

Exercise Packet: Introduction to CERC

[DATE]

Objectives

Upon completion of a full-day Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC) course, participants will be able to:

- Name all six core CERC principles and describe at least one reason why each is important.
- Identify at least two psychological barriers to message receipt two communication tactics for overcoming psychological barriers.
- Draft an empathy statement.
- Draft a set of key messages consistent with CERC principles and plain language recommendations.
- Tailor at least one key message for different audiences or channels.
- Describe actions they can take to promote trust and consistent messaging.

Course Outline

1. Welcome
 - a. Practice with Zoom Tools
2. Introduction to CERC
 - a. Large group exercise: CERC in Action
 - b. Knowledge Check 1
3. Psychology of a Crisis
 - a. Large group exercise: Hazard and Outrage
 - b. Knowledge Check 2
4. Empathy Statements & Key Messages
 - a. Poll: Which Is the Empathy Statement?
 - b. Small group exercise: Write an Empathy Statement
 - c. Small group exercise: Develop Key Messages
 - d. Small group exercise: Review Key Messages
5. Audience Segmentation
 - a. Small group exercise: Identifying Audiences
 - b. Discussion: Learning about Audience Segments
6. Tailoring Messages
 - a. Discussion: Types of Message Channels
 - b. Small group exercise: Update Key Messages
 - c. Small group exercise: Tailoring for Audiences and Channels
7. Collaboration and Coordination
 - a. Discussion: Working with Partners
8. Q&A/Closing Remarks

Scenario Background

Several exercises in this course will be based on a fictitious scenario in the fictitious town of Miasto (mee-ast-oh). For these exercises, you will put yourself in the place of the Communication Officers for the Miasto Department of Health.

Miasto is a highly desirable place to live, surrounded by forests and foothills. Its large Town Center has many inviting places for tourists and residents alike. About 70,000 people live there year-round and about 15,000 people visit throughout the year. The Town Center is surrounded by suburbs—some wealthy, some middle income, and a couple of

low-income communities. About 10% of Miastons speak a language other than English at home, and 8% consider themselves to have limited English proficiency. Miasto also is home to the region's plywood factories.

Introduction to CERC

Exercise: CERC in Action

[Author's note: We have found some course participants are unduly stressed when listening to these excerpts. We advise participants that listening to the excerpts may be challenging and, if they think they will experience a great deal of stress, they should step away for about 10 minutes.]

Listen to the excerpts of from the COVID-19 media briefing for February 14, 2020 with Dr. Nancy Messonnier. See if you can identify the use of each CERC core principle in action. In some cases, you may not be able to note specific sentences as your examples, but the context, tone, or overall approach may be the example.

If you prefer to read along, excerpts from the transcript are below. Feel free to take notes.

Audio Clip 1: Thank you and thank you for joining us. Since we briefed you last, there has been one new confirmed case of COVID-19 in a person who had been under quarantine because of the recent return from Wuhan facilitated by the state department at Joint Base San Antonio Lackland. This makes 15 cases of this new virus in the United States. There are more than 600 people still under quarantine in the United States because of their recent return from the epicenter of this outbreak in China. In general, our guidance is based on specific situation risk assessments, so other people or groups may have different risks. These people are going through difficult circumstances right now. Being quarantined can be disruptive, frustrating, and feel scary, especially when the reason for the quarantine is exposure to a new disease for which there may be limited information. Quarantine is an unusual situation for public health responders, too. The last time we had to quarantine large groups of people was more than 50 years ago. So, while we are doing the best we can, there are going to be bumps along the way. I understand that one of the biggest questions that has come up involves questions about testing and when people should be tested. I want to say right now, CDC's recommendations and the policies we are following across the board is to test people with a history of exposure who are showing symptoms. This is because we know that testing people too early can potentially miss infections.

Audio Clip 2: Another question I want to address is how this virus spreads. Based on what we know now, we believe this virus spreads mainly from person to person among close contacts— which is defined as about six feet—through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. People are thought to be the most contagious when they're most symptomatic. That is when they are the sickest. Some spread may happen by touching a contaminated surface and then touching the eyes, nose, and mouth. But remember the virus does not last long on surfaces. Some spread may happen before people show symptoms. There have been a few reports of this with the new coronavirus, and it is compatible with what we know about other respiratory viruses including seasonal flu. But right now, we do not believe these last two forms of transmission are the main driver of spread. We at CDC recognize this is a difficult time for the people who have returned from Wuhan as well as the community supporting them and ask for their continued patience as we work together. This is a difficult and challenging time on many fronts.

