

# Making Safe the Easy Choice: Practical Behavior Strategies to Influence Safer Road Behaviors

March 26, 2026 Webinar





# Webinar Logistics

- Duration is 1.5 hours
- To activate closed captioning for the webinar:
  - Click on the “Show Captions” button at the bottom of your screen.
  - You may adjust captions under Caption Settings (same button).
- Recording webinar for website archival
  - <https://ruralsafetycenter.org/webinar-archive/>
- Q&A pod to ask questions of presenters and alert organizers of technical difficulties
- Handouts are available for download
- Please complete feedback form at the end of the webinar
- Certificates of Completion/Application for CEUs will be provided





# \*NEW\* Home Safely Podcast: Episode 8



- Vic Lund
  - Traffic engineer at the Saint Louis County, Minnesota Department of Public Works
- In this conversation:
  - Identifying opportunities to reduce crash risk by assessing risk factors
  - Local road safety plan planning process
  - What it means to be proactive in rural road safety
- Listen and subscribe!





# Road Safety Champion Program

- Safety 101 program
- M&C Modules
  - Tuesdays 1-3 pm ET starting April 14<sup>th</sup>
- FR Modules
  - Tues. March 31<sup>st</sup> and Wednesdays 1-3 pm ET starting April 15<sup>th</sup>



Learn More!



Register Now!



# FHWA Rural Road Safety Webinar Series

- **Thursday May 21, 2026 from 1:00 to 3:00 pm ET:  
Innovative Funding Processes for Rural Road Safety**
  - State, regional and local transportation agencies will present on:
    - innovative funding programs
    - alternative contracting methods
    - flexibilities to distribute resources effectively and efficiently across State, Tribal, and local-owned rural roads to maximize safety impact.
  - Strategies will emphasize:
    - effective investments and program eligibilities
    - non-traditional funding sources
    - systemic data-driven investments.





# Rural Opportunities To Use Transportation for Economic Success (ROUTES) Initiative: Request for Information

- This notice requests comments on:
  - unmet transportation infrastructure needs in rural communities
  - barriers that rural communities face in addressing those needs
  - opportunities for ROUTES to improve its services and technical assistance to support rural and Tribal stakeholders
- Comments due within 60 days of the Feb. 23, 2026 posting (April 23<sup>rd</sup>)





# Rural Road Safety Awareness Week

- 3<sup>rd</sup> week in July:
  - July 13<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup>, 2026
- 2026 theme:
  - The Rural Modes – On the Road to 0!
- Graphical theme:
  - Video games
- Daily topics
  - Conventional Vehicles
  - Micro Movers
  - Transit
  - Big Movers
  - Unconventional Vehicles





# Today's Presenter



Kari Finley, Ph.D.,

Director and Research Scholar at the Center for  
Health & Safety Culture at Montana State  
University Bozeman

[kari.finley@montana.edu](mailto:kari.finley@montana.edu)



# Please Reach Out!

- [info@ruralsafetycenter.org](mailto:info@ruralsafetycenter.org)
- [www.ruralsafetycenter.org](http://www.ruralsafetycenter.org)



