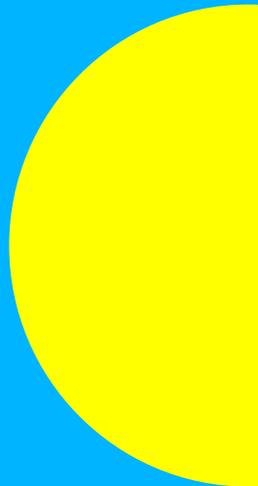
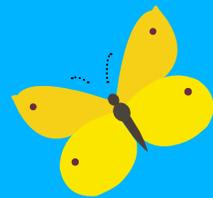


Young people's engagement toolkit

Supporting you to deliver successful public health campaigns for a younger audience



What is this toolkit about and when should it be used?

This toolkit has been designed to support the planning of public health campaigns targeting a younger audience; it is a guide to successfully communicating the key health messages we want young people to engage with.

Context

For three months we have worked with young people from the ages of 15–25 from a variety of backgrounds and London boroughs, to collate invaluable insight about their views towards public health messaging – in particular COVID-19.

Although this toolkit has been designed with a focus on public health campaigns, the insight gathered can be applied to communication campaigns targeting young people across the board.

The toolkit includes recommendations from young people about social media, language, artwork, branding and timescales, which will more accurately inform our approach to campaigns for this audience.

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How to develop your key messages

Be honest and clear

Young people told us that messaging which is clear, simple and transparent works best when trying to capture their attention. Don't be vague or cryptic with messaging.

Young people also expressed that seeing healthcare professionals/graduates, trainees, younger medical professionals that look like them in messaging and campaigns would make them more likely to pay attention because they feel like they are being directly spoken to.

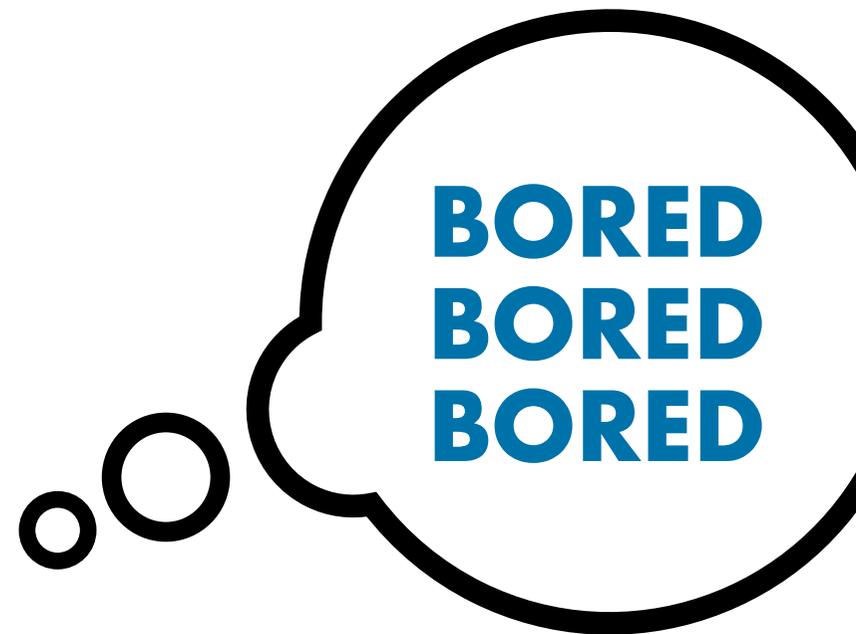
Explain the why

Explaining the direct gain and benefit from engaging with the messaging will make them more likely to act because they can understand the why behind what is being asked of them.

Statistics and facts make information more trustworthy and provide a blunt reminder of how serious the situation is, which young people can sometimes overlook because how fast-paced their lives are.

Be relevant without being cringe

Young people repeatedly expressed that sometimes campaigns overdo it when trying to be too current or popular. E.g. Using popular songs, artists or trying to be too clever with taglines. This can sometimes come across as patronising and cheesy, instantly making them disengage.



Where should the messages be?

- **90% of 16–24 year olds own a smartphone**
- **50% of young people aged 18–24 check their phone within 5 minutes of waking up**

Social media plays a critical role when trying to engage with young people, because that is where the majority of them spend most of their time.

