



A Close Look at Visual Aids

How They Can Make Health Communication
More (or Less!) Effective

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Session objectives

1. Make connections between health literacy skills and understanding visuals
2. Learn about audience research related to visuals in health materials
3. Understand how visuals in health communications can help address health inequities — or perpetuate them
4. Gain tips for selecting visuals for health communications



Opening activity

Photo 1



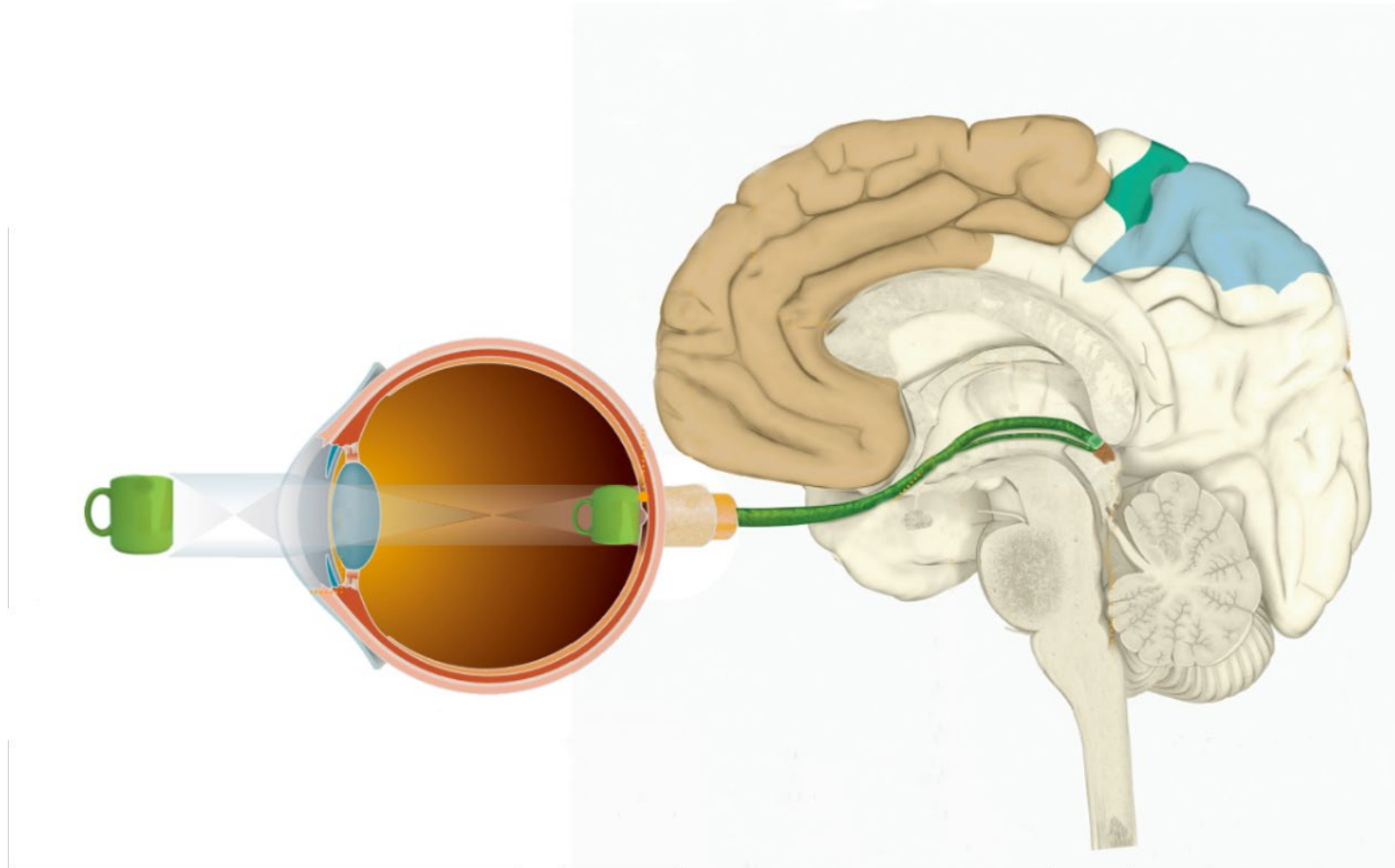
Photo 2





Why visuals matter for health literacy

How vision works



"Seeing" is a complex process



"What our eyes physically perceive is only one part of the story. The images coming into our brain are changed and interpreted. It's really our brains that are "seeing."

