



Transcript

Introduction video 3 | Framing with metaphor

Slide 1

Welcome to the third video of our introduction to framing homelessness. Now, we're going to focus on metaphor. We'll explore the work they do to help people understand things differently, the one that works to shift thinking on homelessness, and then take some time to practice.

It should take us about twenty minutes, with two short exercises and one longer one, where I'll ask you to press pause before carrying on.

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Let's go back to our narrative arc. Have you ever had a conversation where someone just did not understand how homelessness works? What can cause it, what can end it - and what it means to be without a safe and stable home. And I'm guessing, in that conversation, that someone's first instinct - their default - was to blame homeless people for making bad choices.

Well, you're not alone. And I want you to keep that conversation in mind whilst we work through this video together. Because it's metaphor that help us to pre-empt and answer the questions what's this about? How does this work? And to set up some thinking on what we can do about it.

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We think and talk in metaphor, all the time. And as framers we can be very deliberate about what we want our metaphor to do. They interrupt our default thinking with new ways to think about an issue.

They give us a strong mental image - so they're easy to absorb and take up
They make complicated concepts straightforward and concrete - and without dumbing down
They explain why something happens - rather than letting people think it's normal or natural
And they can be extended to bring in related concepts and ideas - that people might not have brought together without help.

And the metaphor that worked to shift thinking on homelessness was this.

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Constant pressure. The idea that "Poverty puts pressure on people - it's constant and strong. If the pressure builds up, people can be pushed into homelessness. We can decrease the pressure on people's lives by creating affordable housing and helping people get good, stable jobs. And we can help people withstand this pressure by strengthening our social welfare system."

Now this is a pretty dry articulation of the metaphor - it's the one we tested, and there are lots of different ways we can express it. But I want you to think back to that narrative arc. And those tricky conversations that start from a position of individual blame.

Constant pressure explains how homelessness works by bringing in the idea of context. That there are forces that act on people's lives - that build up, and build up - and that you can't just try your way out of. But it also sets up solutions. The supports and systems that we can reinforce before people reach crisis point and become overwhelmed.

Key components of this metaphor:

Poverty (and other external forces) put pressure on people

That pressure builds up over time, and can push people to the brink. Especially when there's a sudden increase in pressure, like during the coronavirus pandemic

But we can work upstream to lessen that pressure.

And we can use this metaphor to:

Connect people to what this is like in people's lives

And to link that experience to our broader social context.

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Let's think about what this could look like in practice. A headline from the Telegraph: 'Private renting now 'unaffordable' and low-income tenants 'at risk of homelessness or poverty.' I want you to take a minute. Pause this video. And try out a few ways to rewrite this headline using the constant pressure metaphor. There's space in your workbook. Have you paused?

Welcome back. Here's one we made earlier: 'Constant pressure' of high rents puts low-income tenants 'on the brink of homelessness and poverty.' We're explicitly using the metaphor here - although you don't always need to do that. And we're using it to explain one of the ways in which our context makes us more at risk of homelessness.

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And another headline from the South Wales Argus: 'Nearly 200 people who were facing homelessness have been placed in accommodation since start of pandemic.' Take a minute. Pause this video. And try out a few ways to rewrite this headline using our metaphor. There's space in your workbook. Have you paused?

Welcome back again. Here's our version: 'Nearly 200 people on the brink of homelessness have been placed in accommodation since start of pandemic.' We're not explicitly using the metaphor here. But we're extending it to explain how precarious some people's situations are. Without cueing individual blame. Next up:

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Some of the ways Crisis have put the metaphor into practice. On twitter, in reports, and in workshops with us.

'This constant pressure is what can finally push people and families into homelessness'

'We need to make sure people don't get pushed to the brink in the first place.'

'The pressures of hostel life built up. It was like being slowly suffocated.'

'Many attributing this to the constant pressure of feeling like a burden, tension with their host, and insecurity of their living situation'

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Here's how others have used the metaphor to talk about increasing pressure during the coronavirus pandemic.

'People in these positions are often already at the brink: battling a rising tide of high rents, growing bills, juggling health conditions and caring responsibilities. We need to do right by each and every person in our society, and make sure those hardest hit are not pushed into deeper hardship.'

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And here's what this looks like in action. This time, talking about constant pressure as water against a damn.

I want you to think back to that tricky conversation you had with someone about how homelessness works. What can cause it, what can end it. And who is ultimately responsible. Keep an ear out for the understanding you hear in this video.

Video transcript (each line a new speaker)

So what was sort of the main idea you got from what I read?

A damn has to meet the pressure of the water that it's holding back

The stronger the damn, the better it's going to hold the water

Holding things together

And you know if it's well designed and well engineered it's going to last for a very long time

And one way to kind of prevent that falling apart is having a safe secure place to live

Because it is, it's like pressure. It just keeps building and building and building and there something else you need to pay and something else you need to pay

Some of it is a result of downward pressure from declining incomes hard situations some of it can be sudden

Homelessness can be a symptom of bigger economic problems bigger economic pressures on people

It just keeps going and going and going and everything gets worse and worse and worse and then no-one lends you any money so you can't pay your rent and then you're stuffed

So what sort of things do you think could be done to reinforce that damn?

It did definitely feel like it was a problem the Government had to solve

I think it's kind of social support. Community, actually

The support structure in place. So the damn doesn't break. And the support structure, things like housing, jobs

Providing a strong welfare, cheap housing and opportunities

Low cost housing is a key part of prevention of homelessness. And there's housing that's available for people

Education, even if it comes down to a decent transport system, health

Better support from local authorities, charities, drug charities especially, will strengthen that damn

It's all about having these things in place to stop the damn bursting

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Did you hear it? There's big shifts in thinking here. People use our constant pressure metaphor to talk about context, systemic causation, and upstream solutions before we reach crisis point.

Constant pressure allows you to have very different conversations. Based on very different understandings of how homelessness works. And there are lots of different ways you can bring this metaphor to life in your comms.

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Lots of different ways to evoke the feeling of constant pressure. As an external force that builds up, and builds up. And that's what our activity is about. Take a look at the grid in your workbook.

Think about all the things that exert constant pressure - or the feeling of being under that pressure - in your life. Like the walls closing in, the pressure of heavy weights, or a tension headache. Draw quick, scrappy images for each of those things. Try to think of as many as you can in five minutes. And once the grid is filled, think about how you could incorporate these into your communications. Got that?

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Here's a few to get you started. A pressure gage. A weight. The walls closing in. Feel free to pause here for the rest of the exercise.

How'd you find that? I hope it was useful in getting you to think about the different ways we can talk about constant pressure - without using the same words each time. What's important here - what's doing work to shift thinking in people's minds - isn't the exact phrase. It's the concept of constant pressure, however it's evoked or articulated. And then using that concept to explain how homelessness works.

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We'll end with a few tips on using constant pressure in practice.

Use it early - so people can use it to interpret details or data

Don't mix your metaphor. Constant pressure is doing a lot of work for us, so give it room to breathe. Extend it with images and related concepts...

Including your solution. Talk about the things that we can do as a society to lighten or lessen the pressure in people's lives, or that reinforce buttresses against that pressure.

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And if you only take away three things from this video, let them be these:

Metaphor explain how and why something happens

How you explain a problem changes what (and who) people think can solve it. So our metaphor matter

Constant pressure means we can explain how homelessness can be prevented - and ended

Now take a look at the last page in your workbook. And add any good ideas or phrases you've come across today to your framing thesaurus. Trust me, it will be useful later.

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Next up: framing with context. See you soon.

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And as always, thank you for taking the time to work through this video.