@ruralroadsafety



# National Center for Rural Road Safety

*A Federal Highway Administration Center for Excellence*



# **Making Safe the Easy Choice: Practical Behavior Strategies to Influence Safer Road Behaviors**

Presenter: Dr. Kari Finley

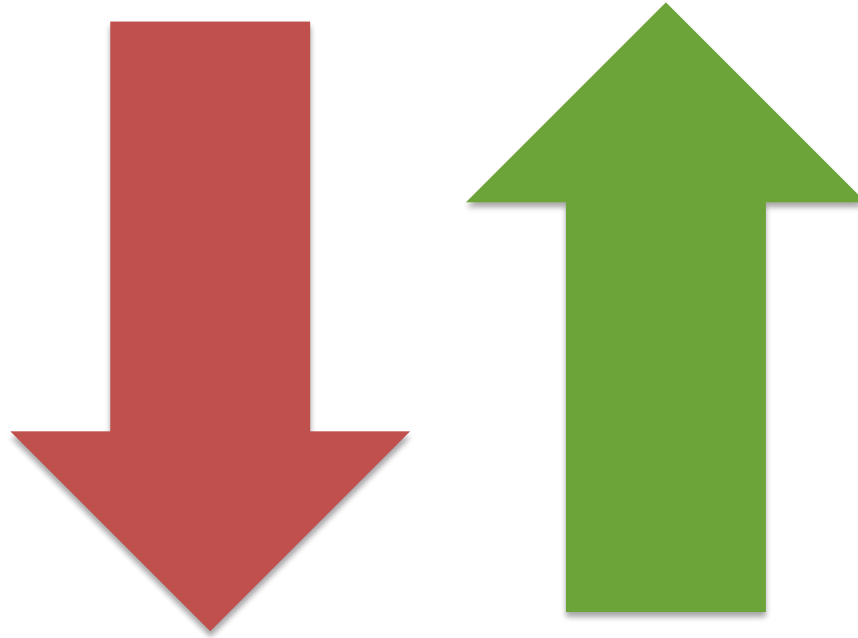
March 26, 2026

Webinar hosted by: The National Center for Rural Road Safety and the  
NLTAPA Safety Work Group

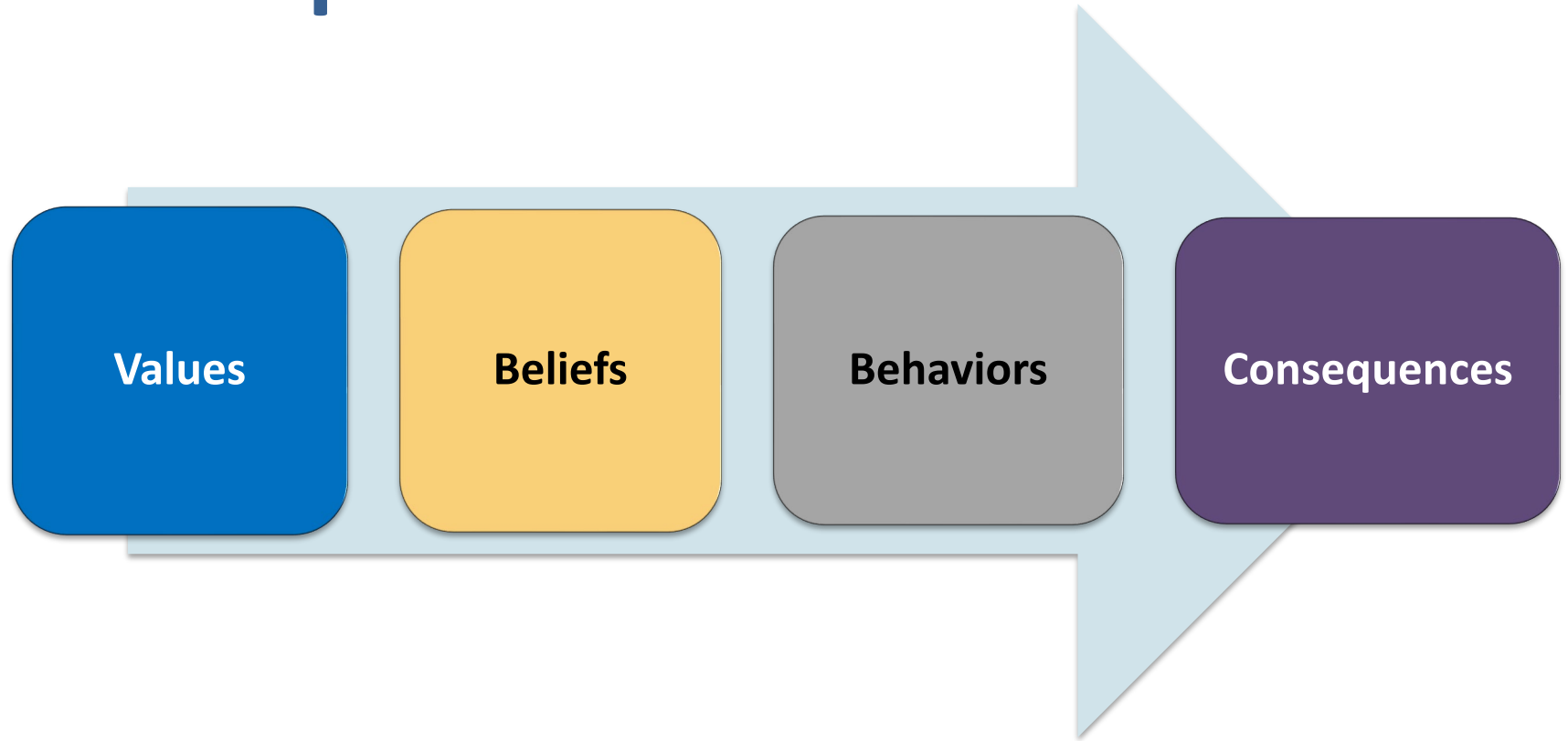
# Agenda

- Behavioral Models – How they can help us
- A Cultural Lens – Shared beliefs and working across the social ecology
- Strategies to Influence Behavior