Communicating involves more than words

- Using visuals effectively is a key part of organizational health literacy
- Health communicators must understand visual communication





How visuals enhance understanding

Audience research insights

Visuals can engage

They help capture attention.

“I think [images] always help [the material] look more attractive and maybe help garner more attention when you see a picture, you know? You always try to look at the picture first actually before you even read the title or anything ”

– Research participant

Childhood Lead Poisoning

What Is the Problem?

Approximately 500,000 U.S. children aged 1–5 years have blood lead levels above 5 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood, the reference level at which the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends public health actions be initiated.

Lead poisoning can affect nearly every system in the body. Because lead poisoning often occurs with no obvious symptoms, it frequently goes unrecognized. Lead poisoning can cause learning disabilities, behavioral problems, and, at very high levels, seizures, coma, and even death. No safe blood lead level has been identified.



How Are Children Exposed to Lead?

The major sources of lead exposure among U.S. children are lead-based paint and lead-contaminated dust found in deteriorating buildings. Lead-based paints were banned for use in housing in 1978. However, approximately 24 million housing units in the United States have deteriorated leaded paint and elevated levels of lead-contaminated house dust. More than 4 million of these dwellings are homes to one or more young children.

Other sources of lead poisoning are related to

- home health remedies (azarcon and greta, which are used for upset stomach or indigestion; pay-loo-ah, which is used for rash or fever);
- some imported candies (particularly those from Mexico);
- imported toy jewelry and toys;
- drinking water (lead pipes, solder, brass fixtures, valves can all leach lead);
- work (recycling or making automobile batteries and home remodeling);
- hobbies (making stained-glass windows, making pottery, and painting); and
- soil contaminated by lead paint chips, dust, or particles.

Who Is at Risk?

- Children under the age of 6 years because they are growing so rapidly and because they tend to put their hands or other objects into their mouths.
- Children from all social and economic levels can be affected by lead poisoning, although children living at or below the poverty line who live in older housing are at greatest risk.
- Children of some racial and ethnic groups and those living in older housing are disproportionately affected by lead.

National Center for Environmental Health
Division of Emergency and Environmental Health Services



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Visuals can engage

They can make materials more inclusive.



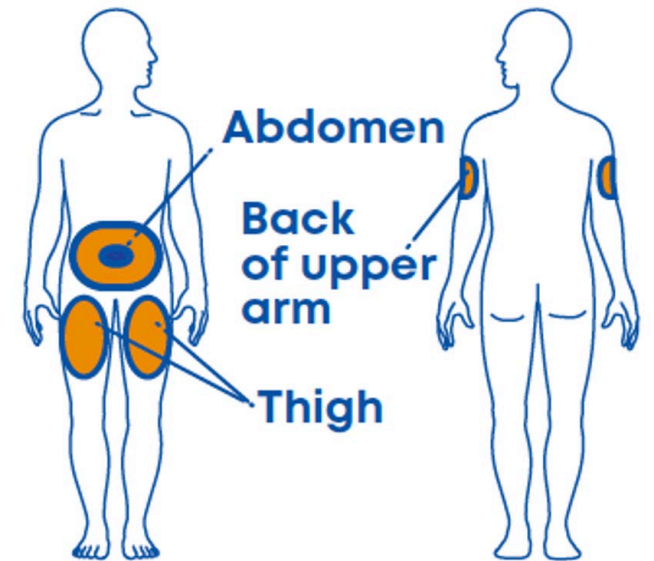
"I'm a very visual learner myself, so
It helps me see how I might be
able to use it, [and] what the parts
of the pen or the syringe are."

