Nurturing caring values, communicating in a pandemic

While not undermining environmental protection now and in the future

Louise Comeau, April 2020

Overview

- Risks and opportunities as we move from pandemic response to recovery

- Summary of converging advice from communications specialists

- Climate change communications in the time of COVID-19
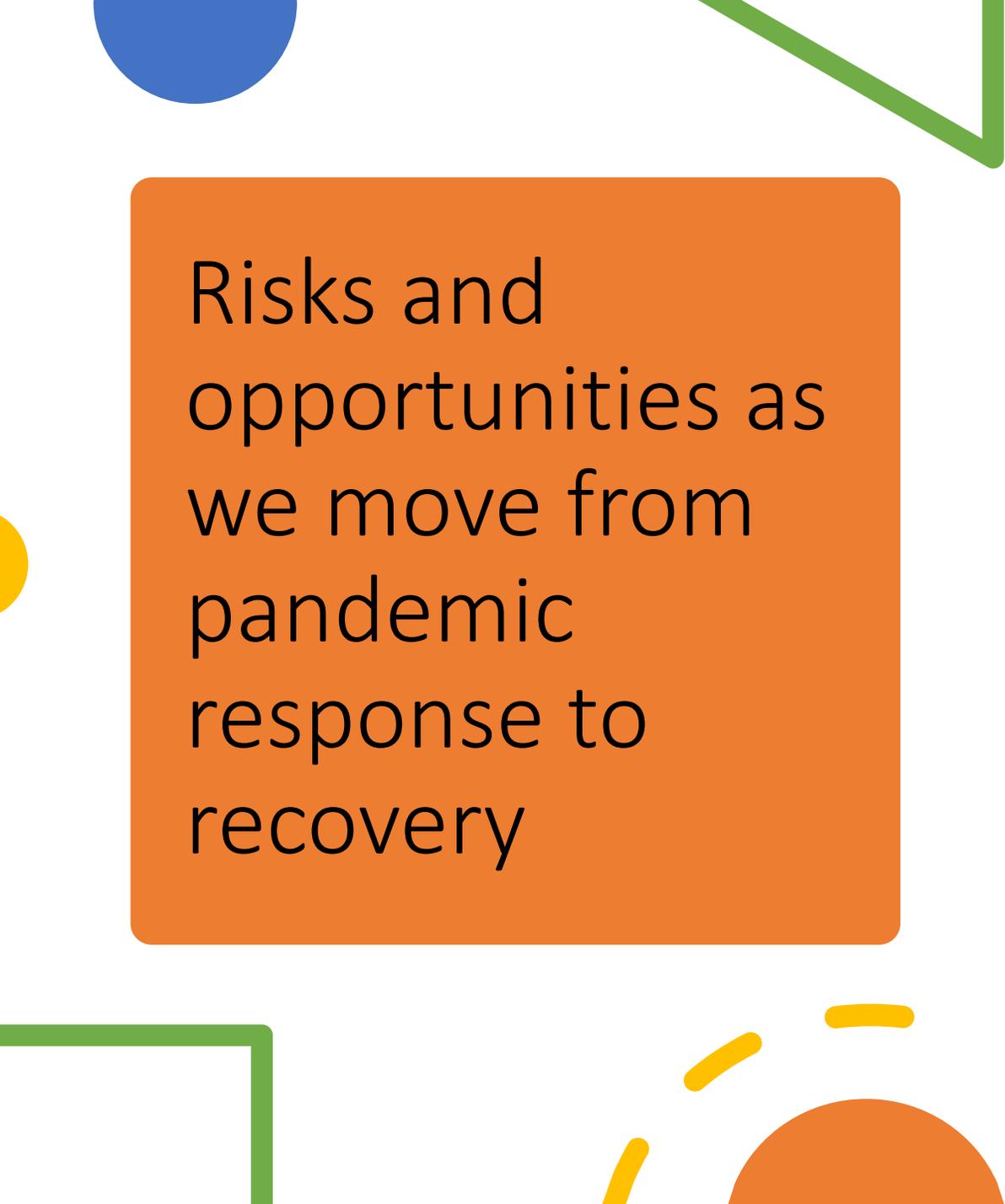
Risks and opportunities as we move from pandemic response to recovery

- Risks
  - Scarcity framing leads to competitive thinking and zero-sum media and opponent narratives: It's climate action or economic recovery; deficit reduction or climate action
  - Environmental communicators come across as tone deaf to public's empathy for all workers
  - We miss the opportunity for transformative change

