Reframing the Response to COVID-19: Applying Reframed Language to Counteract Ageism

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FrameWorks is on a mission...

to advance the nonprofit sector's capacity to frame the public discourse on social problems.
Leaders of Aging Organizations (LAO)
This effort has a robust evidence base

Sample Size: 12,185

The Reframing Aging Project was sponsored by organizations who recognized a shared challenge:
framing =
choices in how we present information

how people think/feel/act
Given the importance of free speech, would you favor allowing a hate group to hold a political rally?

85% in Favor

Given the risk of violence, would you favor allowing a hate group to hold a political rally?

40% in Favor

Sniderman & Theriault, 2004
Framing children’s issues

Support for evidence-based CMH policies

* = P<.01
framing (really) matters right now
4 ideas for framing aging and ageism now
#1
find an urgency/efficacy balance
all urgency → fatalism, disengagement

all efficacy → message rejection, lack of motivation

balance → perceived agency, engagement, action
What to do

• bring a solution when you can
• explain how it works
• tone matters: don’t forget the urgency part of the equation
Balance urgency and efficacy.

Before

“Older people are at the center of the COVID crisis and are disproportionately impacted by the disease.”

After

“Because older people are disproportionately impacted by the disease, states are planning community actions to reduce exposures to the virus.”
#2

think carefully about how you’re positioning groups
“vulnerable”

otherizes reifies stereotypes

saviors and victims

stigmatizes zero sum demands sacrifice

worthiness

invites evaluation of deservingness
What to do

• interconnection as strength

• responsibility to all

• connect with common experiences

• everyone stepping up/doing the right thing (not sacrificing/saving)

• advance *principle* of targeted universalism not “vulnerable groups”
Thinking carefully about how we position groups.

Before

“Most of us will have a few unpleasant days of aches and fever. But for the elderly neighbor down the street or for our grandparents in nursing homes, it's a different story. Seniors, as well as the disabled, are vulnerable to severe disease. For their sakes, we need to make sacrifices.”

After

This virus is highly contagious and people could be spreading it without realizing. When we all stay home today, we see fewer new cases tomorrow. By keeping our physical distance, we slow the spread. This protects people in our communities who are most at risk and the availability of the lifesaving health care we all depend on.”
#3

explanation is power
"do what we say”

rejection disengagement

"see how this works…"

solutions support efficacy engagement
What to do

- explain why problems exist
- show what actions/solutions do
Explanation is power.

Before

“Ageism in our healthcare system has always been a problem and it is becoming a crisis during this pandemic.”

After

“Under stressful conditions, healthcare providers are likely to make snap decisions about people solely based on their age that will determine the quality of care they receive. We need to make sure our standards of care do not discriminate on the basis of age.”
how we frame now affects what’s possible later
How do I learn more?

Visit the GSA’s *Reframing Aging Initiative’s* website:

www.reframingaging.org

Sign up for FrameWorks’ *Framing COVID-19 Newsletter*: