

The Science of Communicating Effectively for Behavior Change

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Objectives

- Describe influences on behavior
- Identify aspects of effective communication for behavior change
 - Receiver
 - Messenger/Sender
 - Message
 - Channel
 - Community engagement
 - Scientific accuracy

Ecological Influences on **Behavior**



UNICEF. Understanding the Social Ecological Model (SEM) and Communication for Development (C4D)

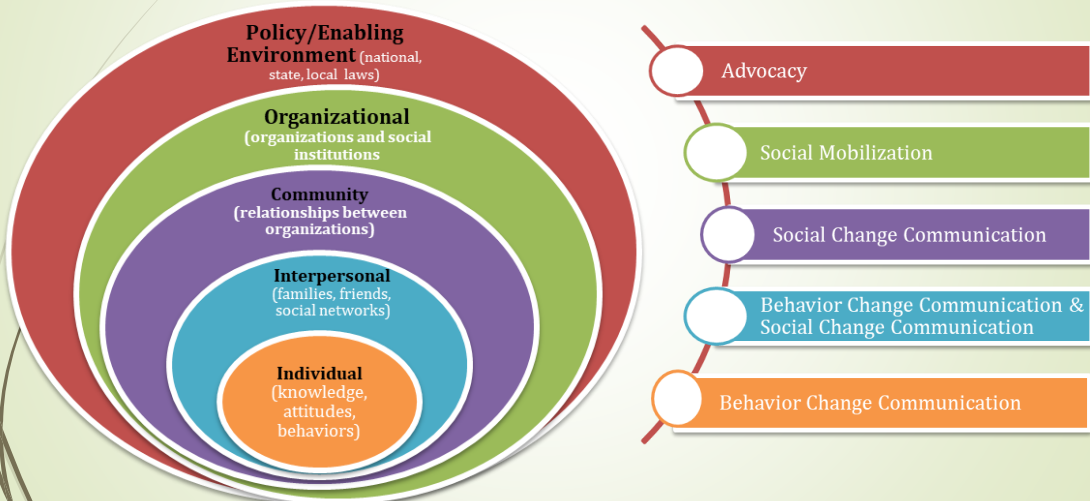
Let's try it out!

Behavior:

Asking for help when feeling distressed

Preventing firearm suicides

Ecological Influences on **Behavior**



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Communicating Effectively

who,
 says what,
 through which channel,
 to whom,
 and with what effect?

The Receiver

- ▶ **Who** is the intended receiver? The intended primary audience?
- ▶ Stages of receiving a message:
 - ▶ Exposure
 - ▶ Attention
 - ▶ Comprehension
 - ▶ Attractiveness
 - ▶ Acceptance
 - ▶ Involvement
 - ▶ Inducement to action

Knowledge is **necessary but** not strongly associated with behavior, therefore **not sufficient**

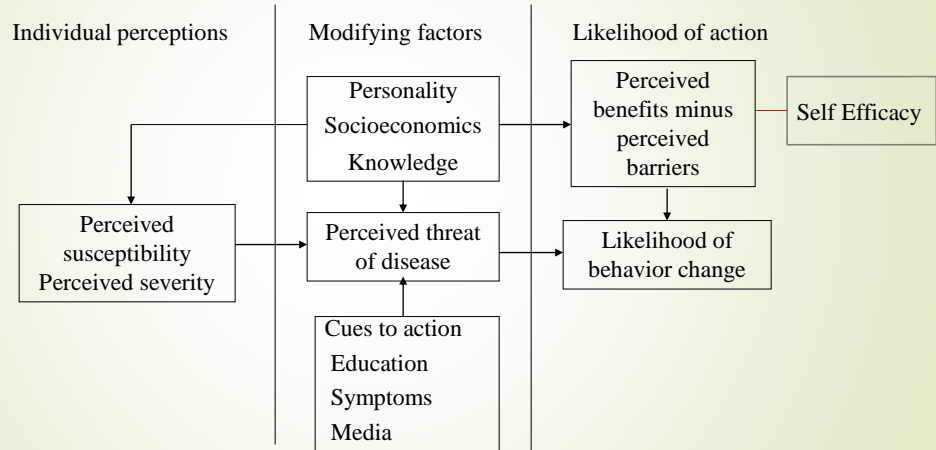
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Acceptance – Attitudes, Beliefs

