

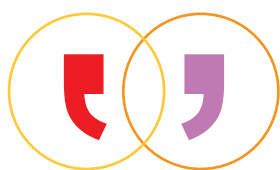
How to Talk About COVID-19:

Narratives to Support Good Decision-Making and Collective Action



In this, a moment of crisis, we must use narratives to provide hope, articulate the urgency and bring people together reminding them of that which matters most to us, our capacity to care for each other.


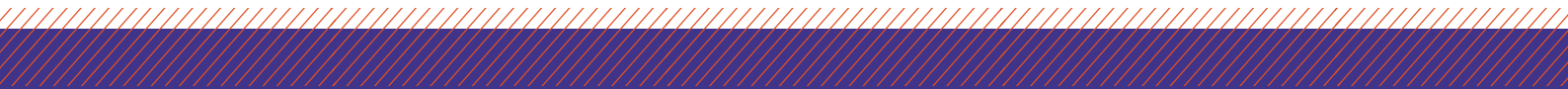
In being together during this crisis we will emerge stronger together after.





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Introduction

Whether you are leading your organisation or your community through, working on the official response, or reporting on the effects of COVID-19 in the media, it is together as communities and organisations that we will get through this global pandemic best. A long term collaborative, caring response will limit the spread, help us cope with the significant impacts, and mean we can emerge better than before.

It is an alarming time. There are real threats, many of them unpredictable, to our physical, social and economic wellbeing. And throughout this crisis we are going to ask people to do many challenging things: to stay calm, think of others first, and keep apart from loved ones and friends in order to stay together as communities over the longer term.

The narratives we use during this crisis are a powerful tool in encouraging and supporting this ongoing effective collective response to COVID-19 in Aotearoa New Zealand. They can also help us come through with our local and global communities in a way that serves people and each other better than we have previously.

However, our narratives in crisis can also inadvertently exacerbate inequalities, encourage antidemocratic behaviour and individualistic responses over community and collective ones.

This short guide is to help you build your narratives about COVID-19 in ways that will encourage people to:

- » Respond collectively, putting caring for each other first.
- » Understand more deeply the role that public institutions and collectives play in ensuring our shared wellbeing.
- » Engage in good decision making based on a respect for best knowledge and science.
- » Create better systems that centre caring for people and the planet to cope with crises.

Communicating on behalf of an institution

For many people communicating during COVID-19 your narrative will represent an institution. Be that the government, media, business, scientific or educational institution.

Just as locks in a canal control how water flows downstream, these institutions have significant power to determine how different people will experience this crisis. Especially those who are most vulnerable because of pre-existing health, social or economic conditions. Be that managing and directing the flow of

financial, health or other resources, the type of information people read, hear and watch, the support people have in and out of work, or how children experience learning during this crisis. There is both a great responsibility and a huge opportunity for your organisations to support the communities who need you most, both in what you say and what you do.

Throughout this guide we name actions people with the keys to unlock our best response can take, while also being part of the interconnected web of committed and caring people helping build public narratives. Narratives that will bring us all together as people who are experiencing this crisis.

We summarise these actions here:

- ➔ Use what matters most to us (helpfulness, responsibility, justice) to frame your communications, AND use that which matters most to us to decide how to direct your activities during COVID-19. For example by using an equity lens to decide which policies and practices to implement (see [“Getting Through Together”](#)* to guide your work).
- ➔ Ensure your visions are inclusive of, and developed in partnerships with, those many people already experiencing the worst impacts of inequitable health, social and economic systems. Detail what it will look like when activities are focussed on helping the elderly, those with disabilities, those already doing the bulk of caring work, those experiencing existing inequities.
- ➔ Show what caring for each other looks at an institutional not just an individual level. Set out how you, people in government, in workplaces, in the banking industry, schools will be acting to build better, more connected systems.
- ➔ When choosing messengers, recognise that trust in governments, institutions or expertise has been considerably eroded for some communities through previous action and inaction. Trust can be rebuilt during pandemics by working in partnership with influential/trusted people from within the most affected communities, using caring and empathy, and driving decision making through an equity lens.
- ➔ In times of stress and anxiety and rapid response, listening to others can be a challenge. However if institutions engage in deep listening in this moment with the communities most affected, the plans they develop will help us emerge more connected and more resilient.

* <https://neac.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/getting-through-together-jul07.pdf>

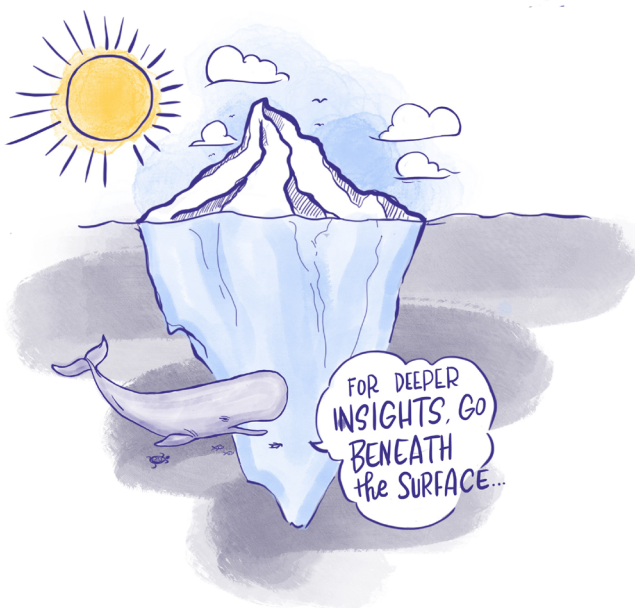
How to use this guide

The first half of this guide gives an overview of the thinking we want to avoid, thoughts we want to surface, and identifies the strategic communications tools to do this. **In the second half** you can go deeper into the detail of those tools and find example communications. We finish with a checklist for your communications.

