



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
School Psychologists

## Effective Communications: Tips for School Psychologists

Effective communications is vital to achieving the goals and objectives of school psychology, whether trying to improve services at the building level, secure funding at the state level, or shape policy at the national level. Failure to communicate well can result in negative outcomes and missed opportunities.

**Leadership role in communications:** All school psychologists can be leaders at the building, district or state level. Good communications is an important leadership tool. Either as a leader in the profession or a professional developing your leadership skills, you can leverage your opportunities and knowledge to reach a wide range of stakeholders. Important aspects to this leadership role are:

- Knowing and reaching out to key audiences/stakeholders.
- Recognizing communications opportunities.
- Developing and conveying key messages.
- Providing useful, relevant information to groups or individuals.
- Making use of resources provided by NASP and/or your state.
- Coordinating with colleagues within NASP and/or your state.
- Encouraging fellow school psychologists to be active communicators.

**Key message areas:** Developing clear, memorable messages is critical to effective communications. Determining what your most important messages are depends on the goal and the specific situation but there are a few global issues that are central to the profession today. NASP is working to help develop and disseminate key messages on these global issues to a variety of stakeholder audiences and for use by individual school psychologists. These include:

- **NASP Practice Model:** School psychologists are a potentially untapped resource. The Practice Model helps districts make the best, most effective use of school psychologists' expertise.
- **Expertise with data:** School psychologists are highly trained in data collection and analysis, and data-based decision-making.
- **School safety and positive school climate:** School psychologists have expertise in violence prevention, crisis response, and creating positive behavioral and learning environments.
- **School improvement:** School psychologists are valuable members of the school improvement team, understanding individual, classroom and school-wide needs and interventions.
- **School-wide prevention and intervention:** School psychologists are leaders in school-wide programs that improve behavior and academic achievement, such as PBS and RTI.
- **School mental and behavioral health services:** School psychologists are advocates for the social-emotional well-being and mental health of children and youth, promoting wellness and providing mental health interventions and support.

## Developing Your Messages

**Identify your target audiences:** There is no “general public.” Messages even on the same issue should be tailored as narrowly as possible to the specific audience because they have different concerns and perspectives.

- Administrators
- Teachers/Other educators
- Allied professionals
- Parents/Families
- School Boards/Polymakers
- Community Providers
- Media
- School Psychologists

**Know your audience’s:** People hear EVERYTHING through their own experience.

- Level of knowledge/awareness
- Primary concerns/expectations
- Perspective
- Possible barriers to understanding
- Ability/likelihood to take action

**Focus on your objective:** What specifically do you want to accomplish?

- Raise awareness of a specific issue or your role/value
- Increase your involvement/effectiveness on an issue
- Build support for specific policy/resource needs
- Expand your leadership role
- Encourage parents/teachers/students to act

**Goals of key messages are to:**

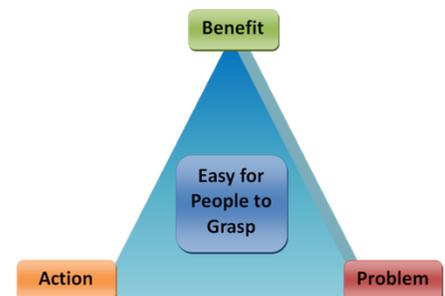
- Get people’s attention
- Connect to a priority
- Minimize suspicion/reactive rejection
- Engage discussion
- Be easy to remember
- **Key messages can’t convey everything**

**Be clear and concise:**

- Determine your main point.
- State it at the outset. Repeat it. Conclude with it.
- Back it up with 2-3 facts.
- Remember, most people will only remember 2 or 3 points in any communications.
- Provide concrete actions/suggestions.
- Use audience appropriate language/Avoid acronyms/technical language.
- Use active tense and bullets to the extent possible.
- Ask a colleague to review/proof your work.
- Briefly describe your role/relevant skills. Always.

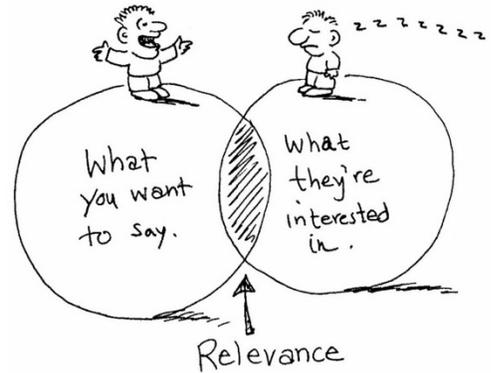
**Use effective message structure:**

- Problem (the issue you are trying to help address)
- Action (what you suggest can be done; your role in doing it)
- Benefit (improved outcomes; don’t forget to identify how teachers, administrators, and families could benefit as well as students)
- The direct relationship between problem, action, benefit is critical to comprehension.



