Resource: Substance Abuse Prevention Messaging in Social and Digital Media Tip Sheet

Introduction

This tip sheet provides general guidance on the design and delivery of consistent and effective messaging for substance abuse prevention across social and digital media channels. Please note, however, that all public health messages should be tailored and tested with intended audiences prior to distribution and promotion.

[The Do's and Don'ts of Effective Messaging for Substance Abuse Prevention Tip Sheet](#) is also available to help you create effective messaging across communication channels.

Social Media Post Best Practices[1]

✓ **Keep messaging short and in plain language.** Social media posts that are easily read and digestible are more likely to be read and engaged with than longer content. Plain language content also ensures you reach audiences at varying reading levels and familiarity with the subject matter.
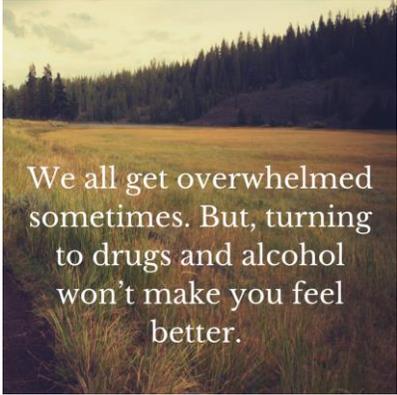
Good Example	Weak Example
Alcohol is a drug that slows down body functions, like talking or walking.	Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant that is rapidly absorbed from the stomach and small intestine into the bloodstream.

✓ **Use graphics, video, or other imagery to convey your message almost all of the time.** Social media reach and engagement is much higher for posts that include a graphical element, such as a meme, data visualization, or GIF. In addition, social media algorithms generally prioritize image-based content over text- or linked-based content.

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[1] The list below contains widely used and tested industry best practices. Other trainings and research referencing these practices include [CDC's Guide to Writing for Social Media](#); [Federal Social Media Accessibility Toolkit](#); and [Digital.gov Plain Language Writing Tips](#).

✓ **Think beyond link sharing.** Sharing links to content on your website is an appropriate use of social media. However, do not exclusively share links without also posting different types of content, such as questions, polls, videos, and other imagery.

✓ **Keep mobile in mind.** While you may draft and post content using a desktop computer, keep in mind that two-thirds of U.S. adults use smartphones[2]. Keep content short and use images with only a few words to optimize the viewing experience on mobile devices.

Good Example	Weak Example
It's hard but true. #WellnessWednesday We all get overwhelmed sometimes. But, turning to drugs and alcohol won't make you feel better.	It's hard but true. #WellnessWednesday We all get overwhelmed sometimes. But, turning to drugs and alcohol won't make you feel better. Drug addiction is a preventable disease. Results from NIDA-funded research have shown that prevention programs involving families, schools, communities, and the media are effective in reducing drug abuse.

✓ **Use the same platforms as your audience.** A wealth of information exists about demographics of social media platforms. This information changes over time as users change their internet habits. To find the most accurate and timely data about specific audiences, visit the Pew Research Center. You may find its latest Facebook and Twitter demographics helpful when planning future content.

✓ **Engage with your audience and other key partners.** As time and staffing allows, engage with as many comments to your posts as possible. Also reciprocate engagement by liking, following, and commenting to users or organizations that engage with your content.

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[2] http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/04/01/us-smartphone-use-in-2015/

✓ **Tell a story.** Even professional audiences need a reminder of the human element behind data and information. Devote a portion of your posts to content that goes beyond data, statistics, and facts.

✓ **Evolve with the platforms you use.** The one social media best practice that will remain constant is to evolve with the technology. Platforms are constantly evolving to keep up with rapidly changing user behavior. In just a few years, Facebook has made dozens of changes that have impacted marketers—from prioritizing native video content to reducing the organic reach of brand posts. Social media news resources include @DigitalGov, Mashable, and NPR's Social Media Desk.

✓ **Rethink events.** Encourage discussion in substance abuse prevention long after in-person events are over by asking participants to use hashtags on Twitter. Consider holding virtual meetings instead of in-person meetings to reduce travel costs.

Platform-Specific Tips

✓ **Facebook**
   o Use Facebook Insights to determine the most strategic days and times to post.
   o Consider small ($50-100 per month) advertising investments to counter reduced organic (non-paid) post reach.
   o Do not post more than 3 times per day.
   o Use hashtags sparingly.

