance that the evaluation cannot control for

Questionnaires

- Questionnaires can help to understand the opinions of a specific group, often a sample of the target population
- They can provide helpful information about how the communication was received and if the communication had an influence over intention to change behaviour
- This type of evaluation can often reach a large number of the population
- Questionnaires often provide quantitative data, which means answers can't be explored in more detail

Process Evaluation

- A process evaluation aims to collect data whilst the communication is being implemented
- This can help to understand if the communication is being received as intended (are the target population seeing it, for example)
- It can help to identify problems that can be amended whilst the communication is running

Focus Groups

- Similar to questionnaires, focus groups can help to understand the opinions of a specific group, often a smaller sample of the target population
- Focus groups can help to explore perceptions, opinions and attitudes towards a communication and the qualitative nature means whoever is asking the questions can ask for clarification or elaboration
- This type of evaluation can be resource intensive, and a plan for recruiting participants is often required

References and Additional Resources

[Response Playbook Final.pdf \(local.gov.uk\)](#)

[Behaviour Change – Message Checklist \(hee.nhs.uk\)](#)

[The Principles of Behaviour Change Communications - GCS \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](#)

[Strategic Communications: a behavioural approach - GCS \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](#)

[7 GRAPHIC Principles of Public Health Infographic Design \(thewellresource.org.au\)](#)

[The behaviour change wheel: A new method for characterising and designing behaviour change interventions | Implementation Science | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](#)

[Home - AMEC Integrated Evaluation Framework \(amecorg.com\)](#)

[Guide to campaign planning: OASIS - GCS \(civilservice.gov.uk\)](#)

We hope this guide has been useful. If you would like more information or have any questions please do get in contact with us via:



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OR



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