**Resonate:**

- Connect with you audiences concerns/priorities.
- Appeal to emotion as well as intellect.
- Use "social math," not just statistics.
- Put a "face" on the issue. Tell stories, not just facts.
- Be a good listener.
- Need a clear "call to action"
- Don't expect your target audience to guess what you need



**Getting Your Message Out**

**Use the three-tiered communications model:**

- Universal: You offer value. No strings.
- Targeted: You offer need something and offer help.
- Crisis: Urgent, rapid, multi-directional
- Proactive outreach promotes "Action Requests" and anticipates/facilitates crisis communications needs.



**Know your district communications tools:**

- Weekly newsletters
- PTA newsletter
- Handouts home to parents
- Website(s)
- Meetings/school events
- Hallway bulletin boards

**1. Reach administrators**

- Newsletter articles
- Handouts/fact sheets
- Data collection/analysis
- Personal meetings (Really important. Try early morning coffee once a month.)

**2. Reach parents**

- Newsletter articles/school lunch menu
- Handouts
- Parent meetings/workshops
- PTA presentations
- Back-to-School night
- School/PTA listservs
- School bulletin boards/hallways

**3. Reach teachers**

- Newsletter articles
- Handouts/fact sheets
- In-service trainings
- Data chats
- Brown-bag lunch discussions
- Classroom visits (pre-arranged)
- School bulletin boards/hallways

**4. Reach community service providers**

- Fact sheets/handouts
- Presentations at their conferences/meetings
- Personal meetings
- Workshops (invite to in-service trainings)
- On-site school visits

**5. Reach school boards/policymakers**

- Presentations/testimony
- Fact sheets/policy briefs
- Legislative initiatives
- School Psych Awareness Week proclamation
- Media articles
- On-site school visits (very effective)

**Coordinate your efforts:**

- Combine efforts with other school psychologists in your district.
- Share activities/presentations/materials (HCHS III handouts, NASP adaptable materials).
- Team up with other personnel (school counselor, social worker, nurse).
- Ask to be listed as a resource in materials sent home or posted on the web.

**Make the most of your presentations:**

- Know how much time you have. PRACTICE.
- Make your major points up front.

- Provide facts but avoid reading lots of statistics (unless you have visuals).
- Use real examples but focus on important details.
- Provide written materials (handouts, testimony, etc.)
- Written remarks can be longer than verbal remarks.
- Provide your contact information.
- Leave time for Q&As if possible.

***Make the most of the media:***

- Submit brief articles to local paper (tips for parents are popular in familyeducation/health sections).
- Offer to be a media spokesperson/"local expert."
- Clear media activities with your supervisor/district communications office.
- Be clear what issues (e.g., discipline, test anxiety, school climate) you are comfortable addressing.

***Speaking as an "expert:"***

- Plan what you are going to say.
- Practice your main messages (no more than three).
- Stay on message. Don't hesitate to repeat important points.
- Research/know your facts.
- Avoid controversial local issues unless you have specific direction/instructions from your district communications office.
- Focus on "best practice" comments.
- Feel free to say, "I do not know."
- Avoid commenting on the specifics of issues with which you are not involved.
- Redirect questions about specifics to general practice knowledge. "I am not familiar with the specifics of this case, but generally adolescents..."
- **Expect everything you say to appear on the front page of *The New York Times* (and that your mother, children, and boss will read it)!**

**Possibilities, Opportunities, Suggestions**

- Familiarize yourself with and work with colleagues to promote the NASP Practice Model.
- Familiarize yourself with the key issues/messages and related NASP materials. Check the website frequently for new and updated information.
- Identify a couple of people in your district/state to help reach out to various audiences.
- Establish personal relationships with other school psych and allied professional leaders.
- Ask colleagues in other professions whom to contact in their associations/other key groups to offer information.
- Offer allied professional organizations information regarding issues of shared concern to include in newsletters or their website. MOST ORGANIZATIONS LOVE THIS if the information is relevant and concise.
- Identify a local or state initiative/issue related in some way to one of the NASP themes. Use this as "hook" to promote an article, handout, letter-to-the-editor, etc.
- Kill two birds... Submit an article to more than one group (e.g., state PTA and principal's association) but let them know you are offering the piece to other groups.
- Offer to be a regular or periodic contributor to a news outlet. Use NASP materials as the base but print pieces usually need to be unique to the paper. (See Practical Strategies for additional tips.)
- Present on a relevant topic at an allied professional conference or meeting.
- Use your state association or district website. Use adaptable resources on the NASP website.

***This handout and other communications resources are available for NASP members at <http://www.nasponline.org/research-and-policy/advocacy-tools-and-resources>. Questions, suggestions, updates? NASP Director of Communications, Kathy Cowan at [kcowan@naspweb.org](mailto:kcowan@naspweb.org).***

**©2016, National Association of School Psychologists, 4340 East-West Highway, Suite 402, Bethesda, MD, 20895, [www.nasponline.org](http://www.nasponline.org)**