# Reducing Risky Behaviors and Growing Protective Behaviors

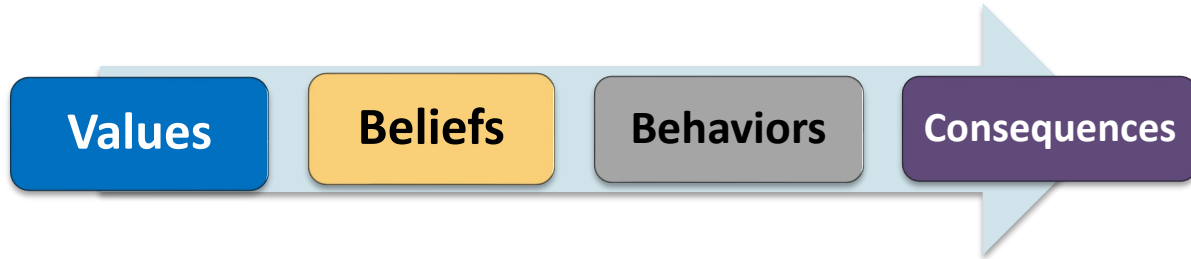


# Simplified Behavioral Model

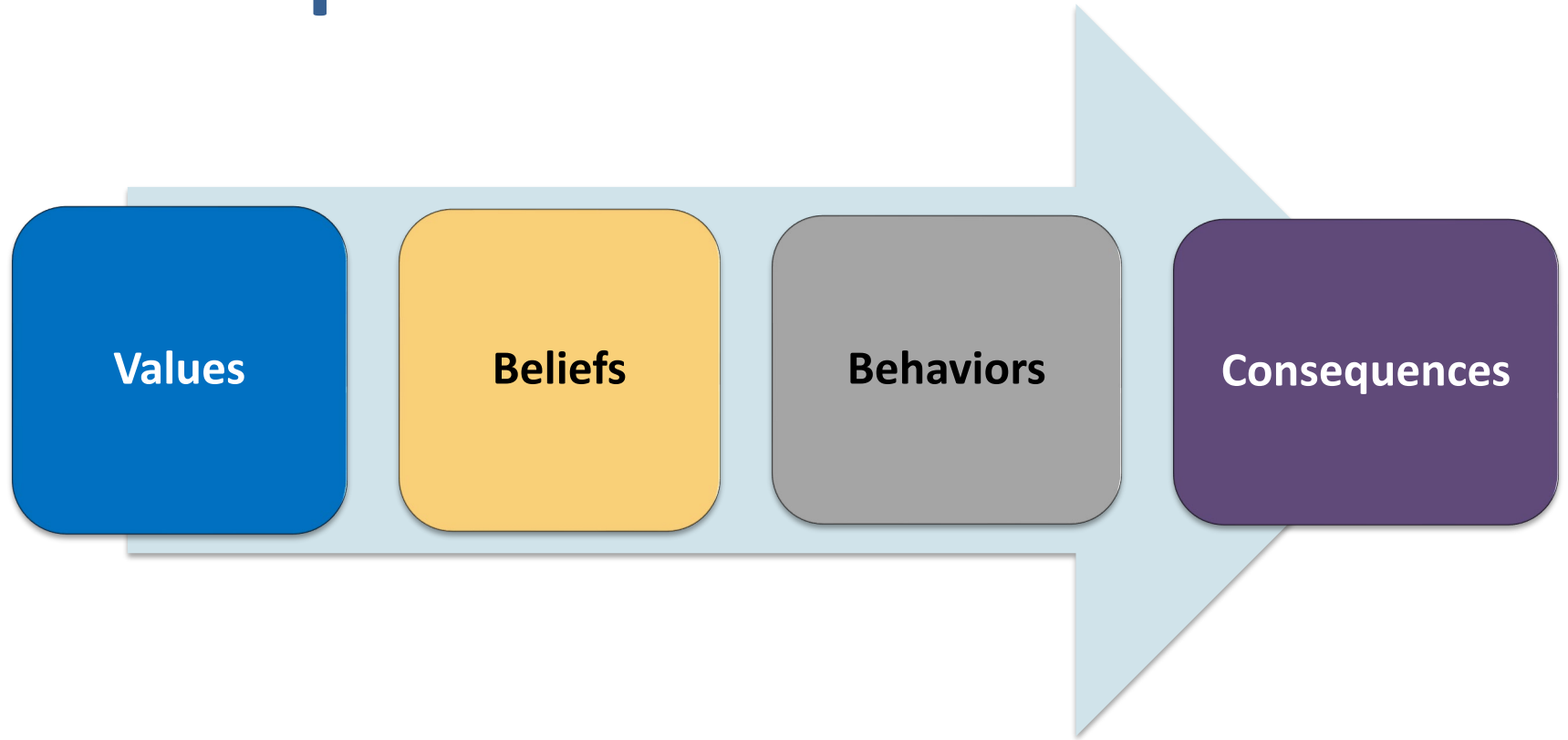


# Behavioral Model

- Provides an empirical, scientific basis for how beliefs and behaviors predict other beliefs and behaviors
- Provides insights into beliefs that shape our decisions
- Helps us understand what we need to grow and informs us about what needs to change
- Helps us decide on specific interventions to address behavior
- Supports evaluation



# Simplified Behavioral Model





Where do these **beliefs** come from?

culture

# Traffic Safety Culture

*The shared beliefs of a group of people, which influence road user behaviors and stakeholder actions that impact traffic safety*

*“It is almost unanimously agreed that beliefs deeply affect our actions”<sup>1</sup>* (p. 237)



Focus on **growing**  
**shared beliefs**  
that influence  
behaviors  
that will change  
consequences

Castelfranchi, C., & Paglieri, F. (2007). The role of beliefs in goal dynamics: Prolegomena to a constructive theory of intentions. *Synthese*, 155(2), 237–263. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11229-006-9156-3>

# Social Ecology



# Simplified Behavioral Model

Value

Many behaviors among different groups each with different beliefs.

