

Oregon Safe Sleep Coalition Communications Guide

Background

In 2021, the Maternal and Child Health Section (MCH) of the Oregon Public Health Division set out to develop a toolkit providing consistent messages that could be shared across settings in a culturally responsive way, thus creating community-wide norms and expectations regarding safe sleep practices. The Oregon Safe Sleep Coalition was formed to act as an inviting, public-facing brand for the toolkit.

The toolkit was informed by:

- A landscape assessment of 35+ research documents/sources.
- 15 in-depth interviews to test messages with childcare providers who cared for children younger than 6 months of age.
- In-depth interviews with Black/African American and American Indian/Alaska Native mothers in Oregon with a child six months old or younger.
- Social media A/B testing with Black/African American mothers and grandmothers and American Indian/Alaska Native mothers caring for an infant under 6 months.

This communications guide shares best practices for communicating about safe sleep practices with communities, with an emphasis on higher-risk Black/African American and Alaska Native/American Indian populations. It also shares tips on using the materials available in the Safe Sleep Toolkit.

Safe Sleep Communications: Best Practices for Partners

DO

- **Provide life hacks.** Parents and caregivers want tips and help, especially “real-world” advice from other parents that is realistic, practical and empathetic.
- **Tie in community identity.** Black/African American and American Indian/Alaska Native caregivers responded to ads that felt specifically relevant to their cultural identities.
- **Help parents practice harm reduction.** Recognize that much bed-sharing is incidental.
- **Use visuals** for moms and caregivers who may not read English well.
- **Use inclusive language and visuals.** Recognize that some at-risk parents may not have a partner. Grandparents may be primary caregivers in some situations.

DON'T

- **Use “should” messages.** Parents and caregivers are turned off by messages that are prescriptive or overly instructive.
- **Play up risk.** Parents tend to lean on their own experience and those of people they know, along with their ability to conceptualize the realities of a risk, more than expert guidance. Sleep-related death, especially SIDS, is shrouded in scientific specifics and mystery, which makes it easy to ignore.
- **Overlook equity.** While it is important to engage at-risk populations, messaging must

avoid “blaming” individuals for systemic inequities that contribute to these public health problems.

Methods for Reaching Priority Audiences

In-person events: SIDS prevention is a sensitive and intimidating topic. Consequently, caregivers want to lean on the advice of people that they trust and those who can be empathetic to their realities. In-person events provide the opportunity to engage caregivers in thoughtful conversations about safe sleep.

Toolkit Tip: The Safe Sleep Toolkit provides several handouts that can be printed with a standard office printer and distributed at events. The handouts are designed to print two to a standard 8.5 x 11 page. Use a paper cutter to separate the two handouts per page.

Social media: Today, it is common for caregivers to seek out parenting content on social media. Much like in-person events, social media allows parents to engage with the select content creators who they trust and who they feel represent their parenting styles, aspirations or realities.

- **Focus on the right platforms.** Currently, young caregivers are most active on Facebook and Instagram. Targeting Facebook also allows you to reach older audiences who may be playing caregiver roles. These trends will inevitably change over time, so it is best practice to research the current most used platforms for priority audiences before deciding where to share content.
- **Expand your reach.** After sharing SIDS prevention content on your organization’s social channels, consider expanding your reach from there. You can invest a modest amount to run your content as a paid ad to reach beyond your current follower list.

Toolkit Tip: The social media images included in the Safe Sleep Toolkit make up a carousel post for Facebook or Instagram. A carousel allows you to show several images in one post. It is common for young caregivers to consume this type of content, especially for tips or educational material.

Here’s how to use the toolkit carousel images:

- Download the social media images from the toolkit website. All images will download in a single ZIP file.
- Follow these [instructions](#) to post a carousel on Facebook or Instagram (they are designed to work on both platforms).
- Copy and paste the “example post copy” text from the toolkit page and post with the images.

Local Radio: Historically, radio has been effective for reaching working populations (who listen while commuting) and certain populations of color (especially Hispanic and African American populations who may tune into culturally-specific channels). Often, radio stations will provide

lower advertising rates for nonprofits, foundations and other cause-based community organizations. This [comprehensive article](#) outlines the basic steps involved in (1) researching stations, (2) producing an ad, and (3) buying air time.

Toolkit Tip: The Safe Sleep Toolkit includes several versions of SIDS prevention radio scripts that you can air on local stations. Download the scripts, choose those you would like to run, then reach out to a voiceover artist (or use talent from your own team) to record.