✓ **Twitter**
   o Draft tweets for niche community and organization audiences.
   o Participate in Twitter chats and other substance abuse prevention conversations.
   o Use Twitter Analytics to see what tweets produce the most impressions and engagement.
   o Use popular hashtags or those with an already defined community.
   o Focus content on real-time coverage of events.

✓ **Instagram**
  - Make text overlaid onto graphics brief so that it is not difficult to see on mobile devices.
  - Create "behind the scenes" and other content that showcases the day to day activities of your organization.
  - Be cognizant of trending hashtags and incorporate them (as appropriate) to your posts.

✓ **Pinterest**
  - Focus content for parent audiences.
  - Use Pinterest's most popular categories to tailor messaging. For example, post recipes to nonalcoholic drinks to the "Food & Drink" category.
  - Use "Rich Pins" to add important contextual information to your content.

✓ **LinkedIn**
  - Focus content on partners and substance abuse prevention professionals and recent college graduates.
  - When applicable, add longer (500-1,000 word) content on issues affecting the substance abuse prevention professional community.
  - Encourage staff to comment and engage with content.

Other Platforms and Tools to Consider

✓ **YouTube** — a service where you can post and view videos. Use YouTube to interview experts, show events, and promote program work.

✓ **Snapchat** — an instant messaging network used primarily by teenagers and people in their 20s. Consider using Snapchat if you need to reach teenagers, young adults, or college students.

✓ **Vine** — a service that help users record six second, looping videos to publish on Twitter. Use Vine only if you need to infuse video content into your Twitter content strategy.

✓ **Periscope** — a live video feed that shows what users see through their phones in real-time. It can be helpful to broadcast speakers during events or other real-time program activities. It is owned by Twitter and primarily used in conjunction with Twitter.

✓ **Canva** — a graphics development software that people without formal graphic design training can use. Users can create memes, data visualizations, headers, and much more.

- ✓ **Storify** — a collection of social media, blogs, and other online content focused on a topic or event.
- ✓ **SoundClound** — a service where users can record and post sounds, like podcasts, voice recordings, or music.
- ✓ **Spotify** — a music sharing service where you can create playlists from popular songs. Use Spotify to create collections of relevant songs to play with an event, highlight an observance, or promote a message.
- ✓ **Buzzfeed Community** — a section of BuzzFeed where people and organizations can create articles and other content about any topic.

What about Google+?

Google+ continues to lose applications, such as Google+ photos and Google Hangouts. It also has inconsistent use that has declined since its launch. While it is still important to use Google+ because it improves Google search results, you do not need to invest large amounts of time drafting content and can repurpose Facebook content for this channel.

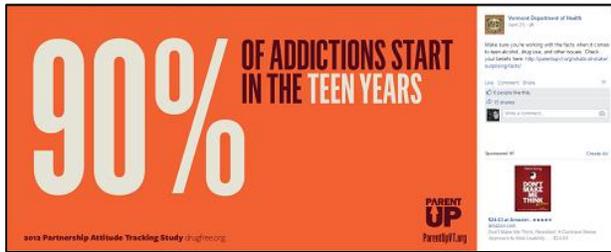## Examples from Drug Prevention Campaigns and Champions

Arizona Department of Health Services

This example shows how to use imagery in content.

See the example.

Vermont Department of Health

This example shows how to optimize content for [mobile devices](#).
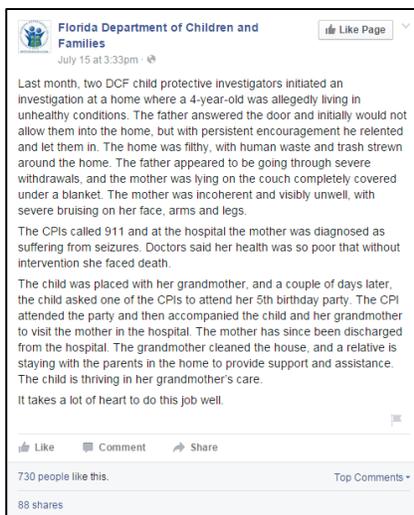
[See the example.](#)

Ohio Department of Health

This example shows how to think [beyond link sharing](#).

[See the example.](#)

Florida Department of Children and Families

This example shows how to use [storytelling](#).

[See the example.](#)