Consequences

# Practical Strategies to Influence Behaviors

# How we process information...

- **Fast thinking** – “reactive, automatic, intuitive, heuristic, associative, and preconscious”
- **Slow thinking** – “controlled, reflective, serial, rule-based, and conscious”

Grayot, J. D. (2020). Dual Process Theories in Behavioral Economics and Neuroeconomics: A Critical Review. *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*, 11(1), 105–136. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13164-019-00446-9>

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (1st edition). Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

**Strategy #1: Support intentional behavior change through strategies that support thoughtful, deliberate thinking.**

# Ask

How well does the strategy that I am implementing foster slow thinking?

# Chat Box

**How could I integrate or foster slow thinking in a current strategy I am using in traffic safety?**

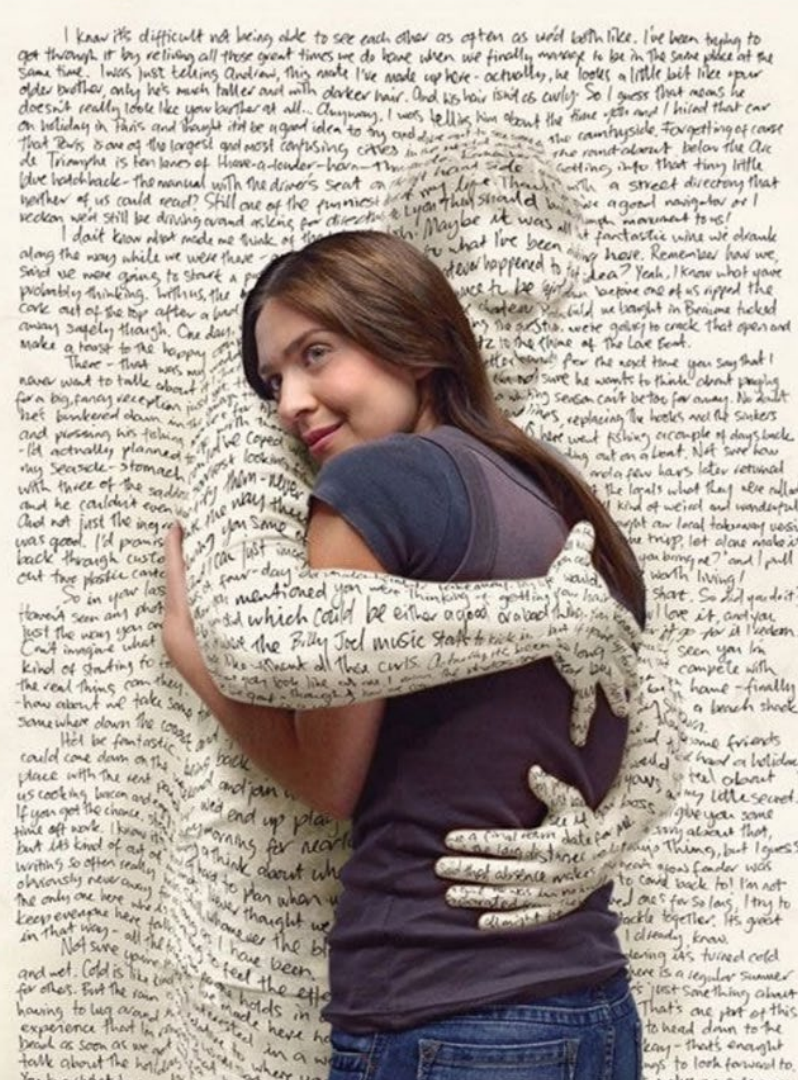
# Emotions – Two Cognitive Paths

**Analytic/Slow** –  
moves more slowly  
and depends on  
conscious and  
deliberate  
reasoning

**Intuitive/Fast** –  
responds  
immediately and  
unconsciously. Is  
stimulated by  
emotional appeals

# Positive Emotional Appeals

*A print advertisement from M&C Saatchi, Melbourne for Australia Post – reminding people how it feels to receive a letter from a loved one*



# Negative Emotional Appeals

“Child Soldiers: It’s Not Happening Here, But It’s  
Happening Now” *Pius Walker, Amnesty International,  
Switzerland*





**“Victims  
Are  
People  
Just Like  
You And  
Me”**

*Advertising Agency:  
Advico Y&R, Zurich,  
Switzerland*



# Fear-based approaches...

Persuasive attempts to strategically invoke fear by emphasizing the potential dangers and harms that could happen, and use that fear as the basis for persuasion.

