

Language and Communications Guide



Guide contents

1. Introduction
2. Evidence and Terminology
3. Tips on language
4. Describing the benefits
5. Target audiences
6. Imagery
7. Best practice examples
8. Training
9. References



*Image: Sport
England*

1. Introduction | The way we talk about movement is important



How we define physical activity and the words we all use to describe it, influences whether people feel activity is for them, and how achievable it is. The way people interpret movement will depend on their current activity levels and past experiences with physical activity through their life.

Someone who is physically active might be more comfortable with words such as 'exercise' or 'keeping fit'. Other people may find these overwhelming or off putting. Phrases like 'moving' or 'gentle walking' could be more appropriate and stimulate a more positive response.

This language document intends to explain how to reframe the language we use when describing physical activity, with examples of good and bad practice.



For those that may not enjoy physical activity, or who have more barriers to movement and physical activity, these types of words could be off putting:

Intense

Vigorous

Exercise

Sport



For people that are not active, using words like these will help them to understand that all moving matters:

Movement

Enjoyment

Feel better

Something is better than nothing



2. Evidence and terminology



Health Literacy

Health literacy is the ability to obtain, read, understand, and use healthcare information in order to make appropriate health decisions and follow instructions for treatment.

The impact for individuals with low levels of health literacy include:

- Significantly more negative outcomes across a range of health indicators
- More likely to have unhealthy lifestyles
- Less likely to make informed healthy lifestyle choices and engage with preventative programmes
- Higher levels of illness and preventable premature mortality
- Less able to manage long term conditions



The Patient Information Forum (PiF) has created a one-page infographic: [Health Literacy Matters](#)

The average reading age of an adult in the UK is 9-11 years old.



Physical Literacy

Physical literacy refers to the degree to which we have a positive and meaningful relationship with movement and physical activity. It's a complex and ever-changing relationship.

Having a positive and meaningful relationship with movement and physical activity makes us more likely to be and stay active, benefiting our health, wellbeing and quality of life.

Physical Literacy Consensus Statement - Sport England

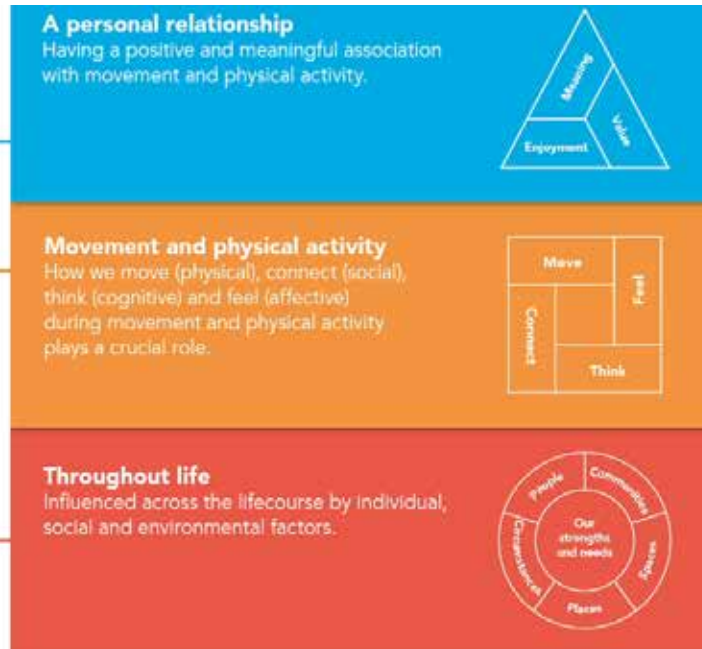


2. Evidence and terminology



Physical Literacy consensus statement

Physical literacy
is our **relationship**
with **movement**
and **physical activity**
throughout life.



Both Health Literacy and Physical Literacy are important factors to consider when we think about the language we use to frame messages about sport, physical activity and movement.

The words, images, phrases and language we use will dictate who we reach, how they might feel about physical activity and crucially, how likely they are to engage in physical activity or movement.

Therefore, the language is an underpinning principle of our approach to tackling inactivity and increasing the amount we all move. The language we use to talk about physical activity is important.



