



We keep each other safe:

An interactive communications guide about
reducing and preventing gun violence

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We all want to reduce injury, death, and harm from guns — and we know that addressing such a widespread problem requires big changes in the systems and structures that shape our world. But we don't have to wait on those: Everyone can play a role in keeping people safe, whoever and wherever they are. As a domestic violence practitioner and service provider, you work hard to prevent violence and keep people safe in so many ways. Now you have a unique and critical opportunity to help people understand and use California policies that can reduce the risk of injury and death from guns.

Whatever reasons people have for owning them, we know that firearms can increase the risk of serious injury or death. In California, we are lucky to have a range of civil and criminal laws designed to limit access to firearms for a person who presents a harm to themselves or others. These policies are especially important in abusive situations: If firearms are available when domestic violence is occurring, the survivor is more likely to experience more severe physical abuse, and more likely to end up killed than in situations where a firearm is not available.

The California Partnership to End Domestic Violence (the Partnership) has developed a set of resources to support practitioners and advocates like you in informing and engaging survivors about the range of options available to prevent domestic violence homicides and other forms of gun violence that affect survivors and their families.

The following resource is intended to be a “tool in your toolbox” and support you in developing local campaigns and communication strategies to:

- share information about different options available to reduce harm from guns,
- inspire needed community conversations, and
- empower survivors.



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Please feel free to download this resource so that you can fill it out and make it your own.



Step 1: Identify your goal — what do you want to change?

Communication is not just about what we say or how we say it. Though our message is important, it's never first — persuasive messages are rooted in the change we want to see in the world and how we think it will happen.



Your turn:

To identify your overall campaign goal and put it in the context of your organization's work, brainstorm answers to questions like:

- What's the problem you want to solve?
- Who needs to take action?
- What should they do?
- What's the next step your audience needs to take to be part of the solution?
- How does this approach empower, educate, and support clients and others who need help?



Step 2: Choose your audience — who do you want to reach?

Messages must be considered with the audience that will receive them. Some potential audiences for local campaigns around reducing injury and death from guns in abusive situations could include:

Potential audience	Possible outcome of communicating with this audience	Ways to reach them
Survivors and their families	Awareness of safety planning options and confidence about seeking more information	Fact sheets, social media, agency-specific materials
Representatives of organizations who serve survivors and their families	Commitment to sharing information with their organizations, developing organizational infrastructure to support use of toolkit, and making appropriate and consistent referrals	Direct meetings, fact sheets, conferences, professional publications, web pages, newsletters
Local decision-makers	Support for policy approaches like local data collection, intra-agency collaboration, etc.	Community meetings, phone calls, presentations, news media (news coverage, op-eds, letters to the editor, editorials), events, sign-on letters, fact sheets

Media is not an “audience.” Instead, the news media can be an important way to reach key audiences (particularly opinion leaders). If traditional or social media coverage is the best communication channel, consider which outlets or channels are most likely to reach your key audience. For instance, the right social media platform will depend on where your audience is most active online.



Your turn:

Use this chart to brainstorm possible audiences, outcomes, and channels for your campaign:

Potential audience	Possible outcome of communicating with this audience	Ways to reach them



Step 3: Select your messenger — who should deliver your message?

Messengers also impact how your message is received because audiences are most likely to connect with and stay open to hearing from messengers who they identify with in some key way. That is, your audience needs to see *the messenger as someone they share experiences or values with*. If your audience doesn't feel that the messenger is "like them" in some important way, even the most powerful story or appeal could fall flat.

Who's in your "messenger mix"? You can tap into different parts of your organization's network to identify different potential messengers who could be especially effective in different situations, and consider people of different gender identities, ethnic and racial backgrounds, ages, and language fluencies. Potential messengers and speakers could include:

- Advocates
- Service providers
- Community members from groups like faith communities, schools, or businesses
- Local politicians
- Survivors

Whoever they are, messengers need support. Depending on their experiences and background, they may need training and practice, logistical help (like child care or transportation to a meeting), or emotional support (like someone to remain with them during an interview).

Your turn:

Use this space to brainstorm possible messengers, the audiences with whom they might connect best, and the types of support they might need.



Messenger	Possible audience	Support needed (training, transportation, child care etc.)



Step 4: Develop your message — what will messengers say?

We know that an impactful message about domestic violence:

- Evokes shared values.
- Names a problem and a solution that “match” one another.
- Acknowledges complicated feelings.
- Helps the audience see how they can be part of creating a better shared future.
- Uses plain language.

Let’s consider each of these:

Identify your values.

An effective message goes beyond facts and figures to connect with people on the level of their deeply held values — the principles and standards that guide how they think the world should work. Ultimately, values are what motivate people to act.

For example ...

Some values that could help ground a message about preventing harm from guns are:

Safety: We all want to keep families and communities **safe** by preventing injuries, fatalities, and trauma from guns.

Progress and possibility: **We can** prevent injuries and deaths caused by firearms: California is unique in that there are many options.

Community: No one has to do this alone — there is a community **working together** to prevent DV homicides and gun violence.



Your turn:

What values motivate you to do this work?