Audio Clip 3: We don't have the tools yet for this novel virus, but there are things everyone can do to contain the spread of the virus. Stay informed. CDC is updating the website daily with the latest information and advice for the public. And remember to take everyday preventive actions that are always recommended to prevent the spread of respiratory virus. We recognize the uncertainty of the current situation. As always, CDC public health experts strive to make the best recommendations based on the most up-to-date data. Our guidance will change as we learn more about this virus. I'd be happy to take questions.

Knowledge Check 1

In your own words, explain why each CERC principle is important. Please add your thoughts as annotations or come off mute and tell us your thoughts.

Psychology of a Crisis

Exercise: Risk = Hazard + Outrage

Your instructor will briefly describe a hazard situation. Use the stamp tool (in annotations) to note whether you think each situation is

- High hazard or low hazard.
- High outrage or low outrage.

Knowledge Check 2

- Which of these choices is a way that stress impedes communication when someone is experiencing a crisis? You may select more than one option. The options are:
 - Focus on the negative more than the positive
 - Read every scientific article they can about the hazard
 - Process information at several levels below their usual level
 - Readily change their beliefs
 - Focus intensely on issues of trust, benefits, fairness, and control
- Match the communication tactic that helps manage each of the psychological barriers to communication. (Answers on slide 27).

Empathy Statements and Key Messages

Expressing Empathy Video Transcript

Opening text: These modules are provided for instructional purposes only. Any opinions expressed by individuals in the videos included in the modules are the opinions of those individuals and do not necessarily reflect those of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), or the United States Government.

Dr. Richard Besser, former Acting Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: It's said, in risk communication, that that until people know that you care they don't care what you know, and I think that that's really, really true. It's so important to be a human being when you're talking to people, even if you're talking to millions of people through television, you have to be a person. And I remember foreshadowing the death of a child, because we were hearing that there was a child who was doing poorly in Texas, and at a press conference, saying, you know, we don't know how bad this is going to be. But we do know that people are going to die, and any loss of life is too many. Sharing that information and letting people know that you care, it's not...(pause) In epidemiology we often talk about rates, about what percent died, the case fatality rate. Well, that doesn't matter to the family that lost a loved one. That person they lost is a meaningful death, and you need to acknowledge that. And if you, if you acknowledge that, again, people will follow you. If you don't acknowledge that, you're going to lose the trust of the people who really need to be behind you.

Joseph Matthews, Deputy Chief, Operations and Planning, New Orleans Fire Department: You should express some type of empathy for the public, showing them, that you have compassion, that you understand, that you sympathize with them. But at the same time, you don't want to make no (sic) unnecessary promises to the public, especially promises that you can't keep, because the public has a long memory, they hold you to those promises. And you don't want to lose your audience because the first time they find that you can't keep a promise, that you've lied to them, then you've lost your credibility. And in your line of work as a public leader your credibility is paramount.

Kevin Pastorick, Public Information Officer, Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals: I think just to be empathetic during a response, because people don't want you to be an authoritative figure, they want you to be their uncle, their brother, their father, their sister, somebody who is in the community you care about what's going on because it affects you too, not just the person who's on the other end watching you. They want to know, and they want to have you reassure them that you're doing everything you can to help them through this disaster, through this situation.

Dr. Besser: When you're doing risk communication, you want to acknowledge empathy. You want to also, though, inspire hope. And by telling people what you're doing to try and reduce the pain, reduce the chances that that any preventable death will occur, that can inspire hope. And people need hope to go forward. So, giving people that sense of what you're doing what you're doing to try and improve their lives, and reduce the pain of an event, is very important during your communication.

Poll: Which Is the Empathy Statement?

For each poll question, select the empathy statement. Be prepared to discuss why the other is not an empathy statement or is a less suitable empathy statement.

- We are thinking of you during this difficult time. **OR** During times like these, all of us feel a little uncertain.
- We understand that this is very hard. **OR** The grief that has overcome our community is enormous.

Scenario: First Hours

The U.S. Geological Survey reports that an earthquake that registered a 6.4 magnitude on the Richter scale struck the town of Miasto at 11:22 a.m. Town Center suffered only minor damage. However, the earthquake caused multiple plywood factory buildings to collapse, trapping hundreds of workers in the rubble. Some of the family members of workers and residents that were not in the area are trying to get into the area to search for family and reach their homes. Emergency responders are working in the area to rescue those in the rubble. The number of people who have died and the degree of damage to the town are unknown. This is the largest earthquake Miasto has seen in the last 30 years although the town experiences minor earthquakes from time to time.

Exercise: Write an Empathy Statement

In times of crisis, expressing empathy can help your audience better receive your message. Sometimes there is no time to express empathy. However, expressing empathy is nearly always helpful at the beginning of an emergency response.

