A time to heal: Moral messaging for harm reduction

A step-by-step guide for public remarks, media interviews, op-eds and conversations. This document is intended as a framework, not a verbatim script.

Our challenge

Harm reduction for people who use drugs saves lives and improves health for the entire community, but it is fraught with unhelpful framing, misconceptions and stigma. Our messaging must be person-centered, morally constructive, respectful and accurate.

Our frame

Framing harm reduction as **a life-saving affirmation of health and the image of God in every person** is essential.

Our values

Healing, **worthiness**, **life**, and **community**. *Avoiding connotations of sin and shame is essential.*

Our stories

Stories that bring harm reduction to life and humanize the issue are an essential part of our campaign. But be careful and keep the following tips in mind:

- **Uplifting endings are important.** Make sure that your stories aren't just about tragedy, death and despair. We must motivate people, not overwhelm them.
- **Connect personal experience to broader stories and trends.** People view drug use through an individualistic lens, and it's easy to dismiss specific stories as outliers.
- **Keep it simple.** Avoid jargon, be brief, and make sure your stories are linear: a beginning, followed by a middle, followed by an end.
- **Give it a human touch.** Use names, include little details that show personality, and talk about relationships. There's so much more to a person than their drug use.
- **Be moral.** Make values and morality explicit. Don't leave it open to interpretation.
- **Be honest.** A little embellishment can cost you a lot of credibility.

Instead of	Try
Focusing on tragedy and death	Focusing on saving lives
Eliciting sympathy	Focus on innate value and dignity
Using labels like "addict" that define people in terms of their drug use	Talk about the full humanity of people who use drugs
Showing people that they're wrong	Meeting people where they are and helping them apply their values to their views.