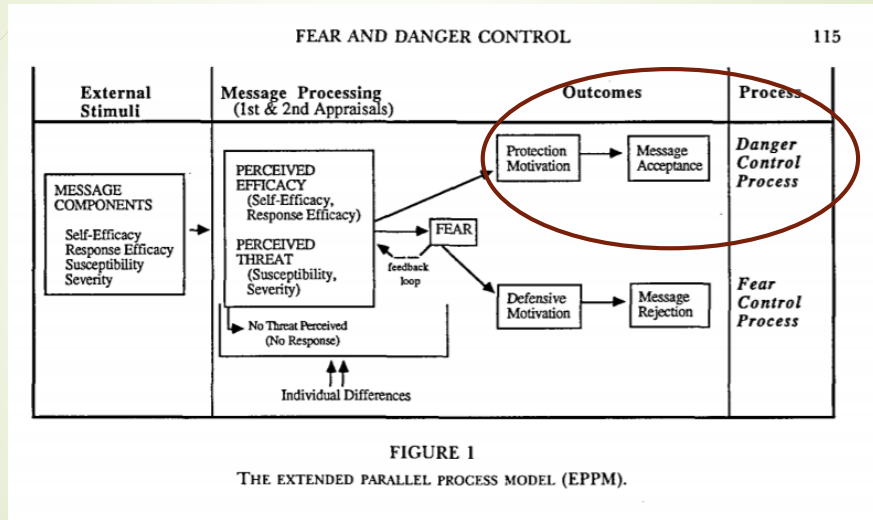
- ▶ Attitudes are much more associated with behavior
- ▶ But, what attitudes do we know to be important?

The Health Belief Model (HBM)



Let's try it out
Behavior: COVID-19 mitigation
strategies among young adults

The Extended Parallel Process Model



Kim Witte (1994) Fear control and danger control: A test of the extended parallel process model (EPPM). *Communications Monographs*, 61:2, 113-134. DOI: 10.1080/03637759409376328

EPPM AUDIENCE SEGMENTS AND STRATEGIES

| | High Efficacy Belief in effectiveness of solutions and confidence to practice them | Low Efficacy Doubts about effectiveness of solutions and about one's ability to practice them |
|---|--|---|
| High Threat Belief that the threat is harmful and that one is at-risk | Danger Control People take protective action to avoid or reduce the threat. <i>Strategy: Provide calls to action</i> | Fear Control People are too afraid to act, just try to reduce their fear and feel better. <i>Strategy: Educate about solutions</i> |
| Low Threat Belief that the threat is trivial and that one is not at-risk | Lesser Amount of Danger Control People know what to do but are not really motivated to do much. <i>Strategy: Educate about risk</i> | No Response People don't feel at risk and don't know what to do about it anyway. <i>Strategy: Educate about risk and about solutions</i> |

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The Messenger

- ▶ Credible
- ▶ Trustworthy
- ▶ Perceived by receiver to be similar to themselves (I can identify with the person) OR
- ▶ Someone I aspire to be like
- ▶ Must be seen to be a 'coping' model – struggles with the same challenges and barriers

The Message

- Tailored to the audience (no such thing as one message that reaches everyone) – tone, language, messenger
 - Requires an understanding of the intended audience (might need some formative work)
- Scientifically accurate – the challenge of no absolutes in public health!
- Balanced: presents benefits and risks
- Simplify the message – complex messages shut down the process
- Content Already many ideas from discussion of attitudes
- Perceived invulnerability / unrealistic optimism (focus on risk behaviors rather than risk groups) – personalize the risk
- Relevant to intended audience and their motivations
- Novel information / information presented in a novel way
- Requests to attend: "now hear this."
- Denotative specificity (you); spatial / temporal immediacy (present tense); qualifiers (may, might)
- Consistent and Repeated

The message TARES Test

- Truthfulness,
- Authenticity
- Respect,
- Equity, and
- Social responsibility

Truthfulness (of the message), Authenticity (of the persuader), Respect (for the persuadee), Equity (of the persuasive appeal) and Social Responsibility (for the common good).



