

# Best Practices for Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication (CERC): When You Are the Communicator

There are times that you might be called upon by your Public Information Team to provide information or to serve as a spokesperson for your agency. If this happens, here are some recommendations for answering that call. These are standards and principles that communicators strive to achieve in each interaction.

## **Build trust.\***

Share information early. Acknowledge the concerns of others. Under-promise and over-deliver. Select a spokesperson who is never condescending. Engage third-party validators and advocates.

## **Don't speculate.**

Share only what you know and talk about what you are doing to come up with answers to the unanswered questions.

## **Use one message and multiple messengers.**

This promotes credibility and message consistency while reducing the potential for conflicting information or information overload. This is achieved by using multiple platforms (tailoring messages for social media, town hall meetings, media inquiries, etc.) and by enlisting partner agencies to help disseminate the information.

## **Provide actionable recommendations.**

There is always something people can do that will reduce their risk of threats and the action itself can lessen stressful situations. At its best, some actions may reduce the need for immediate service from first responders, who may already be stretched near capacity.

## **Correct errors.**

Admit mistakes without making excuses or acting cavalier. Information corrected quickly and in the right way will help maintain credibility and result in improved perceptions that will increase the likelihood of future recommendations being followed.

\* The content of this bullet is from the CDC CERC Core presentation available at [bit.ly/2RgdtnF](https://bit.ly/2RgdtnF)

## The Six Principles of CERC from the CDC

- 1**  **Be First:**  
Crises are time-sensitive. Communicating information quickly is crucial. For members of the public, the first source of information often becomes the preferred source.
- 2**  **Be Right:**  
Accuracy establishes credibility. Information can include what is known, what is not known, and what is being done to fill in the gaps.
- 3**  **Be Credible:**  
Honesty and truthfulness should not be compromised during crises.
- 4**  **Express Empathy:**  
Crises create harm, and the suffering should be acknowledged in words. Addressing what people are feeling, and the challenges they face, builds trust and rapport.
- 5**  **Promote Action:**  
Giving people meaningful things to do calms anxiety, helps restore order, and promotes some sense of control.<sup>3</sup>
- 6**  **Show Respect:**  
Respectful communication is particularly important when people feel vulnerable. Respectful communication promotes cooperation and rapport.

Infographic courtesy of CDC and available at [bit.ly/2HZrL5Z](https://bit.ly/2HZrL5Z).



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