

# Crafting Your Advocacy Message

## **Pick a vehicle.**<sup>1</sup>

Advocacy messages can take many forms including:

- Social media posts
- Blog posts
- Videos
- Meetings with decision-makers
- Letters to the editor
- Any other medium where you can reach an audience

## **Engage the heart and the head.**

- People understand the world through both their heart and their head. In fact, the heart is often the more powerful driver.
- To get people to take action, your advocacy message needs to touch their hearts (through stories and personal experiences) and minds (through facts, figures, and data).

## **Include the key ingredients.**

- A targeted message for a targeted audience
- A clear description of the issue and why it's a problem
- Facts and figures
- Real-life, human examples and stories
- An appealing, emotional connection
- Simple, concise solutions
- Answers to common questions or challenges
- An "ask"—what action do you want the recipient to take?

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<sup>1</sup> Save the Children Action Network's [Advocacy for Kids Training: Elevator Pitches](#)

## Create your elevator pitch.

An elevator pitch is a common type of advocacy message used when a speaker has a very short period of time to spur someone's interest (usually less than 1 minute). Everything about crafting a message applies to the elevator pitch, but you should also consider the following factors:

### The "Ask"

With an elevator pitch, the ask is often to capture the person's interest and set up a longer follow-up conversation.

### Your Audience

You'll typically tailor your message to specific audiences, but you may have unexpected opportunities to pitch your advocacy work, so it's smart to craft a "stock" elevator pitch with wide appeal.

### Hearts Over Minds

As your time is short and emotions are very powerful, focus more on capturing the person's heart rather than their mind (compelling stories over facts).

## The Best Elevator Pitch with Vanessa Van Edwards

Do you ever get anxious answering this question? Or maybe, you are so used to being asked this question that you get bored answering? If your answer is yes to either of the above questions, then this video is for you!

Your elevator pitch is incredibly important -- your level of engagement increases your memorability and impact. In this video, I will teach you the body language and people skills you can use to make your elevator pitch interesting, unforgettable, and influential.



## Strategic Sharing: Knowing Your Story<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Source: National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health and Pathways RTC.  
<https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/pbStrategicSharingGuide.pdf>

Just like getting ready for a test, you will want to study and prepare for each and every event. Knowing your audience is important, but knowing your past and how to talk about it effectively is even more important.

Now, you might think that you know your own story and how to tell it, but you might be surprised at what can happen. Imagine you went to an event unprepared and you were asked a question, like how old were you when you first came into foster care. You tell people that you were nine years old, but at a later event you say that you were eight. This is because you were two weeks away from your 9<sup>th</sup> birthday when you came into care. This might seem like a small issue, but any inconsistency in your story will decrease your credibility. What if you told people that you were adopted but had a failed adoption? People might assume that your adoption failed because of your behavioral issues, when in fact it failed because of the physical health needs of your adoptive parent. **It's important that you know how your audience might receive or interpret your story.** By preparing, you can better avoid confusion and/or negative stereotypes and stigma.

Another great reason to study your topic is so that you can use data and statistics along with your personal story. To say that you have a diagnosable mental health need is one thing, but to say that you, like 20% of all youth in America, have a diagnosable mental health need is another. **When we can use our stories as an example of a much bigger issue to be addressed, then we can be truly impactful.** Remember, when we advocate on a community level we are sharing our stories on behalf of hundreds of thousands of other youth.

When studying your topic, it is important that you choose your boundaries carefully. Let's say that you are at an event and are speaking about when you first came into foster care. You pause because talking about the fear you felt while the police were taking you away triggers emotional memories in you and you have to take a moment to regain your composure. If you had studied your topic and what you wanted to say, you would have known if talking about this was something that would trigger you. When choosing your boundaries, **remember what the purpose for the event is and how your story relates to your audience.** Is it necessary they hear information that is difficult for you to talk about? The best advice for making this decision is: **don't use this speech, presentation, or event to talk about difficult emotional issues that you haven't previously addressed in a therapeutic setting.** This is one of the quickest ways to burn out, or worse: be re-traumatized. However, sometimes you might feel that despite the risk, it's worth sharing for the sake of the audience learning. In this case you need to get prepared, and incorporate this into your safety plan. You can always talk to a trusted adult beforehand if you have any questions as to whether something is appropriate to share.

**First, you should ask yourself these questions:**

1. Out of my diverse personal experiences, which ones best relate to my audience and purpose?



2. How might my audience interpret this information?
3. What data and statistics support or relate to my experiences?
4. Am I comfortable sharing these experiences?
5. Will anything that I'm sharing be a trigger for me?