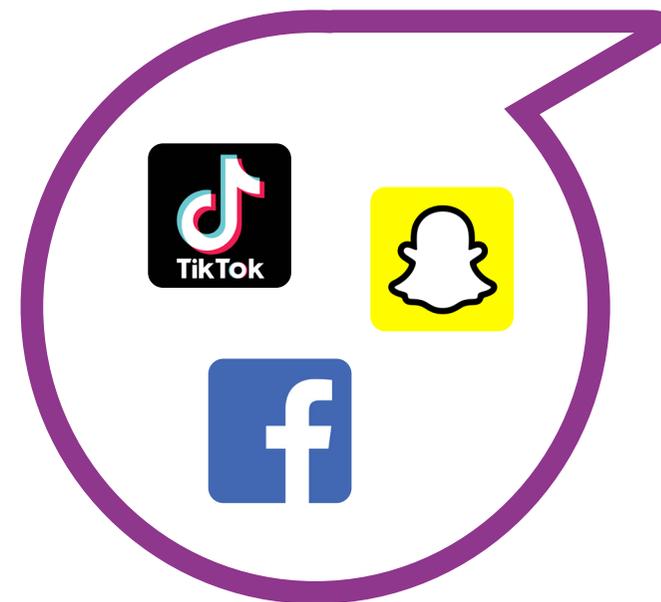
However, there is sometimes a habit of assuming something that works on one platform will work on the others.

Social media is not ‘one content fits all’

For example, images with text does better on Twitter than Instagram. Instagram will push down or hide content that is too text-heavy in the image. When trying to deliver messaging, each platform needs to be treated individually to get the most from it.

List of social media platforms in order of popularity amongst our focus group:

- **Instagram**
- **Twitter**
- **TikTok**
- **Snapchat**
- **Facebook**



Utilise all the functions of social media

Young people told us that they like different social media platforms for different things and the different functions that they provide. Therefore, when creating a public health campaign for them, thinking about the different functions of each platform and how you can adapt your message to each will work better than creating one form of content and hoping it works across all platforms.

For example:

Twitter

If the goal of your public health campaign is to gather insight or have a survey completed, consider placing your questions individually on Twitter polls, instead of posting a link on Twitter to the whole survey. Young people said polls stand out when they are scrolling through their feed and they are much more likely to answer/ actively engage if they could do it then and there.

Instagram

This was the most popular channel amongst our focus group.

'I check Instagram every 10 mins.'

'Instagram is like my news channel.'

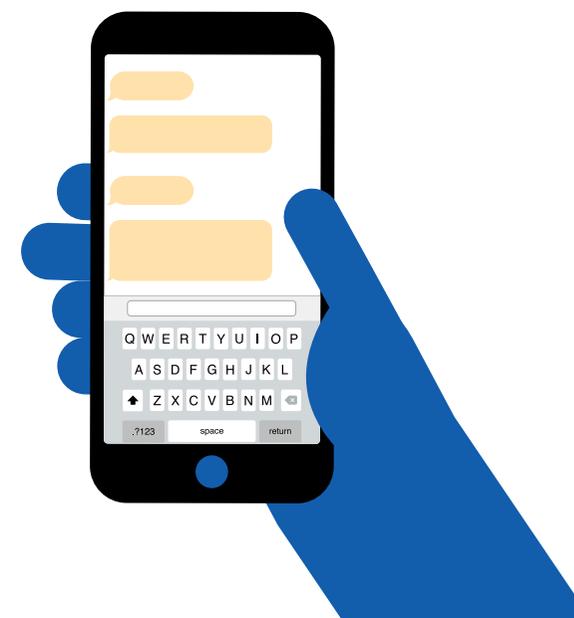
'I hear about everything on Instagram.'

Instagram allows you to post multiple images at once, which means you have more than one chance to capture your audience in one post. The first post could be an eye-catching image or video and then the images that follow can be more detailed or information-focussed.

Using this swipe function will also increase your chances of being seen on young people's feed because Instagram will show the different pages of your post. Instagram stories are becoming more and more popular, and young people have said they are much more likely to check stories and share to their stories. Think about how shareable your content is.

Snapchat

Our group advised that Snapchat is most popular amongst the younger cohort e.g. early teens – and suggested that if there was a public health message targeted at this group in particular this would be the best platform to do it. This platform allows a swipe up function, which means the initial content can be more creative and enticing, then the key information can follow on the swipe up link. Young people also like using Snapchat filters, so consider creating a filter with your key messaging.



Influencers? Memes?

Influencers

If approached in the right way, using social media influencers as a method of communicating public health messages to young people can work but often the wrong kind of influencers are used and this can come across as 'fake', which is the last thing you want to be associated to your public health message.