The challenge we face: thinking we don't want to surface in a pandemic

“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.” — Arundhati Roy

To build effective narratives that will bring out the best in us in this crisis, to help us see what is possible, and help surface people’s understanding that our health and wellbeing is deeply connected to the health of each other, we need to understand some of the unhelpful ideas, or dominant narratives that sit on the surface and stop us seeing.



Narratives that contribute to thinking and actions that is xenophobic or ‘othering’, socially narrowing, selfish, apathetic or authoritarian.

In understanding these ideas we can avoid them, avoid trying to negate them, and **replace** and **embrace** more constructive ones that surface deeper understandings.

In the table on the next page we outline the thinking you should avoid, the thinking you want to surface and the strategies to do so. These strategies are detailed later in this guide.

Thinking to Avoid ¹	Thinking to Embrace
How did we get here?	
<p>“The China Virus” – The virus originated in China, tourists and visitors from China brought it here. It is because of how the Chinese handled it that we now have a global pandemic.</p> <p>Tourists and anyone returning to New Zealand from overseas brought it with them.</p>	<p>A global crisis that affects us all, it has no borders.</p>
<p><i>Surface better thinking using values of helpfulness, frames of innovation, journey and navigation, team metaphors, explanatory chains about how pandemics work.</i></p>	
Who is to blame?	
<p>‘Bad’ people, and ‘others’ . It came from outside so is therefore another reason to view immigrants / foreigners / other races as a potential threat.</p> <p>Individuals who are reckless and irresponsible who don’t self-isolate, “lazy cleaners”, “superspreaders”.</p>	<p>There is no person or group of people to blame. We need to focus on how we can best support people to engage in physical distancing. What support do people need that we can make easier without them putting others at risk?</p>
<p><i>Surface better thinking using values of helpfulness and interconnection, frames of how it affects us all and physical distancing, systems metaphors, explanatory chains about how pandemics work, how handwashing and physical distancing works.</i></p>	
Who is most affected?	
<p>It affects us all. And we all need to fend for ourselves. Keep others out and look out for only ourselves in any way we can.</p>	<p>We all have a role to play. All of us can help slow the spread and keep others safe. We can all look out for others who might need extra support. Some people are more vulnerable to getting the virus and feeling the impacts, and we have a responsibility to ensure these people are taken care of. For instance: the elderly, people who are lonely and isolated, people who can’t access resources, people with underlying health conditions, and people with existing disabilities and care needs.</p>
<p><i>Surface better thinking using helpfulness and responsibility values, frames of equity, journey, systems, team, external pressure metaphors, explanatory chains about why those with existing health conditions need more support.</i></p>	

¹ These narratives are drawn from existing interdisciplinary research, and more recent work of researchers and communicators on COVID-19, including the Public Interest Research Centre in the UK, Frameworks Institute and The Workshop.

Who gets it?

Vulnerable people . Only the elderly and already sick get it, therefore I don't need to worry or change how I live.

Anyone. Younger people can also get the virus. However there are those who will be more impacted. Older people and those in communities already experiencing health inequalities, for instance Māori and Pacific communities. People who are vulnerable

Surface better thinking using values of equity and justice, frames of public and common good, journey metaphors, e.g. "no-one left behind", explanatory chains about how inequality in health systems occur.

Who is responsible for limiting its spread?

Individuals. Individual people need to engage in responsible individual behaviours like hand washing, and keeping apart. If they don't it is their fault this virus is spreading.

All of us. When we wash hands and stay apart we keep everyone well in our community. Really importantly, some people's actions have a very big impact on helping us cope. People in business, in government, landlords can all do their bit to look after people. Employers can help people feel supported in work, people in government can make sure those on low incomes have enough, landlords can offer flexibility in rent.

Surface better thinking using values of responsibility and wisdom, frames of connection as strength, team and acting metaphors, "we all have a role to play", explanatory chains about how physical distancing works.

What is your sphere of concern?

National – We need to protect our nation from external threats and prioritise national interest over global.

Kin – We must prioritise our families and loved ones at the expense of the wider community.

Global community – We are part of a global community working through this together. The creative solutions developed anywhere in the world can be adopted by others very quickly. For example the science about the best way to limit exposure, or health care plans from China used in New Zealand. Just because we are physically distant, doesn't mean we can't be more connected and sharing than ever. We are all connected. We can learn from others and share our knowledge.

Local community – As well as protecting our loved ones, we can model the world we want to live in by showing solidarity with our neighbours and community groups.

Surface better thinking using values of helpfulness, responsibility and creativity, frames of innovation, strength in connection, team and systems metaphors, explanatory chains about how open and transparent science works.

What does this crisis say about us?

This is bringing out the worst in people and just shows that human nature is selfish and bad. Look at all the people panic buying toilet paper, or refusing to self-isolate.

This is bringing out the best in people and just shows how well people can pull together and look after each other in a crisis. Look at all the people who have given their time to the response effort, people who have come back into health jobs, and people organising with their neighbours and communities.

Surface better thinking using values of helpfulness, and responsibility and creativity, frames of innovation, metaphors of teams, acting, systems, explanatory chains about how responsive social interaction is essential for coping in the face of adversity, messengers who are well qualified to comment on the context of the issue.

What kind of government response do we need?

Authoritarian: The government's role is to dictate the response/measures, enforce and police. We want a strong and uncompromising government. Citizens must comply and if it's difficult to cope, then it is up to them to fend for themselves.

