



Government
Communication
Service

Behavioural Science Team

Applying behavioural science to local communications and public spaces safety strategy

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Background

MHCLG commissioned the **Cabinet Office Behavioural Science team** to determine ways in which behavioural science could be applied to the design of local communications to promote public safety as COVID-19 restrictions are relaxed over the Spring and Summer of 2021.

The Cabinet Office Behavioural Science team uses the latest theory and evidence to understand why people behave in the way that they do, and explores strategies and communications approaches to systematically remove barriers to behaviour change.

The suggestions outlined in these slides have been refined and endorsed by Heads of Enforcement and regulatory services from authorities across the country, including county and district authorities in three forums:

- MHCLG's Beaches and Tourism Group
- MHCLG's Compliance and Enforcement working group
- Office for Product Safety and Standards Regional Chairs meeting

The content in these slides are suggestions and are not guidance.

For more from the Cabinet Office Behavioural Science team, see their latest Behaviour Change for Communications Guide here: <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/the-principles-of-behaviour-change-communications/>

Suggestions for communications and public spaces safety strategy

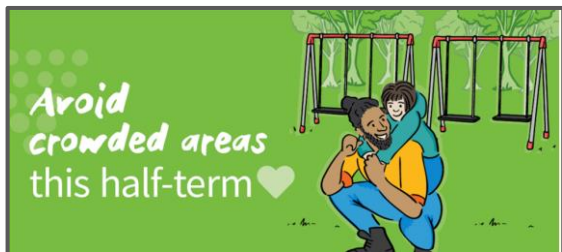
1. Help people to follow the rules and avoid risky situations by **highlighting what behaviour you do want people to adopt, not just what behaviour you want people to avoid.**
 - By telling people what they *can* do, rather than what they *can't* do, people may find it easier to establish plans.
 - Reduce ambiguity as much as possible, considering that people may have different perceptions of what “local” means and what “reasonable” or “minimal” travel might look like.
 - Instead of relying solely on flexible suggestions like “Minimise travel this summer,” communications that includes more specific and direct suggestions can enable plan forming, such as “Discover what’s on your doorstep in [region] this summer.”
 - Fines only illustrate what people can’t do, they don’t illustrate what people can do, so specific communication will help increase effectiveness of fines (or be substitutes for fines when fines cannot be used)
 - In communications, say **what they should do and how they can do it**
 - If closing car parks, provide information about where people can park or advise them to stay local and walk to their destination
 - Instead of “avoid crowds”, say “If you visit a park and it’s very crowded, leave and visit a quieter park. Here’s a map of local public parks and beaches.”



- ⊘ Non-specific
- ⊘ No “correct” behaviour set out

“If the train is busy, please wait on the platform for another service.”

“Please move down the train to make space for others.”



- ☑ Specific
- ⊘ No “correct” behaviour set out

“When visiting the park, look for areas that have the fewest people and sit there.”

“If you visit a park and it’s very crowded try find another quieter park to go to.”

“Here’s a map of all the public parks/beaches/beauty spots in [region].”



- ☑ Specific
- ☑ Correct behaviour set out

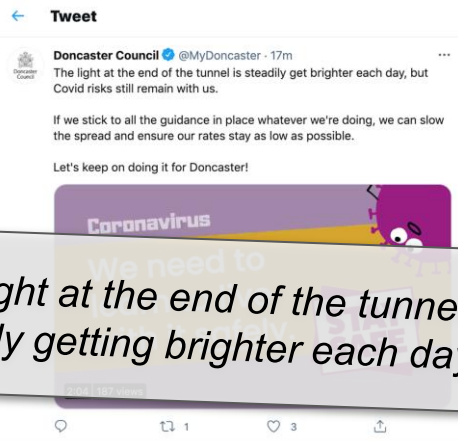
Suggestions for communications and public spaces safety strategy

2. Convey empathy and avoid laying blame on any individuals or groups

- Many undesirable behaviors that might occur during easements (such as crowding in public spaces or on transport) will be an outcome of people correctly following the rules, rather than flouting them.
- Communications should be focussed on providing practical advice that will help people stay safe and make effective and flexible plans.

3. Convey a positive tone that is consistent with the mood of lockdown relaxations

- The post-lockdown period will likely be characterised by positivity and excitement; communications should aim to fit with this tone and support people in having fun safely



"The light at the end of the tunnel is steadily getting brighter each day."