The Channel

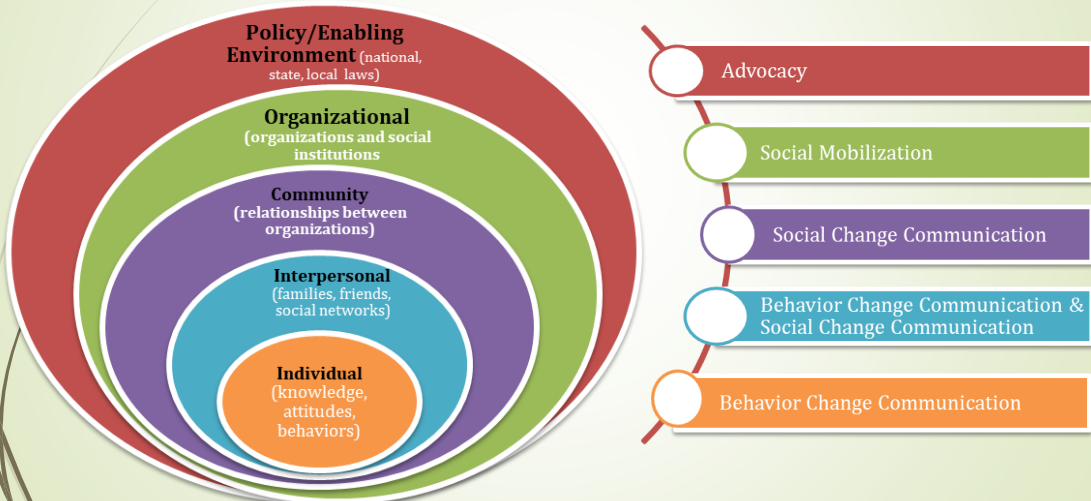
- Understanding touchpoints in the day/week/month life of the intended audience – all those become potential channels
- Use more than one channel
- In choosing channels, consider:
 - Reach
 - Frequency
 - Impact
 - Credibility
 - Cost effectiveness



Community engagement

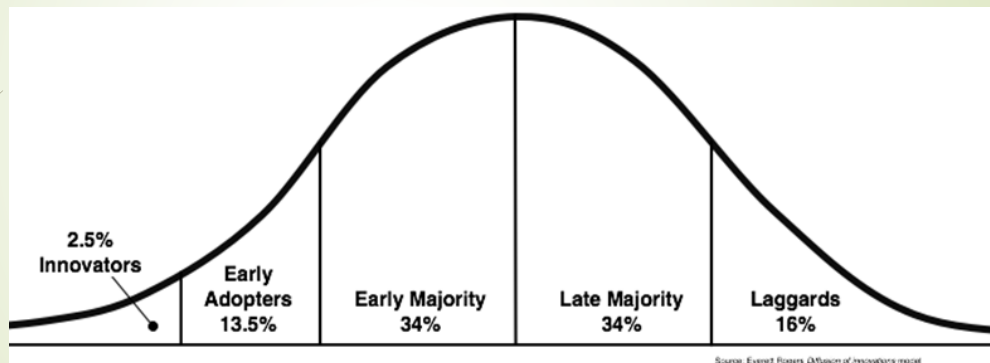
An overlooked imperative in effective communication for behavior change!

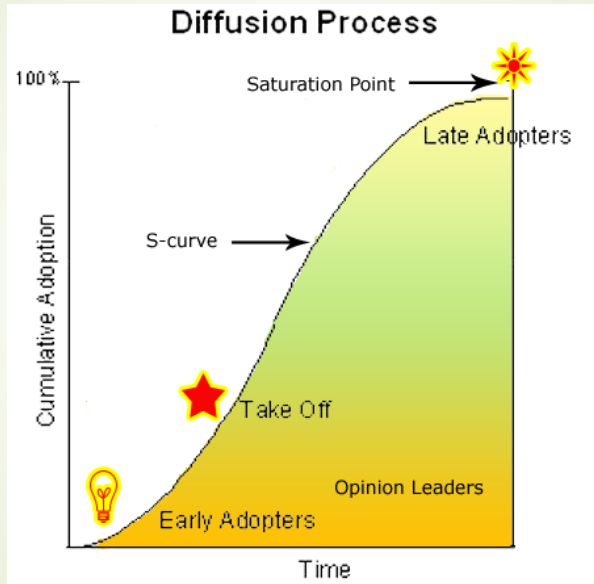
Ecological Influences on Behavior



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Diffusion of Innovation - Adopter Characteristics: The importance of peer networks





