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Safe Communication as a Tool for Universal Prevention —Theoretical Assumptions

Abstract: Safe communication plays a key role in universal prevention, which aims to promote health and prevent health and social problems in the entire population. Universal prevention includes activities aimed at all members of society, regardless of risk level, with the intention of strengthening immunity and reducing risk factors. In the context of social prevention, safe communication is an essential tool that enables open exchange of information, the building of trust, and the support of healthy behaviors. This article presents the theoretical foundations of safe communication as a tool of universal prevention, discussing key elements such as openness, transparency, mutual respect and empathy. Examples of the use of safe communication in various prevention programs and methods for assessing their effectiveness are also presented. The SAFE (Situation, Affect, Finale, Effect) message is particularly emphasized as an effective tool to support social prevention and the rehabilitation process, promoting open communication, confidence-building, and early intervention. The article also discusses the practical applications of safe communication in education, peer support, crisis interventions, and family settings. Examples of SAFE messages illustrate how they can be used in different contexts to improve communication, reduce anger and tension, and foster healthy relationships. Safe communication is a key component of prevention programs that aim to prevent social and health problems, promoting health and wellbeing across the population.

Keywords: universal prevention, safe communication, dangerous communication.

Introduction

Safe communication plays a key role in universal prevention, which aims to promote health and prevent health problems across the entire population. Universal prevention comprises activities directed at all members of society, regardless of risk level, with the objective of enhancing resilience and reducing risk factors (McVey, Antonini, 2016). In the context of social prevention, safe communication is an essential tool that enables open exchange of information, fosters trust, and supports healthy behaviors. It is a process of information exchange that minimizes the risk of misunderstandings, conflicts, and negative emotions, while promoting understanding, trust, and cooperation among participants. It is based on principles of openness, transparency, and mutual respect, allowing individuals to express their thoughts and emotions freely, without fear of judgment or rejection (Rachmad, 2022). Within universal prevention, safe communication supports early identification of problems, facilitates intervention, and enables the provision of support—key elements in preventing more serious health and social issues. This article presents the theoretical foundations of safe communication as a tool of universal prevention. It discusses the core components of safe communication—openness, transparency, mutual respect, and empathy—and their relevance in the context of social prevention. Additionally, the article outlines examples of how safe communication is applied in various prevention programs and discusses methods for assessing their effectiveness.

Universal Prevention

The concept of universal prevention is defined in various ways across disciplines. According to Gail L. McVey and Julia Antonini (2016), it involves enhancing resilience and reducing risk among asymptomatic populations. In the short term, prevention programs aim to increase resilience and minimize risk factors. In the long term, these efforts are expected to reduce the incidence of health problems such as eating disorders (McVey and Antonini, 2016). The Society for Prevention Research (2011) defines universal prevention as efforts to promote health and healthy behaviors across the general population, regardless of individual risk. This includes the development of interventions that motivate change at both the individual and environmental levels (Prevention Research, 2011). According to SpringerLink (2023), universal prevention—also referred to as primary prevention—focuses on promoting health and healthy behaviors. It targets the entire population, not just high-risk groups (SpringerLink, 2023).

Based on a synthesis of definitions from various authors, the author proposes the following definition:

Universal prevention: systematic actions intended to promote health and prevent health issues throughout the population, irrespective of risk level. It includes interventions that enhance resilience, reduce risk factors, and encourage healthy behaviors at both the individual and environmental levels. Universal prevention seeks to create health-conducive conditions through education, social support, and structural change—leading, over time, to improved quality of life and reduced prevalence of health issues.

In the context of social problem prevention, universal prevention plays a vital role in addressing and reducing challenges such as crime, addiction, violence, homelessness, and other issues with negative societal impacts.