Caring, responsible, reciprocal: The people who make up our government can look out for us all, especially the most affected. The government are our elected officials and the thousands of people who work in our hospitals and social services, and collect our rubbish, who are working to get us through this as smoothly as possible.

Surface better thinking using values of helpfulness and responsibility, frames of public good and innovation, metaphors of journeys, explanatory chains about public services in times of crisis, messengers who rebuild trust in government actions and who are well qualified to comment on the context of the issue.

How do we feel about how we will cope?

Fatalistic: We must accept that this will kill many people and devastate livelihoods. No alternatives for action, the government will only respond poorly.

Motivated & hopeful: We can and should take action to stop the spread and flatten the curve. Everything we do to reduce the impact of this virus will give our health care workers the breathing space they need to give the best care to those who need it.

Complacent: It's not going to be as bad as people think. The government is overreacting. No call to action.

Call to action: We have choices to make and options available to us. It is a matter of decision and design.

Surface better thinking, by focussing on the right audience, using values of responsibility and wisdom, frames of public good, strength in connection and innovation, creating and driving and journey metaphors, explanatory chains about how we can stop the spread to help healthcare workers, surprising messengers and those who rebuild trust.

What can we learn for the future?

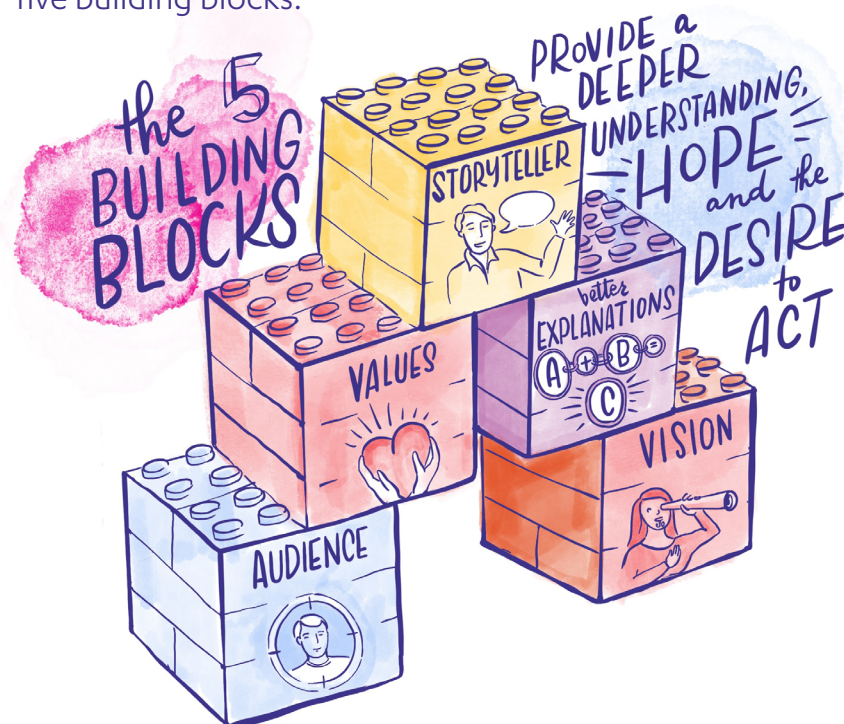
There is nothing to learn. This is a severe and sudden thing that we are dealing with. It's not particularly related to anything else going on in the economy, or society. There was nothing deeply wrong in the economy before this happened, and things should carry on as before once this has passed.

We should be building a more resilient economy based on caring for people and the planet. The virus reveals chronic problems in the economy. We are being hit harder because our health service is already under strain, there have been long-term cuts to social security and many more people are in precarious employment. If we make ourselves more resilient then we will be able to better cope with our ongoing global challenges.

Surface better thinking, by focussing on the right audience, using values of helpfulness, responsibility and creativity, frames of long term thinking and transforming how we do things, natural or built systems metaphors, explanatory chains about how social and planetary boundaries work, messengers who rebuild trust.

Five building blocks for surfacing deeper thinking & helpful action

Deeper understanding and helpful prosocial actions are surfaced with better narratives. These narratives can be built in parts or brought all together using the following five building blocks.



Block 1

AUDIENCE—Find those who need to hear your communications most

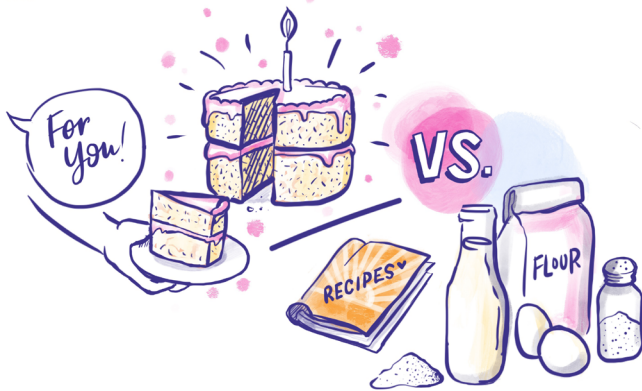


- » Direct your communications towards people who may have limited understanding of the issue and are open to being informed and taking action (this is most people).
- » Don't test your communications with those who already deeply understand the crisis and what is needed.
- » Avoid developing your communications with the express purpose of persuading people who have entrenched, oppositional views to collective action. This leads to mythbusting and negating, techniques that can inadvertently reinforce problematic narratives and ways of thinking.

Block 2

VISION—Develop a clear positive vision for during and after the pandemic

SELL the CAKE (NOT the INGREDIENTS!)



This is a crisis with many unknowns, people are filled with fear and anxiety. This makes it hard to see anything but the worst case and difficult to act in socially connected ways. It's tempting to lead with the problems we need to tackle or leap straight into the solutions. However a vision is like showing people the cake we want to make together.