Memes

Memes are not an appropriate way to communicate public health messaging because they were not created to be taken seriously, which is the opposite of how we want young people to engage with public health messaging. However, young people have suggested approaching meme pages on Instagram to repost your messaging – this would be effective in spreading awareness and getting more young people to see it.

Approaching online blog pages and accounts would also work really well in sharing public health messages because young people trust them as a source of latest news/information; blog pages like The Shade Borough and UK Gossip TV on Instagram.

'We don't just care about people who have been on Love Island'.

'Why am I going to listen to her telling me to stay at home when she's living in a mansion with a pool and I'm sharing a bedroom with three siblings.'

'Last week she was telling me to stay at home and then this week she's on Snapchat at a party.'

'Whenever Boris has an announcement I just go onto The Shade Borough for an update, they simplify what he has said. This blog page is literally like my news channel.'

DO

- ✔ Approach young activists, poets, public figures who have expressed genuine interest in important issues and utilise their following and networks, e.g. George the Poet, Sideman and Joe Wicks.
- ✔ Research who is influential in your local community, this is much more relatable than a random influencer from a different city.

DON'T

- ✘ Include influencers who are very famous because there is often a disconnect between their lifestyle and the audience you are trying to reach.
- ✘ Include influencers whose daily life or actions don't align with your public health messages.



Social media is not the only way we can engage with young people

Young people have continually expressed to us that they often feel grouped together, but they are interested in a variety of things, at different stages in life and use more than just social media.

A list of other platforms young people said they frequently use:

- YouTube
- TV streaming platforms: Amazon, Apple TV, Netflix, ITV, Channel 4
- Music streaming platforms: Spotify, Apple Music
- Radio
- Podcasts: podcasts came up often amongst the older cohort, and they advised using podcasts or directly contacting well-known podcast hosts to advertise messaging.

Young people also suggested the following methods as other ways of engaging with them:

Schools:

- 'I would listen to a public health message if it came from a teacher I trust.'
- 'Share an interesting video in assembly.'
- 'Make it apart of lessons.'



Short webinars or online events:

- 'If I saw an event hosted by a healthcare professional closer to my age, who looks like me, talks like me, I'd be much more interested in going and hearing what they have to say.'



Public transport:

- 'We all use public transport, whether we are at school, college or uni. This is a good way to speak to us all at once.'



Motivators

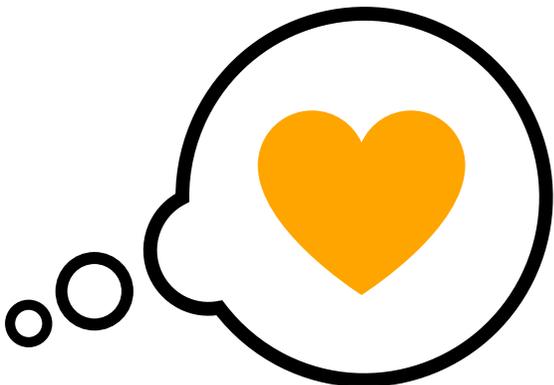
Emotion was identified as the key motivator amongst young people when asked what would make them respond or engage with public health messaging.

Hope

'I just think about how amazing it will be when lockdown is over and I can go on holiday again and get on with my life, that's what keeps me going.'

'I can't wait to go back to uni.'

Use hope and the prospects of the future as a base in messaging and a motivator to follow the rules/make positive health decisions. Show 'what can be' if you follow public health messaging.



Fear

'I think there is an effective way to use fear; I will listen to my mum because I am scared of disappointing her or what will happen if I don't, and I think the same principle can be applied to public health messaging, the fear of what will happen if I don't pay attention or take action. It's almost like a bit of healthy fear.'

Young people expressed that sometimes being scared will force them to change their behaviour and incorporating some fear in messaging would work. They referenced a previous driving advert which encouraged people to pay attention when driving and not use their phones.

'I will never forget that advert because there was literally a young boy that looked like me lying on the floor after being run over, it was hard to see but it got the message across, and I will never forget it.'

Love

'I am using lockdown as a time to learn new languages, do things I wanted to do for ages but never got round to.'

Self-care and self-love should be considered as a strong motivator when developing public health messaging. Young people expressed that they have become much more self-aware and are motivated to invest in themselves. Including ways to improve themselves and stay positive during the pandemic would be well-received in messaging.

'I am so over this, but I stay at home because I know that helps keep my family safe.'

