

TOGETHER FOR LIFE

Toolbox Overview

for Community Coordinators

A pilot project to increase seat belt
use in Utah's rural communities



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TOGETHER FOR LIFE

Toolbox Overview

Wearing a seat belt is important and saves lives. Unfortunately, a leading risk factor for death and serious injury in Utah is not wearing a seat belt. Significant disparities exist between urban and rural rates of seat belt use among road users in Utah.¹ Seat belts are used less frequently in rural areas of Utah than in urban areas.¹ Rates of not using a seat belt are three-times higher in some rural areas compared to urban areas of the state.² From the research, we know that over the past seven years approximately 24% of crash deaths in Utah have involved unrestrained occupants.² Further, unrestrained crash occupants were over 14 times more likely to be killed than restrained crash occupants.²

While these statistics are staggering, there is hope. Utah residents share unifying values about seat belt use. They also share critical attitudes and beliefs that are protective. The Utah Department of Public Safety has initiated a multi-year pilot project called “Together for Life” to increase seat belt use in multiple rural counties in the state. The Highway Safety Office recognizes that while various efforts have been successful at achieving higher seat belt use in Utah’s more urban areas, these efforts have not been as effective in rural environments. This project uses an approach called the Positive Culture Framework (PCF) developed at the Center for Health and Safety Culture within the Western Transportation Institute at Montana State University. This positive-oriented approach engages a variety of stakeholders.

Building on the strengths and resources that exist in Utah communities, the Together for Life Project offers multiple toolkits to increase seat belt use. Each toolkit is intended to guide conversations about seat belt use and promote engagement with this issue. The messages in the toolkits are designed to combine two goals:

1. Confront the seriousness of not wearing a seat belt; and
2. Build hope that communities can work together to reduce risk and create positive change.

Each toolkit includes detailed data, research, explanations, and resources. The toolkits focus on specific strategies to reach across all levels of the social ecology by suggesting approaches for each audience. Communities can obtain digital copies of each toolkit on the Community of Practice website (utahdps.mostofus.org) created for this project. Digital copies of the Together for Life tools are available on www.togetherforlifeutah.org. Coordinators can obtain digital copies of each toolkit for the coordinator on the password-protected portion of www.togetherforlifeutah.org.

Positive Culture Framework

The Together for Life Project uses the Positive Culture Framework. PCF is a positive approach that strategically engages various sectors of a community to improve health and safety. PCF can be applied to many different issues and focuses on three key elements: leadership, communication, and integration.

Leadership

The work of prevention is not done in isolation. When seeking to improve health and safety, partnerships are essential. Leaders bring people together to engage in conversations about a particular issue. Leaders create opportunities for collaboration. While leaders cannot force people to change behavior, they can cultivate conditions where people choose to be healthy and safer. Leadership is a key element of PCF to build hope that communities can work together to reduce risk and create positive change.

Communication

Communication is an essential element of PCF. Effective communication is used for teaching and also for correcting misperceptions. It is through communication that we help communities:

- to better understand an issue;
- to better understand the positive attitudes and behaviors that already exist in the community;
- to learn about perceptions and misperceptions; and
- to teach ways to be healthier and safer.

Integration

Integration results when each level of the social ecology is addressed using targeted strategies. Carefully selecting resources to address specific needs within the community is essential. Prevention is not a “one size fits all,” and with an understanding of the current prevention activities, gaps, and needs, selecting tailored strategies to meet the needs of each level of the social ecology is critical. Leadership, communication, and integration are focus elements in the Together for Life Project in Utah.

Why Positive?

Generally all prevention messages are developed in one of two ways - either they will be framed positively or negatively. Positive messages focus on the benefits of making a change or adopting a specific behavior.³ Positive messages emphasize what is going well and promote what the person desires or values. In contrast, negative prevention messages generally highlight the consequences of not changing. Negatively framed prevention messages focus on the undesirable behavior and the losses one might experience if he or she does not make a specific change.³ Negative messages can evoke anxiety and shame, and it has been found that negative messages using scare tactics are ineffective.⁴

Prevention messages developed using PCF are framed positively. They seek to encourage and focus on what is right and going well and to foster conditions where people choose to be healthy and safer. Utah communities share common values toward caring, health, and safety. The Together for Life Project highlights how seat belt use reflects these common values in Utah.

Why a Systems Approach?

When addressing an issue, it is not enough to target behavior change in the individual. People are influenced by their interactions with one another and are shaped by the environments in which they live.⁵ A social ecological approach involves understanding the complexities of human interactions and the environmental effects that influence behavior.⁶ From this perspective, a systems approach is needed. Prevention efforts must reach across the social ecology.

Using PCF, the Together for Life Project seeks to address seat belt use with

- adults;
- law enforcement;
- key leaders;
- schools; and
- workplaces

in Utah utilizing multiple strategies customized for each domain.

The Result?

Transformation. The goal of using PCF in prevention work is to cultivate the conditions in which communities recognize and revise their social environment to motivate individual health and safety behaviors, or transformation. The

Together for Life Project has three goals. The goals are to:

1. correct misperceptions about seat belt use;
2. take steps to bolster strategies to increase seat belt use; and
3. take steps to increase the likelihood that citizens will encourage others to wear their seat belts.

True transformation results when there is a fundamental shift in cognitions and behaviors. Ultimately, the work will result in lasting community transformation.

Conclusion

Seeking an approach applicable to a rural setting, the Highway Safety Office created the Together for Life Project to increase seat belt use in rural environments. The Together for Life Project uses a positive approach and targeted strategies across the social ecology. While we seat belts are used less frequently in rural areas of Utah than in urban areas,² and not wearing a seat belt remains a leading risk factor for death and serious injury in Utah,² there is hope. Utah communities share common values toward health and safety. The Together for Life Project, highlights how seat belt use reflects these unifying values, behaviors, and attitudes in Utah, and builds on the strengths and resources that already exist.

Tools

1. Cultural Summary

This document summarizes the key findings from several surveys conducted in rural Utah.

2. Speaking Points

Important information to begin community conversations.

3. Press Release

Sample press release.

4. Together for Life Logo and Style Guide

Visual identity guidelines and standards for the Together for Life logo, to unify communications and help create a clear, strong, and consistent brand message.

5. Together for Life Engagement Card

The card can be used to engage individuals to increase seat belt use.

6. Website

Togetherforlifeutah.org provides an overview of the project and connects the communities to county coordinators.

References

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