

VERBIAGE AND MESSAGE FRAMING

IN THE ORTHOPEDIC SETTING

Clinician Resource

Therapeutic Impact of Verbiage¹⁻⁴

Psychological processes such as fear, patient expectations, and autonomy play an important role in recovery and outcomes throughout the rehabilitative process.

The following words have the potential to evoke
fear of movement and damage ■ negative emotions ■ beliefs of irreversible dysfunction

Words to Avoid		Consider Using Instead
Degeneration Wear and tear Bone on bone <i>"Your imaging shows multi-level degeneration in your spine"</i>	→	"Normal, age-related changes" <i>Consider use of visuals to enhance understanding⁵</i>
Stabilize Stability Instability <i>"This exercise will help to stabilize the neck"</i>	→	"Strengthen" "Improve muscular control" <i>Use of "stability" is appropriate in cases of true ligamentous instability where caution needs to be taken</i>
Compression Entrapment Impingement <i>"One of your nerves is being compressed near your spine"</i>	→	"Tight, but can be stretched" "Help things to move better" <i>Utilize words that indicate goals of treatment rather than focusing on pathoanatomy that may not elicit pain</i>
Medical/Anatomical Terms <i>lordosis, herniation, neurological, chronic, diagnostic, lesion, paresthesias</i>	→	normal curvature nervous system reduced feeling/sensation <i>audience dependent</i>

*Modified from Stewart and Loftus, 2018¹

Message Framing⁶⁻⁹

*how information is delivered

Research has revealed that benefit-framed messages encourage more active participation in less severe health circumstances⁸⁻⁹

Benefit-Framed

"**Participating** in PT for your rotator cuff tear will help to improve your functional **ability**, reduce pain, and help you to **self-manage** – likely **keeping** you from needing surgery"

Cost-Framed

"If you **don't** participate in PT, your pain and dysfunction will likely **persist**, leading you to **ongoing** care and increased **potential** for needing **surgery**"

References

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