Young people frequently expressed how important their families are to them and they will often do things not because they care or really want to but because they know it will protect their family if they do.

Has the pandemic changed how young people view public health messaging?

When asked if COVID-19 has changed how they see/engage with public health messaging every young person said yes.

'Before COVID I never really felt like public health messaging was for me.'

'I have so much respect and love for the NHS and the public health sector now.'

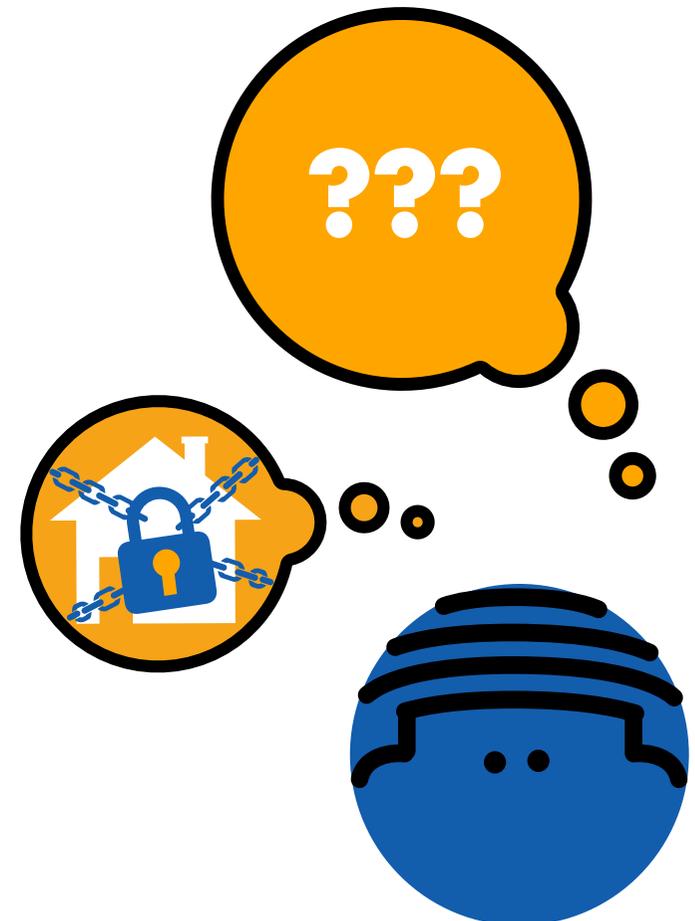
'Before COVID I couldn't tell you the last public health message I even paid attention to, but I will now.'

The production of this toolkit has highlighted that the relationship between young people and public health messaging needed attention and improvement long before coronavirus. Foundational work, peer-led research and, most importantly, co-production is a necessary approach to every public health campaign targeting young people; because there is a rooted opinion that the messaging just isn't for them.

'I would pay attention to public health messaging now because of this work done with the toolkit – I'm more appreciative of public health information.'

Co-production is not only important for insight but can also be used as a method of communicating public health messages too. Young people are much more invested in the things they have contributed to/can see themselves in.

This will then lead to a change in understanding and ultimately a change in behaviour; it will encourage them to share messages with their peers and become more vigilant to public health messaging in general, not just the campaign they have co-produced.



Important things to note

Blame culture

Young people feel like they are blamed for the progression of the pandemic and that people think they don't care about others or the NHS, but in actuality they have been told inconsistent, mixed messages from the beginning.

Acknowledge this through messaging and reassure them that it is not their fault and they have a part to play in overcoming the pandemic.

'Kids can't get it.'

'Young people aren't affected by COVID-19.'

'Go to school, don't go to school'

'Eat out to help out.'

Acknowledge their firsts

The pandemic has disrupted and, in most cases, completely taken away many first experiences for young people: freshers week, first job after university, GCSEs, leaving primary school.

This is incredibly hard for young people and they often feel public health messaging is coming from adults who already got to experience all their firsts, and has not taken into consideration all the things they will never get back.

'The pandemic is robbing me of my 20s.'

'I was so excited to start uni, to be a fresher and experience everything for the first time.'

'I started my first job after uni online, I've literally never met anyone I work with in person.'

Young people are individuals

It is often easy to group young people when targeting them in public health campaigns but they are individuals first. There are young people who have health conditions, who live with vulnerable people or people who are shielding, and there are young people who are shielding themselves. Develop different ways to communicate the same key message to different young people.