Applications of universal prevention in the prevention of social problems:

1. **Education and public awareness.** Universal prevention includes educational programs that raise awareness of social problems and their consequences. Education equips the public to recognize and respond to early signs of social issues, helping to prevent their escalation (McVey and Antonini, 2016).
2. **Strengthening social resilience.** Preventive efforts aim to build social resilience by fostering coping skills, enhancing social support networks, and promoting healthy behaviors. Greater resilience enables individuals and communities to respond more effectively to challenges and lowers the risk of social problems (Society for Prevention Research, 2011)
3. **Reduction of risk factors.** Universal prevention focuses on identifying and mitigating risk factors that contribute to social problems. Examples include initiatives to alleviate poverty, improve access to education and healthcare, and promote healthy lifestyles (SpringerLink, 2023).
4. **Creation of supportive social conditions.** Universal prevention aims to establish social environments that foster health and well-being. This involves structural changes such as strengthening social infrastructure, implementing support programs for families and communities, and advancing public policies that enhance health and social safety (Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, 2025).

Examples of preventive measures include:

- **Educational programs in schools.** The implementation of educational programs that teach children and adolescents about healthy behaviors, stress management, and conflict resolution. Such initiatives can contribute to the prevention of violence, substance abuse, and other social issues.
- **Support for families.** Family support programs that offer counseling, parenting education and emotional support. Enhancing parental communication and parenting skills may help prevent social problems among children and young people.
- **Community initiatives.** Development of community-based initiatives promoting health and well-being, such as support groups, recreational

programs, and actions aimed at improving the local environment. These initiatives foster social connections and encourage healthy behaviors.

Universal prevention plays a critical role in promoting health and preventing both health-related and social problems across the entire population. According to Gail L. McVey and Julia Antonini (2016), it involves enhancing resilience and reducing risk among asymptomatic populations. In the short term, prevention programs aim to increase resilience and reduce risk factors; over time, this contributes to a reduction in health issues such as eating disorders. The Society for Prevention Research (2011) defines universal prevention as activities designed to promote health and healthy behaviors throughout the population, regardless of risk level, through interventions that motivate change at both the individual and environmental levels. SpringerLink (2023) adds that universal prevention—also known as primary prevention—focuses on promoting health and healthy behaviors across the general population, not only among high-risk groups.

Based on a synthesis of definitions from various authors, the following definition may be proposed: Universal prevention refers to systematic actions intended to promote health and prevent health issues throughout the population, irrespective of risk level. It includes interventions that enhance resilience, reduce risk factors, and encourage healthy behaviors at both the individual and environmental levels. Universal prevention seeks to create health-conducive conditions through education, social support, and structural change—leading, over time, to improved quality of life and reduced prevalence of health issues.

In the context of social problem prevention, universal prevention is key to addressing and mitigating issues such as crime, addiction, violence, homelessness, and other socially harmful phenomena. Its application in preventing social problems includes educational and awareness-raising activities, strengthening social resilience, reducing risk factors, and creating supportive social environments. Examples of preventive measures include school-based educational programs, family support initiatives, and community-driven actions promoting health and well-being.

The Theory of Safe Communication Based on SAFE Messages

Safe communication is a fundamental component of effective information exchange, particularly within educational, familial, and professional settings. The SAFE (Situation, Affect, Finale, Effect) Message theory was developed to provide a structured framework for communication that is both safe and effective.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SAFE COMMUNICATION:

Communication Safety theory, introduced by Yoesoep Edhie Rachmad in 2022, highlights the importance of feeling safe in the communication process. Safe

communication facilitates more effective exchanges of thoughts and information, as participants feel comfortable expressing their views and emotions (Rachmad, 2022). **The Johari Window model** contributes to understanding how openness and self-awareness influence interpersonal interactions. In the context of the SAFE Communication Framework, this model emphasizes the importance of openness and transparency in communication¹ and is based on the **theory of two-way communication**. According to research by Gould and Roffey-Barentsen, two-way communication—in which sender and receiver roles are interchangeable—is essential for effective interaction. This dynamic allows participants to ask questions and respond, thereby enhancing understanding and learning (Roffey-Barentsen).

The SAFE Message — This theory is based on four key elements: Situation, Affect, Finale and Effect.