– Research participant

Prefilled pen¹



Prefilled syringe¹



Visuals can clarify

They can reinforce the main message.



"The window [fits the fact sheet the best]. It gives you a visual of what [lead] could possibly be and look like. Instead of 'These kids are affected,' it's showing 'Hey, if you see this, you need to get [it] checked out.'"

– Research participant



Visuals can clarify



They can communicate who the priority audience is.

"It's nice to see like, what looks like a happy family, a dad, a mom, kids look like they're mixed. So that's nice. I'm in a mixed marriage, my husband's Mexican and I'm white. So it's nice to see that."

– Research participant



Visuals can clarify — or confuse

They can also cause confusion.



"I thought anyone could get HIV, but
I guess not."

– Research participant



Visuals of people can resonate

- Add the "human element"
- Make materials feel relatable
- Pull people into the material

**You give a lot
to the people you
care about.**



Now's the time to give back to yourself.

Find out which preventive services you need to
take good care with  MyHealthfinder

health.gov/TakeGoodCare

Visuals of people can resonate



Visuals are stronger if they reflect:

- Everyday life
- Lived experiences
- Diversity within cultures and identities



You are your family's heart and soul —
the one who keeps it all together.

That's why you need to **take good care** of your health.



Learn about recommended preventive services with  MyHealthfinder

health.gov/TakeGoodCare

Visuals of people can resonate — or repel

Be aware that visuals can reinforce:

- Stereotypes
- Stigma
- Harmful myths about a health topic



Visual tone can help

Light and color can:

- Make visuals easier to see
- Elicit the desired emotions



"I feel that seeing happy and bright colors and happy images resonate with anyone"

– Research participant

Visual tone can help — or harm

Conversely, light and color can:

- Make visuals harder to see
- Elicit undesired emotions



"It looks like it's from a horror movie. It needs to be a little brighter. It's a little too dark [and] It just looks very ominous. I know dozens of parents that have a window like this, and [if] you show them this, they're going to have a meltdown. You want to show them a window, one with some chipped paint. But why does it have to be so dark?"

– Research participant



Tips for effectively using visuals



Tip 1: Use them!

Example



Do this:



Your HIV care team

You may have other people on your HIV care team besides your doctor. For example:

- **Nutritionists** can help you make a plan to eat healthy, which helps your immune system stay strong
- **Mental health providers** — like therapists, psychologists, or psychiatrists — can help if you have symptoms of depression or another mental health condition
- **Case managers** can help you get other services and resources you need

Talk with your doctor to figure out what types of care you need.



How often do I need to see my doctor?

Your doctor will probably ask you to come in every 6 months. But you may need to see your doctor more often — especially during the first 2 years after you start treatment or if the amount of HIV in your blood is high.

Seeing your doctor on schedule is one of the most important things you can do to stay healthy. If you skip appointments, your doctor won't know if your medicine is working the way it should or if you're having other health problems.

If you have to miss an appointment for any reason, call your doctor's office to reschedule as soon as you can.

Not this:

Protect Your Child from Lead

Coming into contact with lead can cause problems with kids' learning, behavior, and development. The good news is that you can take steps to protect your child from lead.

Who's most at risk for health problems from lead?

Children younger than 6 are most at risk for problems related to lead. That's because:

- Young children's bodies are still growing and developing — so they're more sensitive to the harmful health effects of lead
- Kids are more likely to put their hands or other things (like toys) into their mouths, which can cause them to swallow lead dust by accident

How do children come into contact with lead?

Most homes built before 1978 have lead paint. When old paint cracks and chips, it creates lead dust. Children can then breathe it in or swallow it.