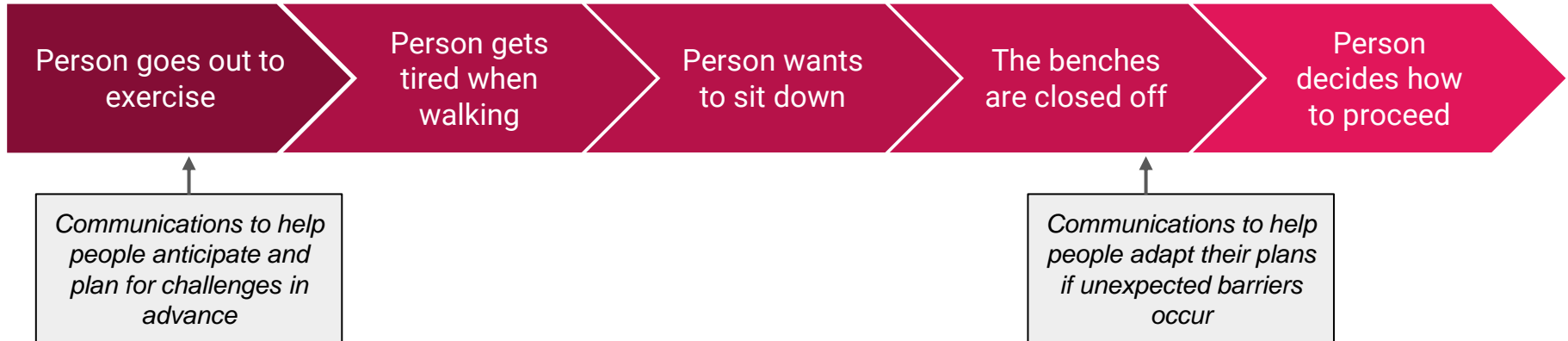
"We know how long-awaited these moments are."

Suggestions for communications and public spaces safety strategy

4. Set clear expectations about how people's safety will be protected so they can plan ahead, for example, by developing and publicising in advance a clear **crowd management strategy**.

Communications are needed to both:

- Help people prepare feasible plans that they can execute with confidence
- Help people make the right decision about what to do in situations when already out and about



Suggestions for communications and public spaces safety strategy

5. Ensure that signage is **attention grabbing** and **looks new and relevant**.

The previous year has been characterised by high levels of information and new rules and guidance - any people have understandably become increasingly disengaged in Covid-related communications, and any new signage will need to be distinctive and novel to cut through the noise.

6. Anticipate **uncertainty** and **anxiety** amongst some audiences. Take the opportunity to **set direction**.

Some residents may not have left their homes in some time, while others will be increasing the number of activities they undertake - **with routines currently disrupted and widespread uncertainty about what the “new normal” might look like**, the first few weeks will be critical in **setting direction and driving the adoption of new, safe habits and behaviours**.

Public spaces safety strategy

Behavioural principles for public spaces safety strategy

- 1. Identify behaviours** that might occur which could **pose risks (e.g. COVID-19 transmission, anti-social behaviour etc.)**
 - For example, *crowds around transport hubs*
- 2. Map out the behaviour you would like people to adopt instead to mitigate the specific risk(s) identified**
 - For example, *move away from large crowds, and travel at quieter times*
- 3. Identify the barriers to those behaviours**, noting that these will be a range of **practical, logistical, emotional, and motivational barriers**
 - Example of motivational barrier: *I have plans to travel today and would be upset if these plans were disrupted.*
 - Example of practical barrier: *I need to be at work at 8.30am so I have no choice but to travel at this time.*
- 4. Develop a public spaces strategy that addresses these identified barriers**
- 5. Communicating the strategy in advance**
 - **Publicise the strategy in advance** so that people can plan ahead
 - Explain why crowd management is needed and how the strategy will **reduce the risks of transmission and help people enjoy their new freedom safely**
 - **Be clear in communication about whether strategies are being used to mitigate transmission risks or other risks e.g. anti-social behaviour, congestion etc. as public understanding is key to adherence**

Example of barrier analysis

| Likely undesired behaviour | Type of risk posed | Desirable alternative | Barriers to desirable alternative | Strategies to overcome barriers to desired alternative |
|---|---|---|--|--|
| People in park/beaches closer than 2m to each other | COVID transmission risk | <i>People socially distance</i> | Park/beach too busy for 2m social distancing | <i>Guide people to leave busy parks/beaches, and promote all available beaches/parks in area to increase likelihood of even distribution</i> |
| People park on high streets because car parks are closed | Local congestion | <i>People avoid taking their cars into high street and stay local</i> | People aren't aware car parks will be closed before they start their journey | <i>Promote crowd management plan in advance, provide communications at car parks signalling parking alternatives, keep car parks open</i> |
| Crowded/disorderly queues inside concert venues and at entrance/exit points | COVID transmission risk Anti-social behaviour risk | <i>Socially distanced queues</i> | People follow crowds, limited space, limited entry/exit points, people travel together and arrive at same time on public transport | ... |
| ... | | ... | ... | ... |

N.B. Text in italics is illustrative, and may or may not reflect your own public spaces strategy.

Communicating public spaces safety strategy

As restrictions are eased across [region name], we're putting in place strategies to help make sure we can all enjoy the Spring and Summer safely. We need your help, and will have signs and marshals who may direct you to:

- *Leave busy parks and beaches and move on to quieter ones nearby*
- *Maintain a 2 metre distance when out with loved ones outside of your household or support bubble*
- *Stay local and walk to your nearest public amenities rather than driving*

These are examples which may or may not reflect your public spaces strategy

Look out for local signs and marshals who will help you enjoy lockdown easements safely.

Our full public spaces guidance is available on our website [insert link].