What values motivate your audience?

Are there values that align?



Name the problem *and* the solution you care about — and make sure they match.

The way we communicate about an issue affects how our audience understands the problem — and, maybe more importantly, how they understand what can be done to solve it.

It's easy to talk about problems because they are so visible and urgent: In fact, whatever the subject, people are likely to dedicate 80% of the time to communicating about problems and only 20% to talking about solutions. In your communication, aim to dedicate about 40-50% of the time or space to talking about the problem, and the rest to naming the solution.

In this case, we know we want people to use the tools and resources available to access resources that can help keep them and their families and communities safe. Make sure that the solution “matches” your problem: That is, make sure to frame your problem and solutions so that the solution seems like a logical response to the problem.

For example ...

Saying “gun violence is a problem” might not make audiences immediately think about navigating legal removal options as a logical next step. Instead, try:

Problem: Guns can pose a threat to community and family safety, but California has a range of options available to prevent harm. However, many people are unaware of these options, or unsure how to learn more about what's right for them.

Solution: Tools are available to help people understand the legal options available to them, and how to select the correct one.



Your turn:

What is your desired solution? That is, what do you hope your audience will do after they hear your message?

Describe the problem you're trying to solve in a way that "cues up" your solution as a logical response.



Be prepared to acknowledge your audience's feelings.

When it comes to domestic violence, there are no “blank slates.” Because almost everyone has some frame of reference for harmful relationships, everyone you communicate with will likely have some fears, anxieties, or other negative emotions about the issue. Some of the possible doubts or negative feelings that you may encounter, depending on your audience, are:

- Overwhelm in the face of competing priorities
- Doubts about the possibility of success
- Resistance to policy solutions (particularly audiences with a historical trauma related to government and other oppressive systems)

Audiences who receive messages that acknowledge their discomfort and the negative, complicated feelings they have are more likely to stay connected and remain open to hearing more, instead of shutting down or dismissing the speaker and message as “unrealistic” or “out of touch.” You do not have to fully resolve all of those doubts, or bring them into complete agreement, but even a quick acknowledgment can help people remain open to what the messenger has to say next.

Some community members hold justifiable skepticism of or hesitation about relying on systems that have caused them or their loved ones harm. One option is to name that skepticism head on: “Counting on the police or the courts might feel unrealistic, and those systems need a lot of improvement. This policy is one way those systems can work to keep people from being harmed ...”

For example....

Consider phrases like “I know this is a hard topic to talk about” or “It can be overwhelming to think about solving a problem this big.”



Your turn:

What are some barriers you might encounter communicating with your audience?
Consider issues like anxiety, overwhelm, or skepticism.

What are some phrases you could use to address these concerns?

Include a call to action to show your audience the role they can play in creating a better shared future.

It's important to name a solution to show people that change is possible, but also to help people see the role they can play in making that solution a reality. What's the next step you want your audience to take, and why? A specific call to action gives your audience something to do to be part of the solution and helps them have agency over building a better shared future. Whatever your call to action, it should help your audience see and believe in the shared benefits of taking action — for example, a future where communities are safer and where everyone can take action to care for themselves and their loved ones.

For example ...

We have an opportunity to make sure everyone in our community knows more — and can do more — to keep themselves and their loved ones safe.



Your turn:

What do you want your audience to do next?

What are some of the shared benefits that you could illustrate to help make the case for taking action?

Use plain language.

No matter who your audience is, it's important that you (or your messenger) speak plainly and avoid "insider" language whenever possible. The shorthand that people in the field use with each other may not be accessible to people outside the field. Though no one phrase is right in every case, one option is to describe the concept in plain language, or share concrete examples. Avoid acronyms whenever possible, and if you must use them, make sure to define them. In general, plain language can help audiences understand complex ideas and come to agreement about the possibility of domestic violence homicide and other kinds of harm from guns.

For example ...

You might call a Gun Violence Restraining Order a "policy to remove guns in situations where someone poses a danger to themselves or others." If you need to use an acronym like GVRO or ERPO, make sure to define what it means.