Lead is also sometimes found in soil, drinking water, and products with old paint — like toys, furniture, and jewelry. But when kids come in contact with lead, it's usually from lead paint in older homes.

How can I keep my child safe from lead?

Take these steps to keep your family safe:

- If your home was built before 1978, have it tested for lead paint
- Keep kids away from rooms with chipping or peeling paint
- Wash kids' hands and toys often
- Cover peeling or chipping paint with duct tape or contact paper
- Use a wet paper towel or mop to clean up dust regularly, especially around windows and on the floor
- Ask a doctor to test your child for lead if you have any concerns

Lead can cause serious health problems for children — so take steps to protect your child from lead.



Tip 2: Include people's faces

Example

Do this:



Not this:





Tip 3: Support the main message

Example



Do this:



Not this:





Tip 4: Reflect the priority audience

Example

Do this:



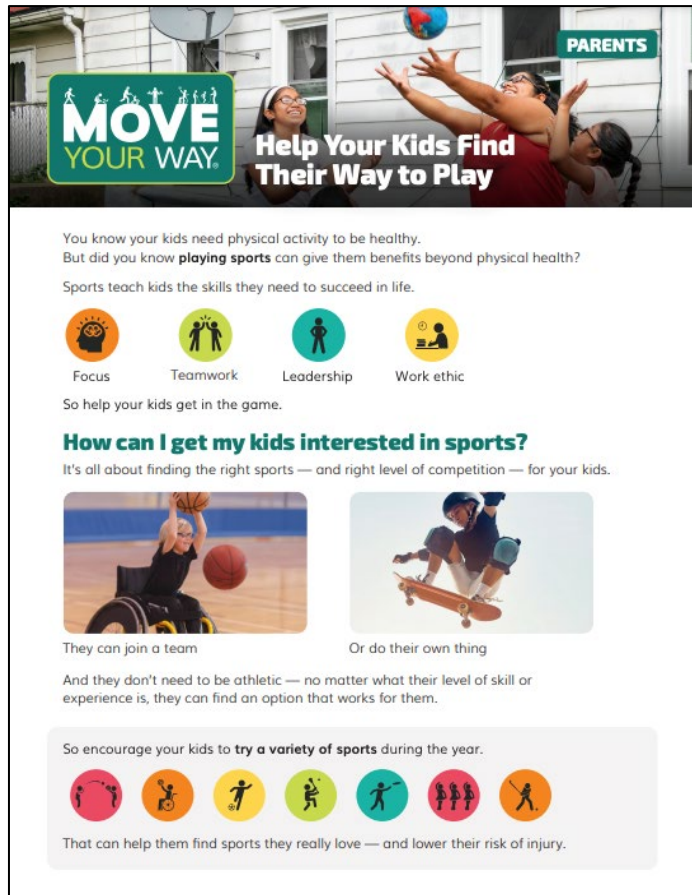
Not this:



Tip 5: Include more than 1

Example

Do this:



MOVE YOUR WAY
Help Your Kids Find Their Way to Play

You know your kids need physical activity to be healthy. But did you know **playing sports** can give them benefits beyond physical health? Sports teach kids the skills they need to succeed in life.

Focus Teamwork Leadership Work ethic

So help your kids get in the game.

How can I get my kids interested in sports?
It's all about finding the right sports — and right level of competition — for your kids.

They can join a team Or do their own thing

And they don't need to be athletic — no matter what their level of skill or experience is, they can find an option that works for them.

So encourage your kids to **try a variety of sports** during the year.

That can help them find sports they really love — and lower their risk of injury.