There are a range of health literacy and readability tools available. Why not use them before posting your next engagement?

[NHS Health Literacy Tool kit](#)

[Grammarly](#)

[SMOG Readability tool](#)



3. Tips on language



The language and words we use to talk about physical activity matters, and crucially, the more we talk about it, the more it becomes important to others. Key to this is to change peoples perceptions of what counts as activity, especially for those who want to move more, or those who are new to physical activity.

Whilst being physically active and moving more can have a positive effect and be a useful way to manage weight, there are many other benefits and motivations for increasing physical activity levels. Careful consideration is required when communicating about the benefits and/or the relationship between physical activity and weight management.



- ✓ 'Moving' feels more accessible and inclusive to those who are least active but may be interpreted as requiring only light intensity activity.
- ✗ 'Exercise' can be interpreted as moderate or higher intensity activity and can feel daunting and off-putting to the least active groups.



3. Tips on language



Physical Activity Messaging Framework (PAMF)

It is recognised that professionals, practitioners and policymakers are a key conduit through which messages are conveyed to the public. There is emerging evidence on how to develop and evaluate key messages for the public. One useful example of this is the Physical Activity Messaging Framework.

The framework sets out best practice principles for developing public messaging:

The Physical Activity Messaging Framework

Chloe Williamson 2022

Decisions made in each section should be used to inform those in subsequent sections.



	1. Who, When, What, How and Why?	2. Message Content	3. Message Format and Delivery
Why?	Who? (in which group(s)?) Identify the target audience and engage with them throughout message development	The message may contain one or more of the following information types: What to do: Recommendations on quantity and type of physical activity Why to do it: Information about benefits/ consequences of activity/inactivity How to do it: Practical or supportive information	Information (content) may be conveyed via one or a combination of: Text (e.g., "physical activity is fun") Images or video (e.g., footage of people having fun being active) Audio (e.g., uses music, voiceover or other audio)
	When? (in which context?) Consider the time of year and context of the message (e.g., during Olympics or at new year)	This information may be: Gain- or loss-framed: Highlighting benefits or consequences Generic (suitable for all), targeted (suitable for specific group) or tailored (to an individual) Personalised (i.e., includes data like name or home address) or not	Consider the following format concepts: Media, mode or channel (e.g., poster, radio ad, social media post) Volume or length (e.g., 100 words or 20 seconds)
	What? (is the aim of the message?) What is the specific aim of the message? Which outcomes are being targeted? (e.g., self-efficacy, knowledge, motivation)	Relating to concepts above, consider the following: Language and choice of words (e.g., ethnically, culturally, contextually and age-appropriate) Message tone (e.g., formal, encouraging or threatening)	Consider the following delivery concepts: Provider, source or messenger Who will the message come from? (e.g., GP or government) Setting(s) In which setting(s) will the message be delivered or received? Frequency, time of day & dose How often will the message be delivered, at what time and for how long?
	How? (is the message intended to work?) By which pathway(s) will the message bring about change in the outcomes? (e.g., by educating or encouraging habit formation)	Where possible, decisions throughout all 3 sections should be based on one or more of:	
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formative evaluation and co-production with target audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relevant psychological or sociological theory



4. Describing the benefits



People who are new to moving will interpret messages differently to those who are already active, as will those living with long term health conditions. For example, short-term benefits often resonate more with people who move less than longer-term goals. Some people however are more motivated by long term benefits following life events such as having a baby or the Menopause. Mental health benefits can be particularly engaging, although they are not always front of mind.

Start small - 'start with small movements and increase if you feel you can'

Highlight the short term benefits - 'feel less stressed or anxious'

Keep it simple and positive - 'try and move for 10 minutes a day, only if you feel up to it!'

Emphasise the fact that doing something is better than nothing

Celebrate the small wins - Moving can mean playing with your grandchildren



Feel less stressed or anxious

Feeling a bit better



Improved bone density

Reduced risk of disease

When talking about Movement, we often assume that longer term benefits and goals are key to encouraging people to move more. However these can often be seen as unachievable and daunting to those that are either starting to move, or want to build more movement into their day.



Describing the benefits



We need to reframe physical activity as 'daily movement' so that it includes and extends beyond sport, exercise and active travel. Embedding the language of 'daily movement' in communications and messaging is therefore key.