'Protect my nan does not resonate with me... my nan isn't even alive.'

'I'm a clinically vulnerable young person and I feel like we're forgotten about.'

Use young people to speak to young people

46% of young people are more likely to trust a message supported by other young people. Co-creation and directly including young people in the delivery of public health messaging plays a key role in how impactful it is. Refrain from gathering all the insights from young people and then delivering the message through an adult – co-produce from the beginning to the end.

'If I saw a public health advert and the voice sounded like mine I would listen.'

'I want to hear from someone my age.'

Public health messaging examples

‘To be honest when it comes down to it the content is the main thing.’

Young people have expressed that regardless of how many social media platforms messaging is put on, or how much money goes into the campaign, if the content isn’t clear, eye-catching and in language they can understand they won’t engage with it.

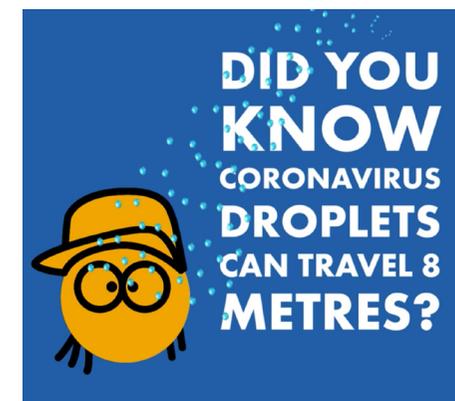
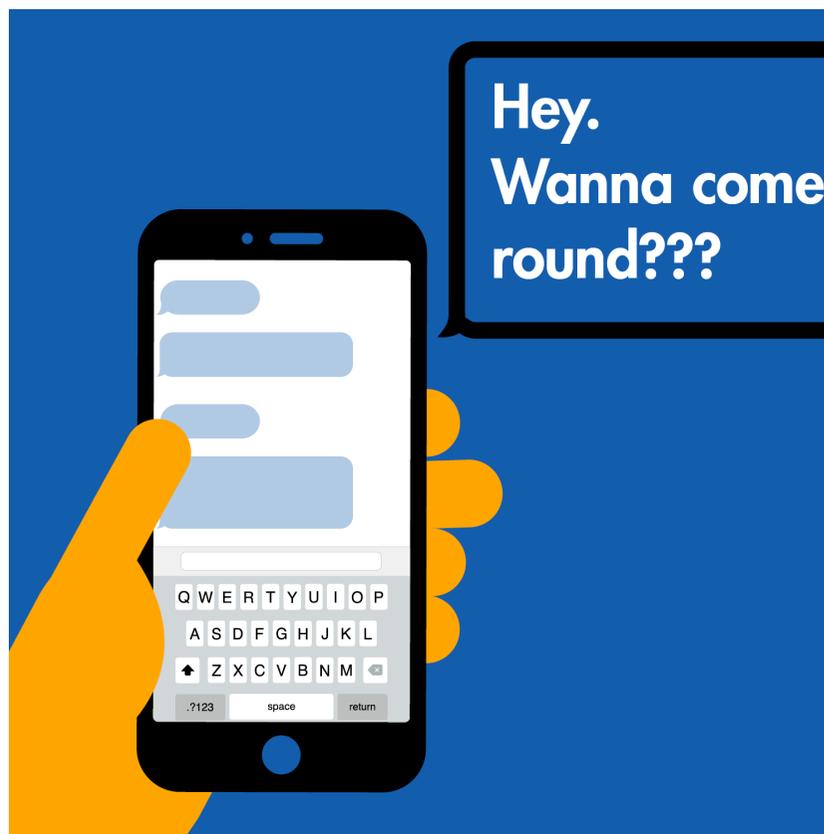
Here are some examples of public health messaging and content approved and co-produced by young people, with the focus on COVID-19 and lockdown.

Stills and GIFs

Quick, eye-catching images and GIFs that showcase facts to can encourage behaviour change amongst young people.

Animation

This animation was created with the concept of life after lockdown and doing what we can to avoid another one. Narrated by young people, the animation draws on the memories and emotions we all felt during lockdown; whilst showing how easy it is to just take another think, and choose a safer option for everyone.



[‘Life after lockdown’ animation](#) and [COVID-19 facts](#) as a GIF animation

Acknowledgements

We would like to say a huge thank you to the young people in our advisory group.

This toolkit would not have been possible without their willingness to be completely transparent with their perspectives and experiences. They have co-produced this document from beginning to end and provided invaluable insights, research and learning.

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