<http://cni.net/journal/?p=1444>

QUESTIONS???



One FINAL CRITICAL message-related factor of effective communication for behavior change

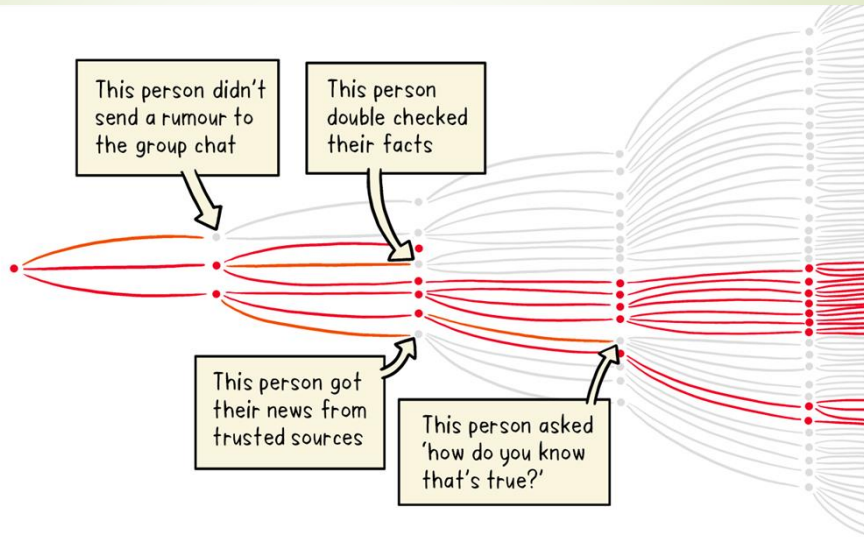


We are in the midst of an **infodemic**?

- ▶ “overabundance of information – some accurate and some not – that occurs during an epidemic”
- ▶ Effective communication is premised on promoting accurate messages – managing infodemics

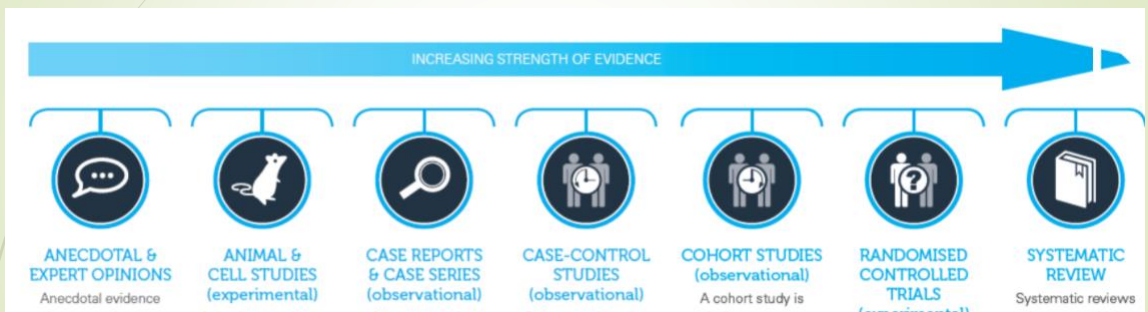
<https://www.who.int/teams/risk-communication/infodemic-management>

Managing Infodemics



<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public/myth-busters>

Types of scientific evidence





How to identify accurate science

- ▶ What is the evidence?
- ▶ Who says this is the evidence?
- ▶ How was the evidence found? (methods, sample size, acknowledgement of limitations of the study, ...)
- ▶ Is there a claim of exclusivity?
- ▶ Others?



Questions?

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