1. **Situation:** Describing the specific situation in which communication occurs. It is important to clearly define the context so that all participants share an understanding of the conversation's background. This involves a description of the specific situation that evokes certain emotions. It should be presented objectively, without judgment or blame. Example: "When you do not put the dishes in the dishwasher..."
2. **Affect:** Expressing the emotions being felt. Communication participants should openly speak about their emotions, which helps to build trust and understanding. This is the expression of emotions you feel in relation to the situation. It is important to speak about your feelings using "I" rather than "you" to avoid accusations. Example: "...I feel frustrated..."
3. **Finale:** Stating expectations and the desired outcome of the communication. Clearly expressing goals helps to guide the conversation and avoid misunderstandings. This is an explanation of why the situation is important to you and what outcome you would like to achieve. It helps the other person understand your perspective. Example: "...because I would like the kitchen to be clean."
4. **Effect:** Assessing the outcomes after the situation or behavior changes. This is a description of what will change once changes are implemented. It shows the benefits of behavioral change.

The SAFE Message model may be effectively applied in a range of educational scenarios: **Conflict resolution:** Students and teachers can use the SAFE Message to express emotions and expectations clearly, facilitating constructive conflict resolution. **Feedback:** Teachers may use the SAFE approach to deliver feedback that is empathetic, specific, and oriented toward growth and improvement. **Collaboration:** Student collaboration becomes more productive when all participants feel safe to voice their thoughts and emotions. Practical use of safe communication:

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¹ www.communicationtheory.org/the-johari-window-model/

— **Resolving conflicts in the classroom**

Teachers can apply the SAFE model to help students resolve interpersonal conflicts. For example, when two students are in disagreement, the teacher may ask them to describe the situation (S), articulate their emotions (A), express their expectations (F), and reflect on the effects after the discussion (E). This process encourages mutual understanding and supports the search for a shared solution.

— **Constructive feedback**

Teachers can use the SAFE Message to provide students with constructive feedback. For example, a teacher might say:

Situation: “I noticed that you had difficulties with the homework assignment.”

Affect: “I feel concerned because I know you are capable of more.”

Finale: “I would like you to try again using the additional materials.”

Effect: “After revising the assignment, we will see if you have understood the topic better.”

— **Group work**

During group activities, students can apply the SAFE Message to communicate more effectively. For example, if one student feels that their ideas are not being considered, they might say:

Situation: “During our last group meeting, my ideas were not discussed.”

Affect: “I feel discouraged because I would like my ideas to be acknowledged.”

Finale: “I would like everyone to have the opportunity to share their thoughts.”

Effect: “By making this change, I hope our collaboration will become more effective.”

— **Communication with parents**

Teachers can also apply the SAFE Message in communication with parents. For example, during a parent-teacher meeting, a teacher might say:

Situation: “I have noticed that John is having trouble concentrating in class.”

Affect: “I am concerned because this may affect his academic performance.”

Finale: “I would like us to find a way together to improve his concentration.”

Effect: “After implementing changes, I hope John will be more focused in lessons.”

— **Students’ Personal Development**

Students can use the SAFE Message for self-reflection on their personal development. For example, after completing a project, a student might evaluate their experience:

Situation: “While working on the project, I had trouble managing my time.”

Affect: “I felt angry because I could not finish on time.”

Finale: “I would like to learn how to plan my tasks better.”

Effect: “After applying new time management techniques, I hope to be more efficient in future projects.”

— Using the SAFE message in the family

The SAFE Message can also be used within families to improve communication among family members. For example:

Situation: “During dinner, you often interrupt me while I am speaking.”

Affect: I feel anger and anxiety.

Finale: “I would like to finish my thoughts without interruption.”

Effect: “I hope this will make our conversations more satisfying for both of us.”

The SAFE Message is an effective method for reducing anger through constructive communication. This approach involves expressing one’s feelings and needs clearly, specifically, and non-aggressively, which helps to reduce tension and avoid conflict escalation. Using the SAFE Message supports constructive communication, reduces anger and tension, and fosters better understanding and conflict resolution. As a result, participants can build healthier and more satisfying relationships.

