


Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 

Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC), an Introduction

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Presentation for the New York State Department of Health
 Health Emergency Preparedness Training Centers
 March 22, 2024

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OBJECTIVES


Upon completion of this training, successful participants will be able to:

- Describe the six core CERC principles,
- Reasons why each principle is valuable to emergency communication,
- Techniques for overcoming psychological barriers that may interfere with audiences' ability to receive messages, and
- How messaging priorities change over time.

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WHAT CERC IS

- First published in 2002
- Empowers informed decision-making
- Helps manage uncertainty
- Promotes more effective response



The right message at the right time from the right person can save lives.
<https://emergency.cdc.gov/cerc/index.asp>

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...AND ISN'T

- The right answer to every communication need
- A rigid set of rules
- A substitute for media training

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SIX CORE CERC PRINCIPLES

-  **1** Be First
-  **2** Be Right
-  **3** Be Credible
-  **4** Express Empathy
-  **5** Promote Action
-  **6** Show Respect

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BE FIRST

- If your organization has information, and it is your responsibility to provide it, do so as soon as possible.
- Tell people what you know, when you know it.

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BE RIGHT

- Accuracy helps establish credibility.
- If you don't have all the answers, tell people what you do know.
- If you can't provide information, explain how you are working to get it.

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BE CREDIBLE

- Honesty is essential.
- Knowing about uncertainty is better than having no information at all.
- Rumors are more damaging than hard truths.

“People can take the truth.” – Dr. Thomas Frieden
Quoted in [Pharmacy Practice News](#)

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EXPRESS EMPATHY

- Acknowledge feelings in words.
- Create a sense of inclusion.
- Every message does not need to be an empathy statement, but the first messages need to have them.

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PROMOTE ACTION

- Giving people things to do calms anxiety.
- Promoting action can help restore a sense of control.

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SHOW RESPECT

- Treat people the way they want to be treated—the way you want your loved ones to be treated.
- Respect can help build rapport and cooperation.

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THE CERC RHYTHM



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PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS TO COMMUNICATION

When people experience a crisis, disaster, or emergency, they may experience

- Uncertainty
- Anxiety, fear, or dread
- Hopelessness and helplessness
- Denial
- But NOT panic

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STRESS IMPEDES COMMUNICATION

People under stress typically...

- Focus on the negative more than the positive
- Process information at several levels below their usual level
- Focus intensely on issues of trust, benefits, fairness, and control



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Adapted from: Dr. Vincent Covello, Center for Risk Communication

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RISK PERCEPTION: NOT ALL ABOUT THE NUMBERS

Risk = Hazard + Outrage*

Many factors can increase or decrease the level of outrage such as

- Voluntary or involuntary
- Natural or human-made
- Familiar or exotic
- Affecting adults or affecting children

As communicators, we don't seek to remove outrage, but to match the level of outrage to the level of hazard.

*Peter Sandman, [Risk Communication Website](#)

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OVERCOMING PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS

People tend to...	So you should...
Simplify messages.	Use simple messages.
Hold on to current beliefs.	Share messages through credible sources.
Look for additional information and opinions.	Use consistent messages.
Believe the first message.	Release accurate messages as soon as possible.

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For more information, contact CDC
1-800-CDC-INFO (232-4636)
TTY: 1-888-232-6348 www.cdc.gov

The findings and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



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