

Implications for Behavior Change

Before going any further in this exploration, read the following article on framing environmental messages. The article can be downloaded from the Master Water Stewards web site:

[Schultz, P. W., & Zelezny, L. \(2003\). Reframing environmental messages to be congruent with American values. *Human Ecology Review*, 10\(2\), 126-136](#)

Environmental messages are often framed in terms of altruism and self-transcendence. The motivation for action is the welfare of others or other reasons that go beyond the individual.

- Altruism: “feeling or acting on behalf of the welfare of others in cases where self-interest could not be involved” (Kaplan 2000)
- Self-transcendence: goals that “transcend the individual, and instead ‘promote the interests of other persons and the natural world’” (Schultz and Zelezny 2003; Schwartz 1994)

These types of messages may lead to the assumption that “pro-environmental” behavior requires personal sacrifice to benefit others and leads to a decrease in quality of life; to avoid this, defense mechanism are activated to take away personal responsibility for the problem. Information-intensive, problems-focused messages may lead to a sense of apathy and helplessness: what can I do? So, why should I care?

In framing environmental messages, including the messages you will communicate to your neighbors and friends as you do education and outreach on stormwater, it is important to always ask, “How can we create messages to promote the realization that ecological quality increases our quality of life and to empower our audience to act?”

Learning Activity

1. Go online. Find an example of one environmental message (related to non-point source pollution) that promotes the realization that ecological quality increases our quality of life and that empowers you to act.

Try variations of one of these search strings:

- stormwater education example
- effective stormwater education
- non-point education example

-
2. In the Discussion forum for this course and this topic, post your example with a brief description of how it promotes the realization that ecological quality increases our quality of life and empowers you to act.