Shen, L., & Coles, V. B. (2015). Fear and psychological reactance: Between- versus within-individuals perspectives. *Zeitschrift Für Psychologie/Journal of Psychology*, 223(4), 225–235.

<http://dx.doi.org.proxybz.lib.montana.edu/10.1027/2151-2604/a000224>



**STREET SMART**  
Be Smart on the Street



**Penalties for jaywalking vary.**

Use crosswalks.  
Wait for the walk signal.

**STREET SMART**  
Be Smart on the Street



**Los peatones no tienen bolsas de aire.**

Al doblar, cede el paso a los peatones.

**STREET SMART**  
Be Smart on the Street



**Bicycles don't come with bumpers.**

Give cyclists room to ride.

**SOMETIMES IT TAKES A FAMILY OF FOUR  
TO STOP A DRUNK DRIVER.**



THE FOX OF MO INSURANCE FOUNDATION AND COLLEGE BUILT HEALTH CENTERS

**MADD**

AEGL

# Formula for Fear Based Messages

X is something to fear; therefore, Y should be implemented to prevent X.

Distracted driving is dangerous... stop texting and driving!

***AKA: Yikes this is bad, but here's what you can do!***



# Why Fear?

A primary and universal emotion

Grabs attention

Memorable

Assumes that when people are emotionally confronted with the negative effects of their behavior, they will change that behavior.

Tannenbaum, M. B., Hepler, J., Zimmerman, R. S., Saul, L., Jacobs, S., Wilson, K., & Albarracin, D. (2015). Appealing to fear: A Meta-Analysis of fear appeal effectiveness and theories. *Psychological Bulletin*, 141, 1178–1204.

## **More effective with...**

one-time behaviors versus repeated behaviors

audiences that include more female recipients than male recipients

messages that describe how to avoid the threat

unfamiliar issues versus familiar issues

Carey, R. N., McDermott, D. T., & Sarma, K. M. (2013). The Impact of Threat Appeals on Fear Arousal and Driver Behavior: A Meta-Analysis of Experimental Research 1990–2011. *PLoS One*, 8(5), e62821. <https://doi-org.proxybz.lib.montana.edu/10.1371/journal.pone.0062821>

The effect of threat appeals on driving outcomes, was **not significant.**

**Takeaway:** Threat appeals can lead to increased fear arousal, but do not appear to have the desired impact on driving behavior.

**What else  
works?**

**Appeal to positive  
emotions**

**Strategy #2: Elicit positive  
emotional responses.**

# Appeal to positive emotions

## Joy, Empathy, Compassion, Hope

Suitable substitutions to fear in the promotion of safer behaviors

Nabi, R. L., & Myrick, J. G. (2019). Uplifting Fear Appeals: Considering the Role of Hope in Fear-Based Persuasive Messages. *Health Communication, 34*(4), 463–474. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2017.1422847>

Cutello, C. A., Gummerum, M., Hanoch, Y., & Hellier, E. (2020). Evaluating an Intervention to Reduce Risky Driving Behaviors: Taking the Fear Out of Virtual Reality. *Risk Analysis*, 0(0).

<https://doi.org/10.1111/risa.13643>

**Takeaway:** Positively framed films significantly decreased self-reported risky driving behaviors, and using a fear-based frame not only failed to reduce risky driving behaviors but increased young drivers' self-reported risky driving behaviors.