While you cannot give people concrete information about the exact impact on their health, jobs and income, you can give people a vision for what responding collectively looks and feels like.

Visions help give people hope and stop communicators leading with the problems and alarming statistics, or getting derailed by misinformation or unhelpful narratives.

- » Explain in terms of people's everyday lives what it will look and feel like when we put caring for each other first during a crisis.
- » Ensure your visions are inclusive of those many people already experiencing the worst impacts of inequitable health, social and economic systems. Detail what it will look like when activities are focussed on helping the elderly, those with disabilities, those already doing the bulk of caring work, those experiencing existing inequities.

- » Show how health care workers will experience the crisis if we are responding optimally.
- » Show what caring for each other looks at an institutional not just an individual level. Set out how people in government, in workplaces, in the banking industry, schools will be acting to build better, more connected systems.
- » Make sure you name agents, the people and organisations and the behaviour they need to engage in (or stop) to make this vision happen.
- » Avoid passive language (e.g markets will fall, access to healthcare is challenging).

TIP: Work with creative people to help make these visions feel genuine, real and possible. This has the added benefit of employing people whose work will be greatly impacted by this crisis.

Myth-busting or Pre-bunking?

“Don’t expect to counter the firehose of misinformation with the squirt gun of truth” — Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews

During a public health crisis misinformation will occur. Some will be maliciously started, some inadvertently spread by worried people. Mythbusting or negating involves repeating false or incorrect information in order to debunk it. There are three reasons to avoid this:

1. You may be laundering it into people’s awareness
2. Repetition is a very powerful way of embedding information
3. People have a bad memory for source and may attribute false information to a trusted source
4. You will spend energy, and critical information space telling the story you don’t want to tell. Instead consider pre-bunking.

In the case of a new pandemic pre-bunking or inoculating people against the inevitable misinformation may be a more useful approach. The two elements to successful pre-bunking are:

- » A clear warning that there is a threat or danger of misinformation or false information that is likely to be encountered
- » Exposing the fallacy of the misinformation that is going to be encountered.

This sounds like:

“To get through together we need to be able to rely on the information we are getting about COVID-19. You will likely see false information over the next months for ‘cures’ for COVID-19. This happens during disease outbreaks when people try to profit from people’s anxiety and fear. For information you can trust go to [covid19.govt.nz](https://www.covid19.govt.nz)”

Block 3

VALUES—Lead communications with what matters most

“We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.” — Martin Luther King, Jr.

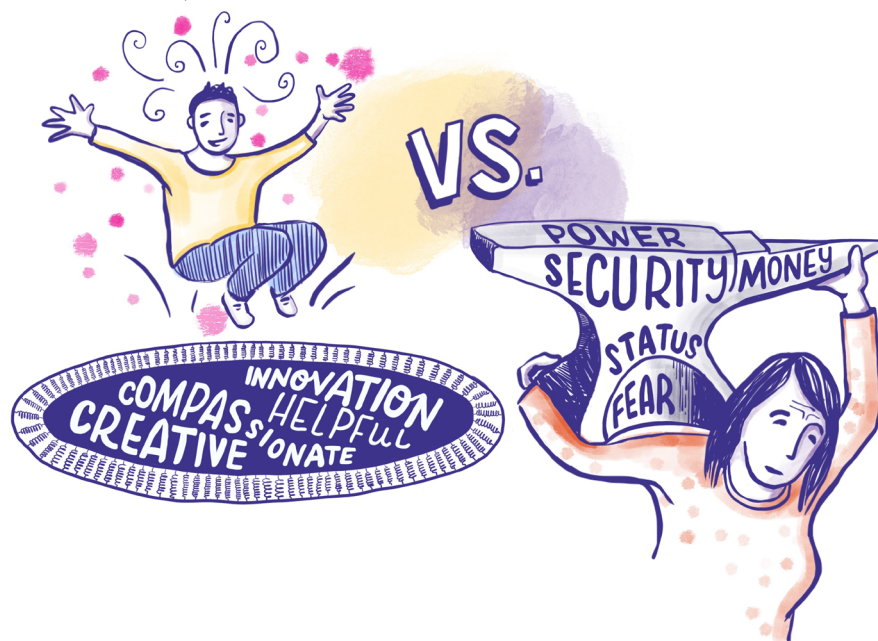
It’s our capacity to look after each other, rather than the myths of rugged individualism, that sustains us. A crisis like this helps reveal our most deeply held and shared priorities in life.²

Our communications must reference these values of care, community, and creativity to surface people’s most helpful thoughts and activate the type of collective behaviour we need to get through a pandemic. Research shows reminding people of these deeply held collective values encourages them to make decisions for collective wellbeing and act in prosocial ways.

Leading with what matters has the added benefit of providing the social proof that others need to act.

It is very easy to inadvertently reference the things that don’t matter most, because we have come to believe they motivate people. Using an individual’s health or safety, money or economics, a desire to succeed/win/beat to lead your communications on COVID-19 encourages behaviour that benefits individuals, but won’t encourage the collective action we need to manage over the long term.

On the next page are those values likely to be unhelpful and helpful to use in the COVID-19 crisis and what they sound like in communications.



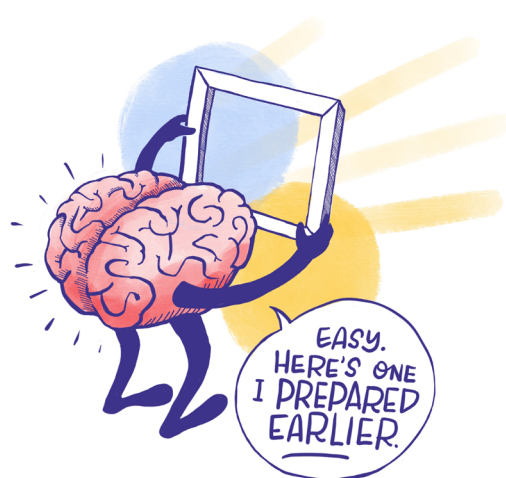
Values to Avoid	Values to Embrace
<p>Cost/economics: where money, growth, financial loss is what matters most.</p> <p>“To avoid the worst financial impacts and help the economy to bounce back it is vital to respond strongly to COVID-19.”</p> <p>“The economy and markets are taking a hit.”</p>	<p>Helpfulness, care, honesty: what matters is how we put the needs of others with whom we have contact before our own.</p> <p>“It is by taking care of each other during COVID-19 that we will get through in the best way. The people in our neighbourhoods, our parents and grandparents, our workmates need us to be helpful and compassionate during this crisis so we will be in a better place when we come out the other side.”</p> <p>“So many people we care about are affected by this crisis. People will lose their jobs, get sick, and need to care for others. The most helpful and responsible thing we can all do is what is asked of us like keeping apart to slow the spread. While the people in government, in business, in other institutions can focus on how to support us to do so and help those people most affected.”</p>
<p>Personal and individual safety</p> <p>“How to keep yourself safe during COVID-19.”</p>	<p>Cooperation and interconnectedness</p> <p>“Find out the best way we will get through COVID-19 together.”</p> <p>“We are all dependent upon each other to keep well. COVID-19 is showing us just how much. By pulling together and thinking about our connections with each other we can limit the impact of this crisis on all of us. We can all practice good hand washing, and practice physical distancing to keep others well. People in our businesses and government can act to support those who need most help while we all work to stop the spread.”</p>
<p>Achievement, competition and security</p> <p>“We will win the fight against COVID-19.”</p> <p>“New Zealand will keep people and the virus out.”</p>	<p>Equity and justice</p> <p>“New Zealanders believe in compassion and justice. During COVID-19 there will be people who suffer more than others because they are already ill, or have been locked into poverty by low paid work and high house prices. People in government, in business, in other organisations who can help, need to devote more resources and attention to the people and places who were already doing it the hardest. This is how we will emerge in the best possible way.”</p>
<p>Authority and identity</p> <p>“Do what the government advises.”</p> <p>“The business community needs to be reassured.”</p> <p>“The elderly and infirm are the most vulnerable.”</p>	<p>Responsibility, wisdom, creativity</p> <p>“Being responsible means taking the most common sense, helpful and effective actions that the many people working hard behind the scenes tell us will help us through in the best ways. We all have different and important roles to play.”</p> <p>“We need everyone, including our older people who are contributing and active members of our community, our mentors and guides, grandparents and parents to keep well. It is their wisdom and knowledge that will help us emerge in a good place.”</p>

Using values in decision making during a pandemic

For decision makers to respond to this pandemic in a way that centres New Zealanders' deeply held values of compassion, care and justice, effective narratives will help shape such a response. People making decisions will need further support to ensure those values are applied consistently in all decision making. In 2007 the National Ethics Advisory Committee prepared guidance "Getting Through Together"* to help people and institutions use our most helpful values in their decision making during a pandemic. These values include minimising harm, respect / manaakitanga, fairness, neighbourliness / whanaungatanga, reciprocity, unity / kotahitanga. All decision makers should be using this document during a pandemic.

Block 4

BETTER EXPLANATIONS

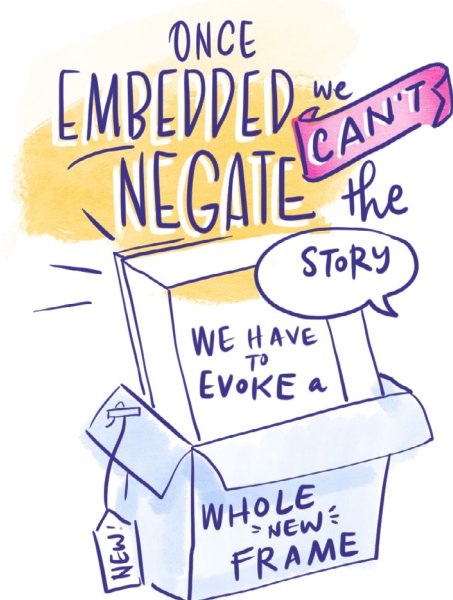


The public is receiving a tsunami of information about COVID-19. People need to understand the science, why this requires specific actions, and actively support those actions.

Public understanding can be shallow. Our "fast thinking" mental system, as Daniel Kahneman calls it, helps us take mental "shortcuts" to avoid having to constantly reassess information in the context of everything we know. People communicating can also approach explanation in a shallow way, assuming that describing the problems over and over will deepen people's thinking.

What is needed are effective "simplifying models". Ways of working with people's fast thinking system to help deepen their understanding about the science and support collective action during a pandemic. To do this:

- » Use effective frames (prepackaged shared explanations we use to understand the world)
- » Use helpful metaphors, and short explanatory chains
- » Avoid unhelpful frames and metaphors
- » Avoid negating problematic frames. Instead tell a new story.
- » Avoid leading with a series of facts, or listing the impacts of the pandemic, these are not explanations, they are descriptions of the problem.