EXAMPLES OF SAFE MESSAGES IN THE FAMILY:

1. **Situation:** “When you do not put the dishes in the dishwasher...” **Affect:** “...I feel frustrated...” **Finale:** “...because I would like the kitchen to be clean.” **Effect:** “If you put the dishes away, the kitchen will be tidier.”
2. **Situation:** “When you are late for meetings...” **Affect:** “...I feel concerned...” **Finale:** “...because punctuality matters to me.” **Effect:** “If you arrive on time, our meetings will be more effective.”
3. **Situation:** “When you do not respond to my messages...” **Affect:** “...I feel ignored...” **Finale:** “...because I want to know everything is okay.” **Effect:** “If you respond, I will feel more at ease.”
4. **Situation:** “When you leave your things in the living room...” **Affect:** “...I feel overwhelmed...” **Finale:** “...because I like things to be tidy.” **Effect:** “If you put your things away, the living room will feel more spacious.”
5. **Situation:** “When you do not share information about projects...” **Affect:** “...I feel left out...” **Finale:** “...because I want to stay informed.” **Effect:** “If you share updates, we will collaborate better.”
6. **Situation:** “When you do not listen during conversations...” **Affect:** “...I feel unappreciated...” **Finale:** “...because I want my opinions to matter.” **Effect:** “If you listen, our conversations will be more meaningful.”
7. **Situation:** “When you do not finish your tasks on time...” **Affect:** “...I feel stressed...” **Finale:** “...because deadlines are important to me.” **Effect:** “If you complete tasks on time, our work will be more efficient.”
8. **Situation:** “When you do not tell me about your plans...” **Affect:** “...I feel confused...” **Finale:** “...because I want to know what is going on.” **Effect:** “If you inform me about your plans, I will be better prepared.”

9. **Situation:** “When you do not help with household chores...” **Affect:** “...I feel overwhelmed...” **Finale:** “...because I want us to share responsibilities.” **Effect:** “If you help out, our chores will be more balanced.”
10. **Situation:** “When you do not appreciate my work...” **Affect:** “...I feel unappreciated...” **Finale:** “...because I want my efforts to be recognized.” **Effect:** “If you show appreciation, I will feel more motivated.”

EXAMPLES OF SAFE MESSAGES IN EDUCATION:

1. **Situation:** “When you do not hand in your homework on time...” **Affect:** “...I feel concerned...” **Finale:** “...because I want you to have time to learn and understand the material.” **Effect:** “If you submit your homework on time, you will be better prepared for exams.”
2. **Situation:** “When you talk during lessons...” **Affect:** “...I feel distracted...” **Finale:** “...because I want everyone to focus on learning.” **Effect:** “If you stay quiet during lessons, everyone will better understand the material.”
3. **Situation:** “When you do not ask for help when you do not understand something...” **Affect:** “...I feel worried...” **Finale:** “...because I want you to understand the material properly.” **Effect:** “If you ask for help, you will achieve better results.”
4. **Situation:** “When you do not participate in group projects...” **Affect:** “...I feel disappointed...” **Finale:** “...because I want you to develop teamwork skills.” **Effect:** “If you actively participate, you will learn to collaborate more effectively.”
5. **Situation:** “When you do not bring required materials to class...” **Affect:** “...I feel frustrated...” **Finale:** “...because I want you to fully participate in the lesson.” **Effect:** “If you bring materials, you will be able to get more out of the lessons.”
6. **Situation:** “When you do not listen to instructions during practical lessons...” **Affect:** “...I feel concerned...” **Finale:** “...because I want you to work safely.” **Effect:** “If you follow instructions, you will avoid dangerous situations.”
7. **Situation:** “When you do not engage in class discussions...” **Affect:** “...I feel disappointed...” **Finale:** “...because I want you to develop your critical thinking skills.” **Effect:** “If you participate, you will improve your analytical abilities.”
8. **Situation:** “When you do not submit projects on time...” **Affect:** “...I feel stressed...” **Finale:** “...because I want you to have time for revisions and improvements.” **Effect:** “If you submit projects on time, you will be able to improve their quality.”
9. **Situation:** “When you do not attend extra classes...” **Affect:** “...I feel disappointed...” **Finale:** “...because I want you to have more development opportunities.” **Effect:** “If you attend, you will have more chances to learn and grow.”
10. **Situation:** “When you do not follow school rules...” **Affect:** “...I feel concerned...” **Finale:** “...because I want you to feel safe at school.” **Effect:** “If you follow the rules, school will be a safer place.”

