

Talking about Homes

Three top tips for effective explanation

People recognise that the current housing system isn't working for everyone. But they are unclear how housing issues have come about, and what solutions would help to ensure everyone has a decent home that they can afford. When people feel, fatalistically, that housing problems are too complex and too big to solve, they tend to disengage. But when we explain things well, we can build understanding, counteract that sense of fatalism, and increase support for solutions.

1. Spell it out

- ▶ Don't assume knowledge. Consider what context or background your audience needs in order to understand your point, and include this in your explanation.
- ▶ Use plain language rather than technical language or jargon. For example, write out terms like the 'private rented sector' in full, instead of shortening to 'PRS'. And don't take for granted that everyone will know what social homes are, or what Housing First entails.

2. Show, don't tell

- ▶ Give examples that illustrate your point. For instance, in order to build the understanding that our homes impact our health, you could provide examples like the stress of keeping up with high rents, or the physical impacts of living in a cold, damp home.
- ▶ Be specific. Spell out the solutions you are calling for. Name who is responsible for problems in our housing system, and who can take action to improve it. Providing details like this helps to paint a clearer picture of how our housing system works and how it can be improved.



3. Break it down

- ▶ We can't explain everything in one piece of communication, so focus on explaining one or two things well, and match the scale of the problem you are explaining to the scale of the solution you are offering.
- ▶ Spell out step-by-step how one thing leads to another. Use words that explicitly link cause and effect, like 'because', 'this leads to', 'this means', 'as a result' and so on.

Putting it together

For longer explanations, you might find applying this structure helpful.

Why it matters	Home is the foundation for our health and wellbeing.
The problem	But many people are living with the worry and uncertainty of keeping up with increasing private rents, while they wait for a social home to become available.
How we got here	This is because housing benefits have not risen in comparison with the rising cost of rent. As a result, thousands of people are being forced to cut down on food and heating, which undermines their health.
The solution and who can fix it	So we need the Government to unfreeze housing benefits and ensure they keep up with private rents.
How it would work/is working	Housing benefits should allow people to afford at least the cheapest third of private rented homes in their area Longer-term, we need more social homes to be built. The Government has committed to do this, but it will take time.
The impact	An increase in housing benefit would relieve the pressure for thousands of people in the meantime – improving their health and stopping them from being pushed into homelessness.

Tips: You can vary the order of these points too. For example, you could start with the solution.

Further framing guides on how to talk about homes can be found at www.jrf.org.uk/narrativechange

This guide was written by Sophie Gordon from FrameWorks UK, as part of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Nationwide Foundation's co-funded Talking about Homes project.

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