* <https://neac.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/getting-through-together-jul07.pdf>

Frames

Frames are neurologically hardwired prepacked explanations about the world. They are developed over time, influenced by dominant culture (e.g. media discourse) and shared between social groups and cultures. For this reason problematic frames cannot be negated. Alternatives can be embraced and shared. Below is a table of frames to avoid and those to replace these with. These have been sourced from our own research and people and organisations around the world working together to help frame a positive and effective response to this pandemic. For more framing examples see [The Social Change Library](#)*

Frames to Avoid	Frames to Embrace
<p>Crisis/Panic</p> <p>“People are selfish, panicking and it is only going to get worse.”</p> <p>“Death rates are climbing, and selfish people are refusing to self-isolate.”</p>	<p>Solidarity and interdependence</p> <p>“We are all in this together, together we will get through. It’s ok to be scared, reach out for support and do the right thing to help others.”</p>
<p>Us Versus Them</p> <p>“It is the old, vulnerable, and people who are already sick who are going to get it.”</p>	<p>Public/common good</p> <p>“This crisis will affect us all no matter who we are. A strong and prepared health system, with healthcare staff who have the breathing space to care for us, income support that everyone can access when they need it, stable housing, helps to limit how badly it will affect us all.”</p>
<p>Individual behaviour</p> <p>“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.”</p>	<p>How it affects us all</p> <p>“When we wash our hands and keep our distance, we protect everyone in our community. When people in the government and the PM ask us to keep apart they are looking out for us all. Come together by staying apart.”</p>
<p>Individualism/consumerism</p> <p>“It’s important we put more money in people’s back pockets to stimulate spending.”</p>	<p>Public/common good</p> <p>“The best way to make sure everyone is taken care of is through our public services. They are there for all of us. People in government need to focus on a well-resourced health system, with supported staff, income support for those who will be caring for the sick and for children. These public services will get us through.”</p>
<p>Connection as threat</p> <p>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.</p>	<p>Connection as strength</p> <p>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 supermarket, the delivery service. This moment shows us how much we all need each other to keep going.</p>

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* https://commonslibrary.org/progressive-framing-of-the-coronavirus-pandemic/?fbclid=IwAR0V7_3ryyDafWGFpYA8eliv5xRJ_g6qhC3A3j0PPAv_PFMcyJRqtahxE

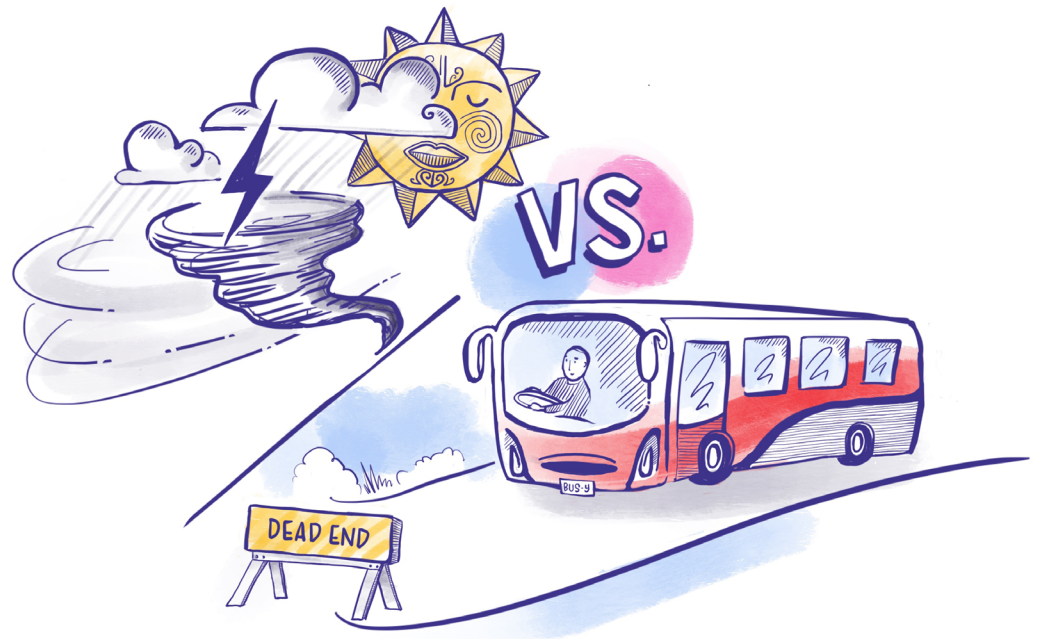
<p>Social Distancing</p> <p>We need to keep social distancing to stop the spread of the virus and protect our healthcare workers.</p>	<p>Physical Distancing</p> <p>Right now we need to keep physical distance from others so that we can protect ourselves, each other, and give healthcare workers a chance. But we can still connect, check in on neighbours, and ask people in government help build strong communities to get through together.</p>
<p>Fatalism</p> <p>“Governments are complex and slow moving, it is difficult for them to respond quickly to do what is needed.”</p>	<p>Innovation</p> <p>“People across the health system have prepared for a pandemic and are implementing the plan. As new science on COVID-19 comes in, skilled people who care are assessing and responding. We have the skills within our public institutions and our health and science communities to get us through this with the right support from all of us.”</p>
<p>Zero-sum game</p> <p>“We need to decide the trade offs to make between the different options for supporting workers and those on benefits.”</p> <p>This particular frame surfaces a ‘more for you, less for me’ way of thinking, not a ‘better for all’ way of thinking.</p>	<p>Equity</p> <p>“To care for everyone and ensure all our communities are connected and strong after this crisis, the government needs to focus on those who are most at risk and will experience the worst impacts. Their resources need to be devoted to those people and communities who need them most. That is the sensible and caring thing to do.”</p>
<p>Economy</p> <p>“The economy is tanking, financial markets running scared.”</p>	<p>Innovation</p> <p>“It is time to come together, and focus on what matters most to us - caring for each other. We will rise to this challenge as we have risen to other challenges before. Look at the insights, knowledge, and practical help that is being shared around the world so other countries respond better.”</p>
<p>Short term fix</p> <p>“While this is happening we need emergency measures. We are in unprecedented times so it requires unprecedented measures. Raising benefits now is fine as long as it comes to an end once this is over.”</p>	<p>Long term thinking</p> <p>“Now more than ever, COVID-19 has shown us how much we rely on each other. It has also shown us that strong connections and resilient communities are critical. A well resourced and responsive public service can help support these things. We need to build this over the long term to ensure we are prepared and resilient in any crisis to come.”</p>
<p>Back to normal</p> <p>“This crisis will end and things will go back to normal. The economy will recover but it's going to be hard.”</p>	<p>Transform how we do things</p> <p>“If this crisis has shown us anything, it's that the systems put in place to govern our lives can be quickly changed for our collective good. We can deliver new hospital beds and we can hire enough people to care for us when we're unwell. We can support people when industries have to close. We can prioritise caring for people and the environment and create an economy that delivers that.”</p>