EXAMPLES OF SAFE MESSAGES IN THE WORKPLACE

SAFE messages can be very effective in professional settings. They support clear and constructive communication of one's needs, expectations, and emotions, which can lead to better cooperation and understanding within a team. Below are several examples of how SAFE can be used in a workplace context:

1. **Situation:** "When you do not deliver reports on time..." **Affect:** "...I feel stressed...". **Finale:** "...because I need that information for my ongoing work." **Effect:** "If you submit reports on time, our work will be more efficient."
2. **Situation:** "When you do not inform me about changes to the project..." **Affect:** "...I feel confused..." **Finale:** "...because I want to stay up to date on progress." **Effect:** "If you keep me informed, I will be better prepared for the next steps."
3. **Situation:** "When you interrupt me during meetings..." **Affect:** "...I feel unappreciated..." **Finale:** "...because I want my views to be heard." **Effect:** "If you allow me to finish, our meetings will be more productive."
4. **Situation:** "When you do not collaborate on shared tasks..." **Affect:** "...I feel overwhelmed..." **Finale:** "...because I want us to share responsibilities." **Effect:** "If you contribute, we will complete tasks more smoothly."
5. **Situation:** "When you do not provide feedback on my work..." **Affect:** "...I feel uncertain..." **Finale:** "...because I want to know how I can improve." **Effect:** "If you give me feedback, I will be able to do my job better."

Safe communication is a process of information exchange that minimizes the risk of misunderstandings, conflicts, and negative emotions, while promoting understanding, trust, and cooperation among participants. It is based on the principles of openness, transparency, and mutual respect, enabling individuals to express their thoughts and feelings freely, without fear of judgment or rejection.

Key elements of safe communication:

- **Openness:** Participants in communication are encouraged to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions honestly and directly.
- **Transparency:** Information is conveyed clearly and understandably, without concealing important facts.
- **Mutual respect:** Each participant is treated with respect, and their opinions and feelings are acknowledged as important.
- **Empathy:** Participants strive to understand the perspectives of others and respond to their emotional needs.
- **Bidirectionality:** Communication is interactive, with opportunities for asking questions and providing answers, which fosters better understanding and learning.

SAFE communication and SAFE message can be used in everyday life, in any life situation. For example, in:

- **Education:** Teachers and students can use safe communication to create an environment conducive to learning and personal development.
- **Family:** Family members can apply the principles of safe communication to improve relationships and resolve conflicts constructively.
- **Workplace:** Employees and employers can benefit from safe communication to enhance cooperation and job satisfaction.

Safe communication is a key element of the universal prevention and mental health program named “Let’s Talk²—Pogadajmy”. This program aims to promote mental health, prevent emotional and psychological problems, and support parents in difficult life situations. The “Let’s Talk—Pogadajmy” program is addressed to parents to strengthen their communication skills, which helps avoid conflict and supports the emotional and social development of their children. Since safe communication is a process of exchanging information that minimizes the risk of misunderstandings, conflict, and negative emotions—while promoting understanding, trust, and cooperation among participants—and is based on the principles of openness, transparency, and mutual respect, it allows for the free expression of thoughts and feelings without fear of judgment or rejection.

The role of safe communication in prevention programs:

- **Promoting mental health**

Safe communication enables open discussions about mental health, which can help identify problems at an early stage and prevent their escalation. Programs such as “Let’s Talk—Pogadajmy” encourage parents to share their feelings and experiences, leading to greater understanding and support.

- **Preventing emotional and mental problems**

Through safe communication, participants in prevention programs can express their concerns and fears without fear of judgment. This, in turn, may lead to early intervention and support, which is essential in preventing more serious mental health issues.

- **Supporting parents in difficult life situations**

Safe communication helps create an environment where parents can openly discuss their problems and receive support. Programs like “Let’s Talk—Pogadajmy” offer tools and strategies to help cope with difficulties and build psychological resilience.

