



Promoting positive opinion about refugees: Messaging tips

Speaking tips

- Keep your message simple and short. Use language that everyone will understand (nothing technical, unless it is critical to what you are saying).
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Share (short) stories and examples that others can relate to (at a common place in your community – like a school, a well-known business or niche a business is filling, a park, place of worship, for example).
- Appeal to emotions. Emotions help people remember your message much more than logic and statistics! Sharing a joke or a laugh is helpful too.
- Be brief. Don't describe all of the small details.
- If someone asks you a question or about details you don't want to talk about, direct your answers to something you want to say.
- Invite people to act: people will remember your message if they can do something. How can they find out more? How can they get involved in the community efforts you're talking about?
- **Practise** what you want to say in advance. Figure out how to tell stories effectively and in a few words. Have a friend ask you questions (even tough ones!)

What to avoid:

- The opposition's language (bogus refugees, queue-jumpers, etc.) Don't use these words: the more they are said, the more they stick in people's minds. We want people repeating our messages, not someone else's.
- Naming opponents to our views (like the names of neo-Nazi groups, Conservative Party critics, etc.). Don't use their names: we want people to remember the faces and stories behind refugee contributions and community collaborations.

Getting used to values-based messages

Below are a few sentences illustrating what we mean by messages “leading with values”. These are phrases you can use in public talks, organizational materials or just in conversations in your daily life.

It is useful to think of ways these phrases can be connected to personal stories (of people who came as refugees or of the community working together to welcome refugees).

a. Phrases emphasizing connectedness

The goal is to underscore that: We are all connected; our futures are connected and that we're stronger when we work together.

"Now, more than ever, we know that our lives are all connected, which means that the only way forward is to value each other's contributions and to work together."

"Our communities thrive when we work together to face the future."

"In this interconnected world, we really are stronger when we work together. When we do, it's beautiful."

"In this moment in our lives, I think most of us recognize that our world is so interconnected. Our actions have consequences beyond ourselves. Our fates are linked. That's why our community / our group is working together."

"When we work as a community to solve problems, we all move forward."

"Because we're all connected, bad policies hurt all of us – threatening what we value: standing together values and disrupting our communities."

"This is really about Community Values: Are we going to acknowledge that we're all in this together, and that we need to look out for each other?"

"Look, in this group / in our community, we're all on the same team. We know that Canada thrives when we draw on our Community Values to solve problems and that is the only way in today's interconnected world."

b. Phrases emphasizing human rights

"We know that moving your family to make a better life is one of the hardest things a person can do. Sometimes even moving across town is hard enough! Just imagine what it must be like if we are forced to move, to save our lives."

"If we arrived as immigrants here or our families did, then we all know how hard it is to pick-up and move. Moving is a difficult choice to make. That's why I / we in this community / group / want to welcome people who are seeking refuge here."

"Today, as always, people move to make life better for themselves and their families. No matter our differences, most of us want pretty similar things."

"When we look at the history of those who found refuge here, regardless of how they arrived, refugee newcomers have always renewed, enriched and contributed so much to communities already here."

Words that Work

What type of words and phrasing work when trying to change deeply held perceptions and beliefs about people who are seeking refuge? Based on research on ground-breaking research to find the words that work and that change the debate around people seeking refuge, these are words that help target **Persuadables**.

Move Towards	Shift from	Because...
Live in peace, care for children, live free from danger, safety	Security, survival	Portrays people who seek refuge as people with dignity and agency
Seeking safety, rebuilding lives where it's safe, looking to set up a safe home	Fleeing persecution, violence and torture	Explaining positive motivations rather than the push factors increase understanding
It is legal to seek asylum; when people cross borders their human rights come with them	It is not illegal to seek asylum; not a security issue	Negating a frame brings the frame you want to avoid to top of mind. Best to say what we are <u>for</u> .
People seeking refuge / safety	Refugees	<p>This is difficult because in communications, we are trying to be brief. However, just be mindful that mass nouns evoke stereotyping effects and eclipse the individuals and their stories.</p> <p>Helping audiences focus in on real people, not imagine an undifferentiated mass of moving bodies.</p>

Adapted from [Anat Shenker-Osorio](#) of [ASO Communications](#).

Examples of suggested responses to concerns raised

Example 1

Concern: Some refugee families require more financial support than predicted. What now? Refugee families aren't succeeding as we would have hoped.

Response: Often we need to look to the long-term successes.

- Look long term – note: statistics on tax contributions of former refugees vs. other Canadians: **Refugees earn more than most Canadians after 25 years** (Vancouver Sun); **Migrants and refugees are good for economics** (Nature)
- Successes of refugee-led small businesses outstrip the success of small businesses started by other Canadians
- Look to second-generation successes: Thousands of descendants of South-East Asian boat people work as medical professionals in Quebec (pharmacists, doctors, etc.) With a current shortage of medical personnel, how much worse would the situation be without these vital skills? *Include local examples here!*

Example 2

Concern: Refugee families are moving to urban areas, rather than staying here.

Response: Small communities are vital to helping refugee families springboard into a new life in Canada. Your efforts make a difference.

- Include local examples here of refugees who have moved elsewhere and who have returned to thank first sponsors, for example this [Thank you letter to refugee supporters](#) (Western Star) *Include local examples here!*

Example 3

Concern: We have limited housing options in our community already. We can't house refugee families too.

Response: We should be scaling up teamwork, not dissension' to resolve the long-standing leadership vacuum on affordable housing options. ([Stop blaming refugee claimants for problems we've chosen not to solve](#), Ottawa Citizen). *Include local examples here!*

Example 4

Concern: Recent reports of crime by refugees are sparking concerns over security in the community.

Response: Point to statistics showing that crimes by refugees and newcomers are very rare, and even lower than other population groups (see: CCR web resources like [Welcoming newcomers decreases crime](#) and [Myths vs. facts](#)).

- In times of tragedy, there is strength in community. Use any opportunities to start conversations and learn about our neighbours, rather than resorting to stigmas.
- Speak about refugees around you, what they are like and the contributions they are making. Encourage notable community members to do the same. Isolated incidents should not overshadow the hard work and progress in creating better and stronger communities together.
- You might also speak about how future generations of refugee families are giving back in ways that strengthen our communities. Among them we find [police chiefs \(Minh-Tri Truong\)](#), thousands of medical personnel, care providers, and others playing critical community roles, as [visible leaders \(Sharmarke Dubow\)](#), [lesser known Canadian icons \(Hieu C. Truong\)](#) and unsung, [everyday heroes \(Mohamed-Mamon Alhoms\)](#). *Include your own local examples here!*

Example 5

Concern: Others in our community need our help. We can't help everyone.

Response: Refugees are giving back, whether it's in making donations after disasters (money, blood banks, hair extensions) or in boosting local economies, starting businesses (example: [Successful refugee business owners](#), CBC), creating jobs, etc.