Not this:

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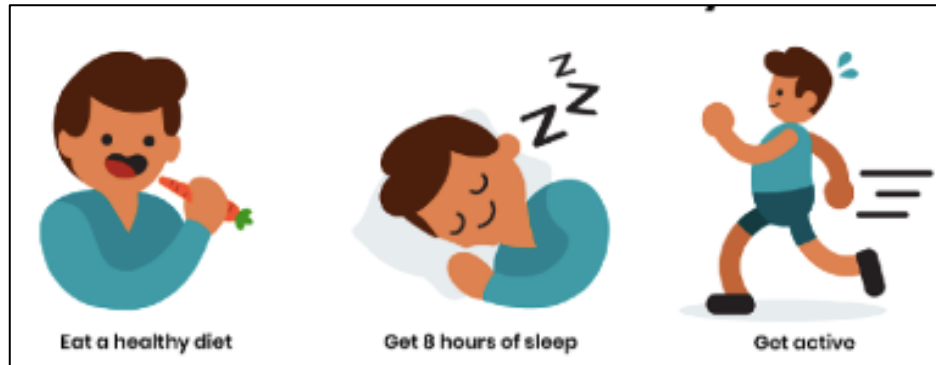
Lead can cause serious health problems for children — so take steps to protect your child from lead.



Tip 6: Use a consistent style

Example

Do this:



Not this:





Tip 7: Avoid "triggering" visuals

Example

Do this:



Not this:





Tip 8: Get audience feedback

Before testing

ABOUT **3A7**

Learn about PTSD

Learn about TREATMENT

Browse VIDEOS

Find a THERAPIST

SEARCH

PTSD

We've been there.

Hear from Veterans with PTSD and find out how treatment can help you.

GET STARTED



Do I have PTSD?

How does PTSD affect the people I love?

How can treatment help me?

What is treatment like?

How can I find a therapist?

Learn about PTSD

PTSD is a mental health problem that some people develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event.

Learn about TREATMENT

Find out how therapy and medicine can help you manage PTSD symptoms.

Watch Videos

Interview Clips



My mood would sink really deep.



When I was diagnosed with PTSD, I wouldn't say I was



Quit beating yourself up and go get help.

communicate
health



After testing

ABOUT ECA

Learn about
PTSD & TREATMENT

Explore
RESOURCES & TOPICS

Watch
VIDEOS

VETERANS CRISIS LINE

What is ABOUTFACE?

Real stories from Veterans who have experienced Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), their family members, and VA clinicians.





What is PTSD?

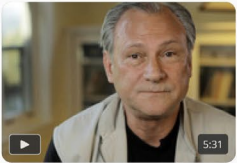


How can treatment help me?



Do I have PTSD?

Veterans' Stories



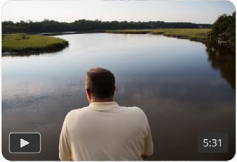
My mood would sink really deep.
Curtis Thompson
US Air Force | 1981-2011



When I was diagnosed with PTSD, I wouldn't say I was surprised.
Tia Christopher
US Air Force | 1981-2011



Quit beating yourself up and go get help.
Jerry Reed
US Air Force | 1981-2011



I basically froze.
Reedy Hopkins
US Air Force | 1981-2011



My meditation.
Joe Duarte
US Air Force | 1981-2011



I cannot be this person.
Laura Hendrixon
US Air Force | 1981-2011

BROWSE ALL VIDEOS



Closing activity

Photo 1



Photo 2





Conclusion



Key takeaways

- Using visuals effectively is a key part of organizational health literacy
- Visuals can impact understanding, engagement, and relevance for priority audiences
- Consistent and thoughtful consideration of visuals for health communications supports health equity
- Whenever possible, get feedback from your priority audience!

Questions?

Resources

- [Assessing Health Materials: How to Use NLM's Health Education Materials Assessment Tool](#)
- [The CDC Clear Communication Index](#)
- How It Works Daily's "[Science of Vision: How Do Our Eyes Enable Us To See?](#)" webpage
- The National Eye Institute's "[How the Eyes Work](#)" webpage
- Tableau's "[What Is Data Visualization?](#)" webpage
- Visual Literacy Today's "[What is Visual Literacy?](#)" webpage
- Weinschenk, S. (2020). *100 Things Every Designer Should Know About People* (2nd edition). New Riders Publishing.



Thank you!