Read the situation in **Scenario: First Hours** and write an empathy statement for the people directly affected by the earthquake. **You do not need to start on the informational points at this time.** You will develop informational messages later in the course.

We will discuss this exercise as a class after you complete it. Please be prepared for a few participants to share their statements.

Exercise: Develop Key Messages

At the start of an emergency, there are a lot of unknowns. Despite this, one way you can practice CERC principles is to tell people what you know, what you don't know, and what you're doing to find out. Considering the current situation (**First Hours** after the earthquake), work with your group to determine the most important pieces of information people in Miasto need right now. Next, work with your group to choose and write down the three most important messages. Also write supporting messages as needed. Decide whether you should leave out any of the messages your group has developed or suggested. Remember, people in crises have a lot of information to process and limited mental capacity to

process that information. Please use the template message map in [Appendix A](#). Be prepared to share your messages with the other groups. Don't forget to

- Be brief. Use positive action steps (avoid "don't" statements).
- Use words your audience uses. Avoid jargon.
- Use personal pronouns (actual or implied).
- Avoid stigmatizing, marginalizing, or blaming language.
- Avoid speculation or promises you can't deliver on.

Some CDC tools to help you with your messages include the following:

- [Health Literacy website](#)
- [Clear Communication Index](#)
- [Health Equity Guiding Principles for Inclusive Communication](#)

One person from the group should email your group's key messages to [your email address]

Exercise: Review Key Messages

Each group should have received a copy of the key messages another group developed in the previous exercise. Your task now is to review the key messages and ask yourself:

- Do the messages include the most important information without too much detail?
- Are the messages easy to understand, even when someone is in a crisis state of mind?
- If I were in Miasto and going through this crisis, would the messages provide the information I feel I need and help me know what to do?

Then, as a group, write one to three sentences providing honest, respectful feedback to your colleagues. Email the feedback to [your email address] and we will route it to the appropriate group. We will also discuss as a class.

Audience Segmentation

Scenario: 24 Hours

A few small aftershocks continued until around 10:00 p.m. last night but fears of another earthquake or major aftershock have largely subsided. It appears that about half the homes have experienced moderate to severe damage. The entire community is focused on rescue efforts. Indeed, the nation is watching. Responders have been mostly successful in persuading people to avoid going into damaged areas. But some people are beginning to feel desperate, even hopeless, that their loved ones will be found alive.

The water department has issued a warning against consuming tap water for the entire area it serves (Miasto and a few outlying communities). Even so, the hospital, which fortunately was not damaged, is seeing several patients complaining of stomach cramping and diarrhea. This further stresses their capacity to treat wounds for earthquake survivors.

Exercise: Identifying Audiences

Together, consider the scenario and list as many different audiences as you can for the scenario. Save your answers as we will revisit them later in the course. You have 5 minutes.

Discussion: Audience Segments

What kinds of information can we know about our audience segments before an emergency happens?

Where can we get that information?

Is there any group we need to partner with to quickly confirm or obtain information about certain audience segments?

Tailoring Messages

Exercise: Update Key Messages

Considering the current situation (**Scenario: 24 Hours**), work with your group to determine the most important pieces of information **one audience** in Miasto need right now. Next, work with your group to choose and write down the three most important messages. Also write supporting messages as needed.

You may opt to use the template message map in [Appendix A](#).

Exercise: Tailoring for Channels

Create at least two messaging products based on the key messages you created in the last exercise. Consider which channels your chosen audience uses. Feel free to be artistic!

Each group will share their work with the others when we return to the main room. We recommend sharing your screen when sharing your work.

Collaboration and Coordination

Scenario: 2 Weeks

It has been 2 weeks since the earthquake struck. Many people are applying for disaster assistance, but it seems that residents from the low-income neighborhoods and households that prefer a non-English language are not. In addition, the hospital is still seeing people with gastrointestinal illness, most likely from drinking contaminated water or washing their food and dishes with it. The department of health realizes that to adequately reach all their audiences, they will have to work with partners to provide face-to-face messaging.

Discussion: Working with Partners

Using the current scenario (**Scenario: 2 Weeks**) for your discussion:

- Name at least three groups or types of groups the jurisdictions of Miasto can work with to address the situation.
- Name at least two actions response units (such as the outreach section, the communication section, or the scientific section) can take to foster better collaboration and more consistent messaging.

Share with the larger group one or two things your group decided or learned.

Appendix A: Template Message Map

Main Audience:		
Statement of Empathy:		
Key Message 1	Key Message 2	Key Message 3
Supporting Point 1-1	Supporting Point 2-1	Supporting Point 3-1
Supporting Point 1-2	Supporting Point 2-2	Supporting Point 3-2
Supporting Point 1-3	Supporting Point 2-3	Supporting Point 3-3