As a county, we must join up and share communications between organisations to present consistent messaging on moving more.



It's important to celebrate success and cheer on progress, no matter how big or small. Small progress could be as simple as walking to the shop to buy a paper or playing with grandchildren.

Some short term benefits which are great to highlight can be seen in this diagram.



Describing the benefits



People who are less active may find a numerical target to aim towards motivating and clear. A degree of flexibility can help people not to feel demotivated if they miss the target on some days.

Some is good, more is better, but every minute counts...



Whether it's a 10-minute seated or yoga workout in the morning, a cycle or walk with your household at lunch, playing with your children in the garden, if you have one, or even moving when talking on the phone – every little helps.



Start small and increase your activity as you feel stronger.



Go for a gentle 30 minute walk each day, whenever you feel up to it.



Any amount of exercise is better than none.



5. Target audiences



The way in which we communicate and engage with different target audiences will differ as they will experience different barriers and inequalities. The language and imagery we use must therefore be carefully considered. For example, aim to use images of your target audience rather than generic stock images. Images and language can both help and hinder engagement and participation.

Useful links for engaging with different target audiences



“We Are Undefeatable” is a movement supporting people with a range of long term health conditions, developed by 15 leading health and social care charities and backed by Sport England.



A national NHS Campaign. Better Health has lots of free tools and support to help people move more, lose weight or quit smoking.



Get Yourself Active transforms attitudes and perceptions of disability and physical activity by informing, empowering and supporting disabled people and other key stakeholders.



Versus Arthritis provides information, advice, and resources on arthritis conditions, treatments, and care.



Activity Alliance is a charity that helps organisations to include more disabled people in sport and activity.



Sense is a national disability charity that helps deaf blind and complex-disabled people to communicate, experience the world and fulfil their potential.



Target Audiences



Moving with a long-term health condition

Messages should speak to your audience as 'ordinary' people rather than those with 'perfect lives'. People living with long term conditions or a disability often feel excluded from communications about physical activity and often disregard them as for being aimed at healthy people and 'not someone like me'.

Keep it positive - Messages with negative terms or tone can be off-putting, especially those living with a long-term condition who are looking for uplifting and positive inspiration. - *'It is easier on some days'*.

Acknowledge challenges - People with long term conditions often feel their condition and combination of barriers are complex and unique. There is an instinctive rejection of generic advice and recommended activities as being irrelevant to their circumstances.

Tailor your guidance to your specific audience and try to convey that being active is easy, without explicitly saying it is easy.

Look forward, not back - For people who are frustrated that their health condition limits the daily activities they can take part in, emphasising the benefit of maintaining or improving their current level can feel more achievable and realistic than improving their condition.



Images: We Are Undefeatable campaign



We Are Undefeatable's Five in Five offer routines for those living with long term health conditions:
<https://weareundefeatable.co.uk/five-in-five>



6. Imagery



The way we show movement in images has a large impact on how different people respond to them. The images we use must relate to the target audience, and every effort should be made to ensure they are inclusive and non-discriminatory. Try to avoid images that show the perfect athlete, or people that are wearing tight sportswear.

Remember the audience you are targeting may not have been physically active before. Research suggests that people will have a more positive response to imagery, if they can believe it can be them. Also think about using alt text with images with any social media or website imagery, as this will allow it to be read aloud to users by screen reader software.

Examples of Imagery

Who are your audience?

Does this image represent the people you are trying to reach?


Is this image inclusive?


Does the image represent inclusive and diverse audiences?

Be kind - Make sure your image doesn't contain anything likely to offend.

 **“This could be me”**



 **“This isn't me”**



Images: Pexels.com





Image libraries

There are a range of online image libraries that offer free downloadable images, that cater for a wide range of audiences, including long term health conditions and disabilities. A few of the most notable are below:



Images to help more people with a long - term health condition find ways to be active. [Image Library](#)



A wide selection of high quality sport and physical activity images that are free for you to use. [Image Library](#)



An award-winning campaign to transform the way women are portrayed when exercising and show the realities of fitness. [Image Library](#)



A free image library which depict older people in non-stereotypical ways. [Image Library](#)



7. Best practice examples



CMO guidelines suggest that adults need to **work out for 150 minutes per week** to keep fit and healthy. Participating in **vigorous exercise** like running or cycling helps to reduce severe health conditions and keep you **in shape**. Many **athletes** find having a **workout plan** helpful, as it means they can make sure they keep on track of their **fitness** goals.