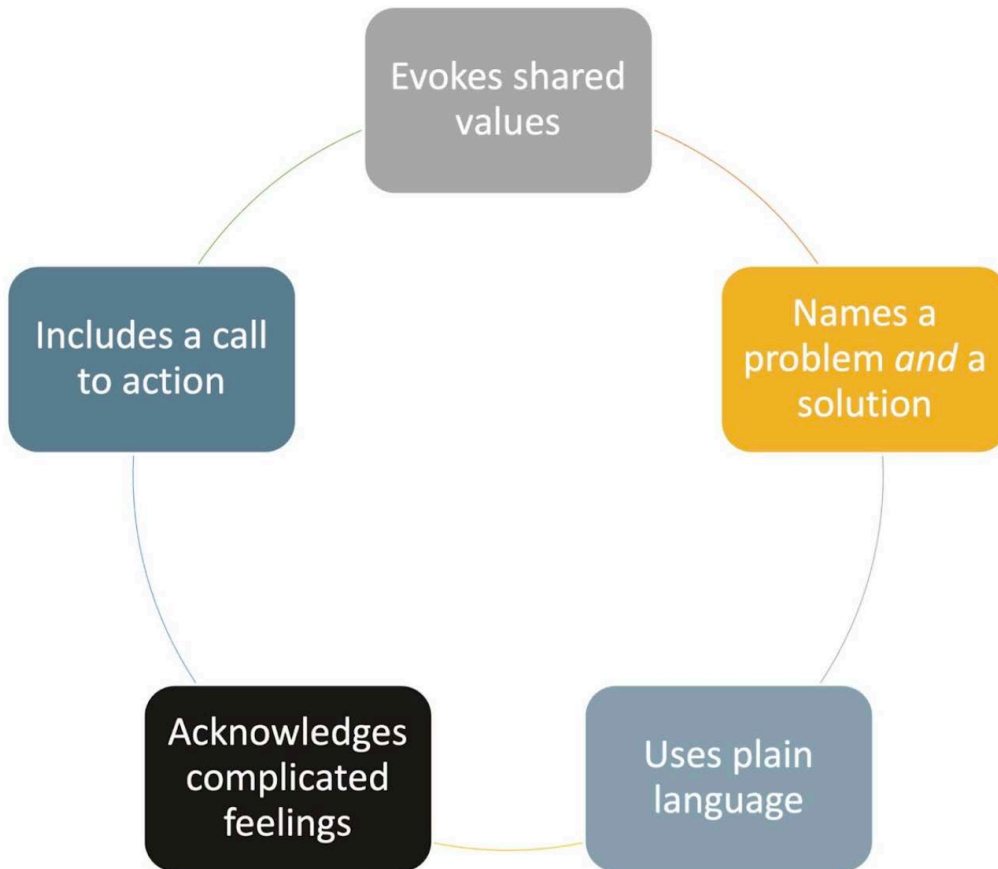
Your turn:

What are some terms that audiences might not immediately understand? How could you restate these terms in plain language?

(If you're not sure your language is clear enough, try explaining the concept to a friend or loved one who isn't familiar with the topic area.)

Step 5: Assemble your message

A strong message about preventing domestic violence-related harm from guns ...



The sequence you use to order these components can make a difference in how your message is received. Leading with shared values is a good idea because it gives people an entry point into a difficult conversation they may not otherwise feel ready to have.



Value	Goal: Empower audience to explore safety planning AND	Messenger	Message channel	Possible audience	Sample message
Supportive community	... highlight community-specific data.	Community leader	City council meeting	City council members and community residents	<p>One of the things I love about living here is that we take care of each other — in good times, and bad. When our neighbors are struggling, we take action — and we know that guns in the home are making some of our friends and neighbors less safe. No matter who owns it, a gun in the home, can make abusive situations more dangerous, particularly when Black or Latina women are at risk. [place to include local story or data from toolkit].</p> <p>I know that thinking about how to help friends, neighbors, or loved ones if they are being threatened or hurt can feel overwhelming — but I know my community, and I know we can do big things together. In this case, there are many options available to help families seeking safety reduce risk from guns. To learn about options, please visit [tool or resource audience can access] and share with your friends and loved ones. Together, we can ensure that everyone in [community name] knows everything that they can do to keep our community safe.</p>
Progress and possibility	... affirm success and convey optimism.	Local politician	Op-ed in a local outlet	Local decision-makers and community advocates	I'm proud to be a Californian/ [community] resident because we lead the nation in so many ways. That's something that's especially important when we're faced with an epidemic of gun violence that harms not just communities, but families: A gun in the home, no matter who owns it, can make abusive situations more dangerous and increase the risk of injury or death. I'm proud, though, that our state is leading the way in protecting

					<p>families from gun violence in the home. We have a range of legal options that can reduce risk from guns when families are struggling with violence. When people know how to access and use these policies, the results are clear: [place to share data about harm reduction from toolkit]. To learn more about these options, and how to access them if you or a loved one needs help, please visit [tool or resource audience can access] and make sure to share it with friends, loved ones, or anyone you think might need it.</p> <p>Sometimes it feels overwhelming to think about how to address a problem this big — but making sure everyone knows about and can use this information is one way we can all play a part in building a stronger, safer, more resilient California.</p>
Safety engage social media networks	Advocacy organization	Social media post	Advocates and survivors	<p>We want to keep our families safe, but in abusive situations, a gun = higher risk, especially for Hispanic & Black women. Scary thought — but help is available!</p> <p>Check out the #CAGunViolencePreventionToolkit for resources to decrease risks and increase safety >> EndingGV.org.</p>



Your turn:

Use this table to practice assembling your own messages.

Value	Goal: Empower audience to explore safety planning AND	Messenger	Message channel	Possible audience	Sample message



Step 6: Remember ...

Communicating how to reduce injury and death from guns in abusive situations can be challenging, but we hope these resources and suggestions provide a valuable starting point that will help you inspire community conversations and provide survivors with the information they need to advocate for their safety.

If you get stuck, just remember ...

- The messenger matters!
- Name your values.
- Talk about solutions and problems — and help your audience see what they can do *next*.
- Speak plainly.