Framing to deal with power grabs during a crisis

There are real risks in times of crisis that people engage in power grabs, for instance, the spread of disinformation to take personal advantage of the crisis, or use the crisis as an opportunity to implement policies that limit people's access to information. How we frame the pandemic can bolster or prevent these attempts. During the H1N1 pandemic, communications in some countries emphasised individualism, individual responsibility and reified the nation state. Any framing that draws on nationhood, individualism, war and defence, tends to surface anti-democratic solutions and place limitations on people's freedom and information. Research shows these frames get amplified into the media space.³ Avoid them.

Metaphors

Metaphors are a simplifying cognitive model. They take something abstract or complex and attach it to something concrete and every day to help deepen understanding quickly. Metaphors can be used with great effect to help people process complex information during times of crisis. However some metaphors, which seem intuitively helpful, can frame responses that will be unhelpful during a pandemic.



³ Rossmann, Constanze, Lisa Meyer, and Peter J. Schulz. "The mediated amplification of a crisis: Communicating the A/H1N1 pandemic in press releases and press coverage in Europe." *Risk Analysis* 38.2 (2018): 357-375.

Metaphors to Avoid	Metaphors to Embrace
<p>War and battle</p> <p>“Together we will fight this virus.”</p> <p>“Frontline” staff</p> <p>“The battle against COVID-19.”</p> <p><i>Surface anti-democratic solutions, individualism, fear, and limitations on people’s freedom and information.</i></p>	<p>Journeys, navigation and challenges</p> <p>Journeys are useful as there is a destination in sight (the other end of this) and the real question isn’t whether we’ll get there, but how.</p> <p>“How do we overcome the hurdles in our way.”</p> <p>“How do we make sure nobody is left behind.”</p> <p>“We are all in this boat together, let’s paddle in the same direction.”</p> <p>“We can navigate our way through and out of this.”</p> <p>“This is a stress test for us. It is testing our capacity to cope with crises to come.”</p> <p>“We are falling. The decisions we make now determine whether we fall apart or fall together.”</p> <p>“Slow the spread”</p> <p>“Flatten the curve”</p>
<p>Disasters, e.g. storms, natural weather systems, floods, fires</p> <p>“We can weather this storm.”</p> <p>“This is a flood overcoming us.”</p> <p>“A tidal wave”</p> <p>“Going into a bunker.”</p> <p><i>Surfaces a battering down response, fear, and a lack of control.</i></p>	<p>Creativity and drive/mechanics</p> <p>“We can create better, more resilient connected communities now.”</p> <p>“Wisdom and compassion will help us steer through this crisis.”</p> <p><i>Surfaces thinking about positive human actions that can be taken.</i></p>
<p>Heroes and individual sports</p> <p>“Nurses and doctors are the superheroes of this pandemic.”</p> <p><i>Surfaces thinking about individualism.</i></p>	<p>Natural or built systems, team sports, acting</p> <p>“Many people work upstream to ensure our downstream health.”</p> <p>“People in the public health system are like a ground crew for our health, doing the contract tracing.”</p> <p>“Like in a football team, we all need to work together to prevent the ball getting through.”</p> <p>We all have different and important roles to play</p> <p><i>Helps explain the need for many people working together in our public systems.</i></p>
<p>Power/strength</p> <p>“People need to be strong during this crisis.”</p> <p><i>Surfaces thinking about individualism.</i></p>	<p>External pressures/overloaded truck</p> <p>“The impacts of the virus, job loss, poor health, lack of social support can overload us like a truck with too much cargo, so we cannot cope. Lifting some of those burdens will help us cope and stay well.”</p>

Explanatory chains

Why a chain?

The purpose of an explanatory chain is to use the way our minds already explain issues in the world (in preexisting causal chains $a + b = c$) to open a side door to people's thinking about science. Facts/data alone won't deepen any shallow understandings. An explanatory chain can.

Chains should offer an unbroken linear path of logic where Idea A leads to Idea B, which leads to Idea C, and so on, connecting causes to consequences and building up shared understanding. Metaphors can be used effectively in an explanatory chain.



What should be in a chain?

There are five key components to effective chains.

1. **Start with a vision for a mobility culture that moves all children in ways that are positive for their health and the planet.**

Sounds like “we need to get through this pandemic together and keep as many people well as we can”.

2. **Explain an initial factor: What is the original cause of the problem?**

Sounds like “during a pandemic the illness can spread very quickly affecting thousands of people all at once”.