'Working out' sounds too much like traditional exercise - something which many people will feel excluded from.

Many people find a numerical target to aim towards daunting.

'Physical activity' or exercise can be interpreted as moderate or higher intensity activity, and can feel daunting and off-putting to the least active groups.



CMO guidelines suggest that adults should be physically active every day, **whenever you feel up to it**, to help your overall health and well-being. Participating in **daily movement** like **gardening or walking** to the bus stop helps to reduce health conditions and help you feel better. **Try to start small and increase your activity as when it feels like you can. Any amount of activity is better than none.**

The key is finding movements that work for you.

This helps to create a sense of empathy, but also empowers people to choose activities that best suit their lifestyle.

Adding a degree of flexibility can help people not to feel demotivated if they miss the target on some days.

Providing examples of activities can help, particularly those that can be easily fitted into daily routines, do not require expertise or high fitness levels, and have a social element.

The idea of 'starting small' is often positively received as it can overcome fears around barriers to being active.



Best practice examples



1

We all experience life events throughout the year; distractions, and changes of routine can all affect how we feel.

It's therefore important we listen to our bodies, start small, be kind to ourselves and celebrate these achievements rather than focusing on what we didn't get the chance to do. There is always tomorrow.

Would you like to move more but not sure how?

2

Join 5K Your Way, Move Against Cancer for a 4-week journey of 5K adventures each week in your local area.

Whether you walk, swim, cycle, jog, row, or kayak – the choice is yours! Break down the 5k into manageable chunks throughout the week.

3

As a nation, we're less active in the winter, something that's often linked with lower mood, and energy.

If you would like to move more this winter, start small and listen to your body. Being physically active doesn't mean running a marathon or walking for miles. Moving can include playing with your children or even walking to the shop to buy a paper.



8. Training

Active Dorset

Active Dorset can organise and deliver a range of physical activity training courses suitable for health and community organisations. The training will help professionals to gain knowledge, skills and confidence to promote physical activity within their role to support people to be more active.

Supporting Individuals to Move More

The training is relevant for individuals who are having conversations with the adult public in a professional or voluntary capacity. This would include staff working in a healthcare setting, social prescriber's and volunteers working in a voluntary, community, or social enterprise.

RSPH Level 2 Award in Supporting Behaviour Change

This qualification is for any individuals who are interested in helping others develop a healthier lifestyle by encouraging physical activity. Suitable for community activity providers, local authority workers, social prescriber's, and health coaches.

[View training here](#)



LiveWellDorset

LiveWell Dorset offer free RSPH accredited health and well-being training to organisations and staff working within Dorset's Integrated Care System, including to colleagues in local government, NHS and Primary Care Networks.

[View training here](#)



9. References

Framing Nature Tool kit - Avoiding the traps	https://publicinterest.org.uk/FramingNatureToolkit.pdf
Movement for Movement Dorset's Physical Activity Strategy	www.movementformovement.co.uk
An introduction to Health Literacy	https://www.england.nhs.uk/personalisedcare/health-literacy/
WHO Health Literacy Tool kit	https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789290224754
Physical Literacy	https://www.sportengland.org/news-and-inspiration/physical-literacy-consensus-statement-england-published
Chief Medical Officer Guidelines for Adults, Children and Young People	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/physical-activity-guidelines-uk-chief-medical-officers-report
Moving Medicine Risk Consensus Statement	https://movingmedicine.ac.uk/riskconsensus/
Cover image	www.pexels.com
Strength Messaging Insight Report The Chartered Society of Physiotherapy	https://www.csp.org.uk/publications/strength-messaging-insight-report
Physical Literacy Infographic	https://www.sportengland.org/news-and-inspiration/physical-literacy-consensus-statement-england-published

For more information on this document, please contact:

Dan Hunt
Marketing and Communications Officer
hello@activedorset.org