# Hope

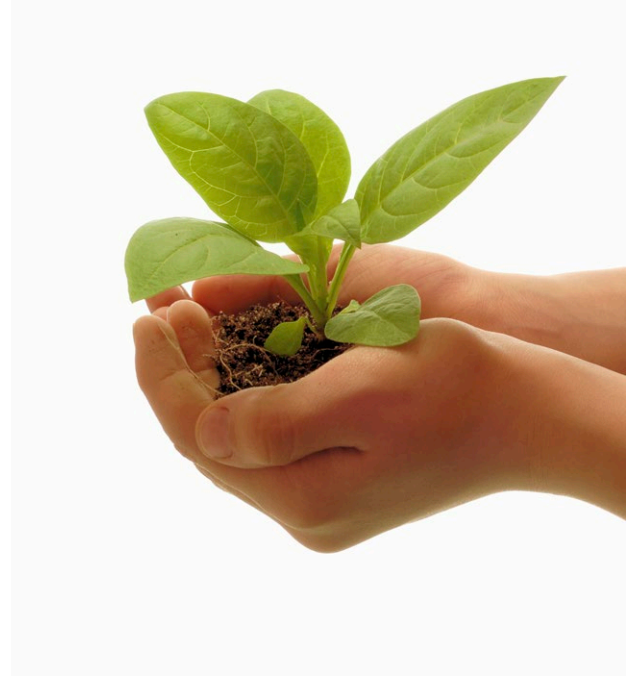
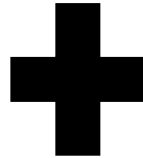
“the **perceived capability** to derive **pathways** to desired goals and **motivate oneself via agency thinking** to use those pathways.”

- **Willingness to move forward** (the will)
- **Seeing a path forward** (the way)

Snyder, C. R. (2002). Hope Theory: Rainbows in the Mind. *Psychological Inquiry*, 13(4), 249–275.

What is the  
difference between  
**concern** and **fear**?

# Concern + Hope



# Raise Concern and Hope

## 4:1 Ratio of Hope to Concern

Fry, R.O. (2011). Leveraging Strengths to Bring Out the Best in Human Systems: An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry.