3. **Describe the mediating factors: What is set in motion by the initial factor? (Think “domino effect”).**

Sounds like “if we have many ill people all at once, this overloads the people and resources in our hospitals and people get very sick and die because they cannot be cared for as they should”. You can include facts here, e.g. “we currently have enough beds in our intensive care units to look after x people”.

4. **Have a final consequence: What are the effects?**

Sounds like “The rapid and uncontrolled spread of the virus between people is like a domino effect. It makes the impact on people and communities worse than it needs to be and the consequences last for many years to come”.

5. **Point to structural and systems solutions. Highlight collective action, so that the public can engage at the right level once they understand.**

Sounds like “By having a well resourced public health system, we can ensure public health professionals can trace all the contact cases and ask people to physically distance, like the ground crew at the airport but working for our health. This physical distancing requires our commitment and material support from the government to carry it out. This will help slow the spread and ensure all of us and our health system can cope during COVID-19”.

Other science that benefit from an explanatory chains:

- » How pandemics work
- » How handwashing kills a virus
- » What is contact tracing and physical distancing
- » The role of stress in being able to cope in a crisis
- » How responsive social interaction is essential for coping in the face of adversity⁴.

Using Facts

- ➔ More facts do not provide a better explanation or make clear the actions people need to take. Even if the public is asking for more data this may not mean they want more facts. Interrogate that assumption.
- ➔ Facts are important during a crisis, but they are not the story. They are a character in the story you need to tell about the virus, its impacts, the response, and actions people need to take.
- ➔ Use facts judiciously (less is more for people inundated and anxious) and put them in explanatory chains.
- ➔ Consider the impact that mortality data may have on dehumanising people and families.
- ➔ Make sure you report data that measures the positive behaviours and changes you want people to engage in.

Block 5

STORYTELLERS—Find influential and trustworthy messengers for your message



The messengers who convey messages about COVID-19 matter.

- » Your messengers need to use a consistent effective set of messages no matter who they are.
- » Expertise does not matter as much as people's perception of expertise, i.e. influential people in a community can be seen as experts.
- » So use a wide range of messengers with the same narrative
- » Use messengers who are well qualified to comment on the context of the message. For example, business people talking about what CEs can do, health leaders talking about health, and community leaders talking about caring for each other.
- » Find unexpected messengers who may align with persuadable people's values. For example, conservative politicians talking about caring for each other.
- » Trust in governments, institutions or expertise may have been considerably eroded in some groups through previous actions and inaction. Trust can be rebuilt during pandemics by using caring and empathy and driving decision making through an equity lens^{5 6}.

⁵ Reynolds, Barbara, and Sandra Crouse Quinn. "Effective communication during an influenza pandemic: the value of using a crisis and emergency risk communication framework." *Health Promotion Practice* 9.4_suppl (2008): 13S-17S.

⁶ Crouse Quinn, Sandra. "Crisis and emergency risk communication in a pandemic: a model for building capacity and resilience of minority communities." *Health Promotion Practice* 9.4_suppl (2008): 18S-25S.

A checklist for your communications

Avoid	Replace with
Building Block 1. Audience	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Focusing on the opposition and their story. » Testing with your base. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Focus on developing messages for the majority of people who are looking for guidance and reassurance.
Building Block 2. Vision	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Leading with facts, policies or problems. » Being vague and abstract in the vision. » Excluding the most affected from the vision. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Lead with a positive vision. » Make the steps and human agency visible and concrete. » Centre the most affected.
Building Block 3. Connecting with values that matter	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Leading with cost, safety, fear values. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Helpfulness, interconnection, equity, responsibility, wisdom and creativity.
Building Block 4. Build explanatory pathways	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Frames of economic growth, individualism, fatalism, fear. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Frames of equity, innovation, long-term thinking, common good, public health.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » War and disaster, hero metaphors. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Journey, navigating, systems, teams metaphors.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Negating unhelpful frames. » Myth busting incorrect facts and stories. » Using passive language. » Leading with facts or using single facts about the pandemic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Build helpful frames. » Inoculation or prebunking. » Name agents. » Build explanatory chains (use effective metaphors).
Building Block 5. Storytellers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Choosing expected or untested messengers using their own message. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Use a range of values-aligned and trusted messengers using a consistent effective message.

Further reading

Strategic communication and science

Berentson-Shaw. J (2018) A Matter of Fact. Talking Truth in a Post Truth World. BWB Text
<https://www.bwb.co.nz/books/matter-fact>

Public thinking about COVID-19

Public Interest Research UK. Pandemic Guidance
<https://publicinterest.org.uk/pandemic>

Values in communication

Common cause guide to communications
http://www.commoncause.com.au/uploads/1/2/9/4/12943361/common_cause_handbook.pdf

Values to guide decision making in a pandemic

National Ethic Advisory Committee. Getting Through Together. Ethical Values for a Pandemic
<https://neac.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/getting-through-together-jul07.pdf>

General Framing Guidance during COVID-19

The social commons library resources for COVID-19
<http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/makingsciencepublic/2020/03/17/metaphors-in-the-time-of-coronavirus/>

Māori and COVID-19

Why Equity for Māori must be prioritised during COVID-19 response
<https://thespinoff.co.nz/atea/18-03-2020/why-equity-for-maori-must-be-prioritised-during-the-covid-19-response/>

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People and organisations from within New Zealand across the world are working to provide effective communications advice during the COVID-19 pandemic, some of which have been used in this guide. Thank you to Marianne Elliott, Nadine Hura, Sharon Bell, , Mark Chenery, The Common Cause Foundation, Australia ReMade, Anat Shenkar Osorio, The Public Interest Research Centre, and others for their contributions, and their care and expertise during this challenging time for us all.

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