EXAMPLES OF USING SAFE COMMUNICATION AND SAFE MESSAGE IN PREVENTION PROGRAMS

Safe communication plays a key role in prevention programs aimed at addressing social and health issues. These programs often include training in safe communication, teaching participants how to express their thoughts and feelings openly

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² The Let’s talk universal prevention and mental health prevention program is an original initiative aimed at parents. It was developed and is implemented by Azyl—Pedagogical Support Center. The SAFE message was created specifically for the purposes of this program.

and constructively. In programs such as “Let’s Talk—Pogadajmy”, participants may form support groups where they share experiences and support one another. Safe communication is also vital in crisis interventions, where the swift and effective exchange of information can be crucial to ensuring safety and providing support to individuals in crisis. The SAFE (Situation, Affect, Finale, Effect) message is a tool that can significantly support social prevention and the resocialization process by promoting open communication, building trust, and facilitating early intervention. Below are examples of how this communication can be applied in specific areas.

— **Education and training**

Prevention programs often include training in safe communication, teaching participants how to express their thoughts and feelings openly and constructively. For example, training may include techniques such as active listening, expressing empathy, and giving constructive feedback.

— **Peer support**

Within prevention programs such as “Let’s Talk—Pogadajmy”, participants may form support groups where they can share their experiences and support each other. Safe communication is key to creating an atmosphere of trust and mutual support.

— **Crisis intervention.**

Safe communication is also vital in crisis interventions, where the swift and effective exchange of information can be crucial to ensuring safety and providing support to individuals in crisis. Prevention programs may offer crisis communication training that teaches how to respond in emergency situations.

Conclusions

The SAFE (Situation, Affect, Finale, Effect) message is a tool that can significantly support social prevention and the resocialization process. Social prevention aims to prevent social problems such as crime, addiction, and violence through early intervention and education. Resocialization, on the other hand, focuses on reintegrating individuals who have committed offenses back into society, helping them adapt and avoid recidivism.

The SAFE message also finds application in social prevention. Examples of such use include:

— **Promoting open communication**

The SAFE message promotes open and transparent communication, which is essential in social prevention. It allows participants in prevention programs to express their concerns, fears, and problems in a safe and constructive way³.

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³ <https://www.abacademies.org/articles/Re-socialization-of-convicted-persons-stages-and-methods-1544-0044-23-4-515.pdf>

— **Building trust**

By expressing emotions (Affect) and expectations (Finale), the SAFE message helps build trust between program participants and facilitators. Trust is the foundation of effective prevention, as participants need to feel safe in order to talk openly about their problems⁴.

— **Early intervention**

The SAFE message allows for the early identification of problems and intervention before they become more serious. By clearly identifying the situation (Situation) and expectations (Finale), areas in need of support can be quickly identified and appropriate actions taken⁵.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE SAFE MESSAGE IN RESOCIALIZATION

— **Social reintegration**

The SAFE message and safe communication support the process of social reintegration for individuals who have committed offenses by helping them form healthy relationships with others in society. Expressing emotions and expectations in a safe and constructive way helps build positive social bonds⁶.

— **Reducing recidivism**

Through the SAFE message, individuals who have committed offenses can better understand their emotions and needs, which helps them avoid behaviors that lead to recidivism. Clearly identifying the situation and expectations enables better planning and decision-making that aligns with social norms⁷.

— **Emotional support**

The SAFE message enables the open expression of emotions, which is key in the process of resocialization. Individuals who have committed offenses often struggle with difficult emotions, and the ability to express them in a safe manner supports the therapeutic and adaptive process⁸.

The SAFE message can be an effective tool in social prevention and resocialization, promoting open and transparent communication. It helps build trust between participants in prevention programs and their facilitators, which is the foundation of effective prevention. By clearly defining the situation and expectations, it enables early problem detection and intervention before they become

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⁴ <https://annegrethannawa.com/saccia-1>

⁵ <https://www.preventioninstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/AECF-Community-Safety-messaging-guide.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.abacademies.org/articles/Re-socialization-of-convicted-persons-stages-and-methods-1544-0044-23-4-515.pdf>

⁷ <https://annegrethannawa.com/saccia-1>

⁸ <https://www.preventioninstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/AECF-Community-Safety-messaging-guide.pdf>

more serious. As a result, the SAFE message supports the creation of a safe and constructive environment that fosters health and social well-being.

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