



**Free help
to quit smoking**
California Smokers' Helpline
1-800-NO-BUTTS
(1-800-662-8887)
www.nobutts.org
National Quitline
1-800-QUIT-NOW
(1-800-784-8669)
<https://smokefree.gov>

**SECONDHAND
SMOKE**
It does more than stink.

**Benefits of a smoke-free
home and car**

- You, your family and your friends will all breathe easier.
- Your hair, clothes, furniture and car will smell fresher and cleaner.
- Food will taste better and pets will be healthier without secondhand smoke.

Sources
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke. A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta, GA: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Coordinating Center for Health Promotion, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2006.
American Lung Association. "Health Effects of Secondhand Smoke." <http://www.lung.org/stop-smoking/smoking-facts/health-effects-of-secondhand-smoke.html> (accessed March 2, 2018).
American Cancer Society. "Health Risks of Secondhand Smoke." <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-prevention/tobacco-and-cancer/secondhand-smoke.html> (accessed March 2, 2018).
U.S. Department of Public Health. www.tecc.org

TECC Support

Developing Effective Messages: A How-To Guide for Educational Materials

Developing Effective Messages: A How-To Guide for Educational Materials

Before you think about the design elements of your next fact sheet or brochure, it's important to make sure your content is clear and concise.



Topics in this guide

- + Defining your target audience
- + Developing your message
- + Writing text that's easy to read
- + Framing messages to promote equity





Defining Your Audience

Keep It Focused

Choose a clearly defined audience for your material. Your resource will be less effective if it tries to serve too many purposes. For example, if you are creating a secondhand smoke fact sheet for multi-unit housing residents, adding information to try and make it appropriate for policy makers as well, will water down your message. It's better to create separate fact sheets for specific audiences.

Once you have determined who your audience is, involve representatives throughout the development process. You can use surveys, interviews, and focus groups to learn about their needs and concerns.

[Please see our "Consumer Testing Guide" for more information](#)

Priority Populations

The language used by groups to identify themselves is constantly evolving. It is important to let communities identify how they want to be defined. When developing the [Story of Inequity](#), the California Tobacco Control Program (CTCP) had extensive engagement with representatives from the populations featured on this website. Thus, CTCP recommends using the naming schema found in the [Story of Inequity](#) for each priority population.



Developing Your Message

Key Message Points

- + Keep your message short and easily understood.
 - + *"Secondhand smoke is a real health risk."*
- + Focus on family, especially children.
 - + *"Kids who breathe secondhand smoke get sick more often."*
- + Use clear and friendly language, free of blame.
 - + *"Learn how you can protect your family."*



The online TECC catalog has hundreds of materials with great examples of talking points you can use for inspiration.

Keep It Action Oriented

- + Focus on realistic actions and achievable goals.
 - + *"Ask family members and friends to step outside to smoke."*
- + Emphasize benefits of adopting the behavior.
 - + *"When you make a smoke-free rule at home, your whole family will breathe easier."*
- + Acknowledge barriers (social and financial) and provide ideas to overcome them.
 - + *"Let them know it isn't about smoking, it's about keeping your family healthy."*
- + Include free or low-cost resources for help, such as a local cessation clinic or the California Smokers' Helpline.
 - + *"The California Smokers' Helpline offers free help to quit smoking. Call 1-800-NO-BUTTS (1-800-662-8887) or visit www.nobutts.org."*

Writing Text That's Easy to Read

Engage Your Reader

- + Keep the message short and simple. You don't need to include lots of statistics or share everything you know.
- + Speak directly to your audience and use "you" and "your" where possible.
- + Maintain an adult perspective. Be careful to avoid assumptions about people who read at a low level.
- + Include examples and personal stories from the community to engage your reader.



TIP

Headlines that ask the reader a question help draw them in.

Example: "Do e-cigarettes help smokers quit?"

Organize for Impact

- + Start with the most important information and end with a call to action.
- + Structure the material logically. Step-by-step, chronological, question/answer and problem/solution formats are easy to follow.
- + Use shorter sentences.
- + Break up longer content with headlines, short paragraphs, and bulleted lists.



Choose the Right Words

- + Avoid jargon, technical, or scientific language.
- + Write in an active voice using vivid verbs.
- + Replace statistics with words like “most,” “many,” and “half.”
- + Choose the appropriate reading level for your audience. For general educational materials, guidelines recommend an 8th grade or lower reading level. Materials for policy makers could have a higher reading level. Most importantly, the information provided should be understandable, meaningful, and easy to use. [Please see our “Readability Guide” for more information.](#)

Text Makeover

Before:

“Today only 12% of Californians smoke. Smoking is linked to increased illness and death associated with lung cancer and heart disease. Quitting smoking is possible with our free cessation help.”

After:

“Most people in California don’t smoke. If you smoke, you are more likely to get lung cancer or have a heart attack. Call us today for free help to quit.”



Citing Sources

When using facts and figures that are not common knowledge, you should cite the original source of this information. The Rover Tobacco Control Library can help CTCP-funded projects find sources for facts and statistics and help format citations. [See the Rover "Citation Help" webpage for more information.](#)

Example

80% of kids who have used tobacco started with a flavored product.

Citation in APA format:

Ambrose, B.K., Day, H.R., Rostron, B., Conway, K.P., Borek, N., Hyland, A., & Villanti, A.C. (2015). *Flavored tobacco use among U.S. youth aged 12-17 years, 2013-2014*. *JAMA*, 314(17), 1871-1873. doi:10.1001/jama.2015.13802.

Framing Health Disparities Data to Promote Equity

Use language familiar to everyone

The terminology we commonly use in public health such as “health disparities” and “social determinants of health” may not resonate with some audiences. It’s more effective to discuss these concepts with colloquial, emotionally compelling language.

Text Makeover

Before:

“Despite efforts in tobacco control over the past two decades, tobacco-related health disparities remain for some priority population groups.”

After:

“Our goal is to give everyone a fair chance to live a healthy, smoke-free life regardless of their income, education, or ethnic background.”

- + Read [“A New Way to Talk About the Social Determinants of Health”](#) from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for more information about effectively framing the conversation around these issues.



Start with the “Why”

Messages that describe disparities and focus on one ethnic group can reinforce negative racial stereotypes. To avoid this, try to be explicit about the reasons why health disparities exist.

Text Makeover

Before:

“American Indians have the highest smoking rates compared to all other racial/ethnic groups in the US.”

After:

“The tobacco industry has aggressively marketed their products to American Indian communities, which has contributed to high smoking rates.”

People First

It’s important to acknowledge that Californians are people first and not defined by the priority population they may be a part of. Don’t define people by their situation or life experience.

Text Makeover

Before:

“Big Tobacco targeted low-income children by descending upon housing projects.”

Here, “low-income” is something that the children are defined by. However, it is just something that the children and their families experience—not who they are.

After:

“Big Tobacco targeted children from families with low incomes.”



Next Steps

Now that you have developed effective messages for your educational material, you are ready for graphic design!

Please contact ta@tecc.org and someone from the TECC team will assist you.

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 tecc.org

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Tobacco Education
Clearinghouse
of California