***We are not thinking  
machines. We are feeling  
machines that think.***

***Antonio Damasio***

# Ask

**How is emotion used in  
the strategy I am  
implementing?**

# Chat Box

**How could I foster hope and concern versus fear in a traffic safety strategy I am implementing?**

# We are influenced by our social context

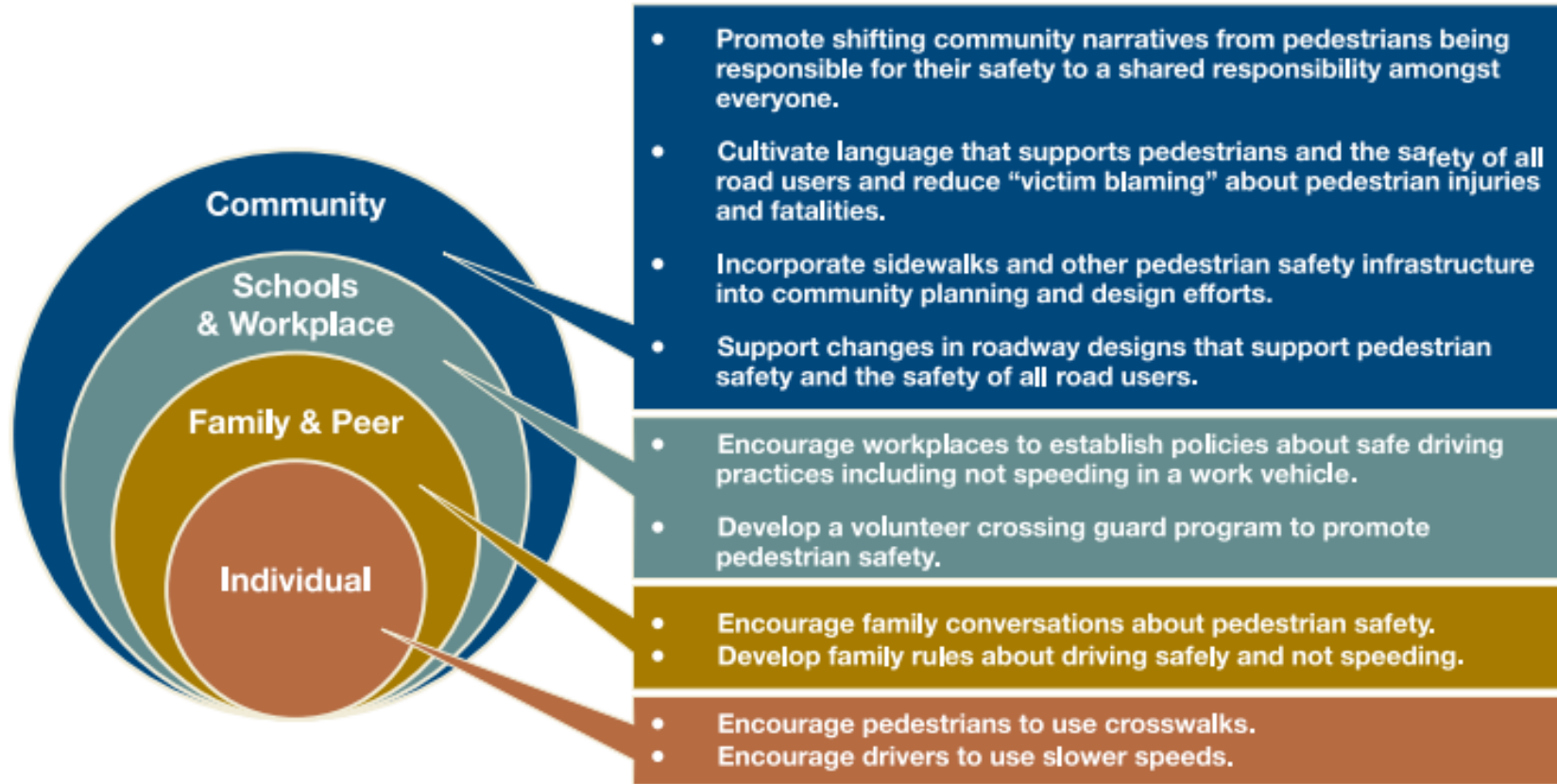
Our behaviors are influenced by those around us.

*If everyone uses their cell phone when driving, that becomes the normal and expected behavior, regardless of the law.*



**Strategy #3: Implement strategies that support behaviors across the social ecology.**

# Actions Across the Social Ecology for Pedestrian Safety



# Ask

**What actions do I want to grow across the social ecology to support this behavior?**

**What strategies will support these actions?**

# Chat Box

**Think about a behavior you are working on. What actions do I want to grow across the social ecology to support this behavior?**

# 3 Strategies

**Strategy #1: Support intentional behavior change through strategies that support thoughtful, deliberate thinking.**

**Strategy #2: Elicit positive emotional responses.**

**Strategy #3: Implement strategies that support behaviors across the social ecology.**

# Large Group Questions

- Which strategy feels most transferrable to your work?
- Which of these strategies is your state/community excelling at?
- Where do you think there are opportunities for improvement?

# Conclusion

- We can use behavioral models to support our work.
- We can think about our work through a cultural lens.
- We can use strategies to influence behavior that are grounded in research.



Thank you!

## Contact Us

Email: [CHSC@montana.edu](mailto:CHSC@montana.edu)

Kari's email: [kari.finley@montana.edu](mailto:kari.finley@montana.edu)

Phone: (406) 994-7873

#CHSCulture



Join our email list for announcements on upcoming events!

[www.chsculture.org](http://www.chsculture.org)