- Opportunities
  - Collective, caring, sharing values drive framing, narratives and action focused on re-imagining pandemic recovery options
  - We open the policy window wide to let in solutions that transform rather than tinker
  - We secure support for lasting change
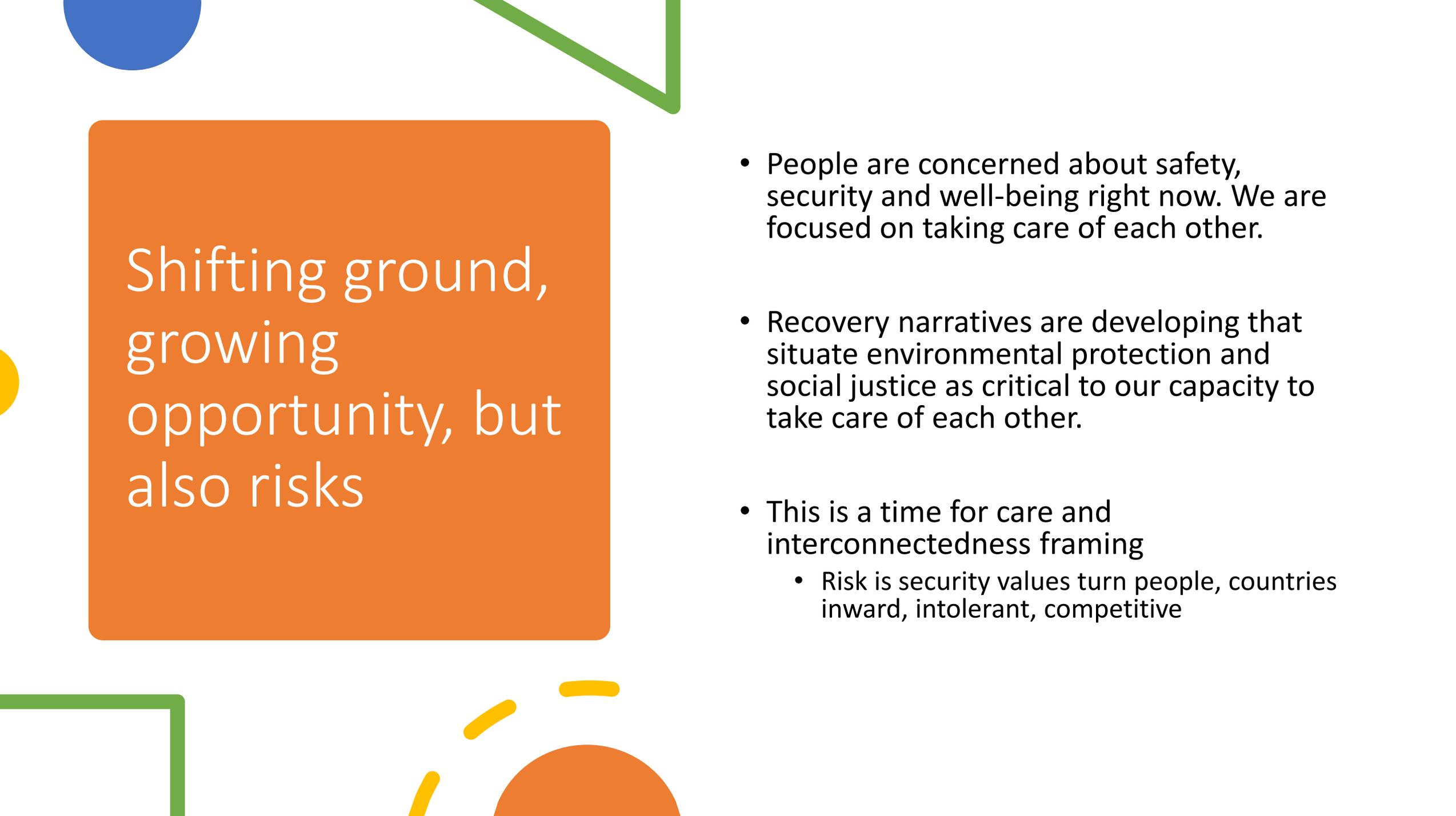
Shifting ground, growing opportunity, but also risks

- People are concerned about safety, security and well-being right now. We are focused on taking care of each other.

- Recovery narratives are developing that situate environmental protection and social justice as critical to our capacity to take care of each other.

- This is a time for care and interconnectedness framing
  - Risk is security values turn people, countries inward, intolerant, competitive

Summarizing expert advice: Communications tips: From MobLab, Frameworks Institute, Public Interest and Climate Outreach (in UK)

- We need resilience thinking to be community, country, global resilience thinking:
  - Emphasize: caring, cooperative, collaborative
  - Solidarity and charity
  - Standing together, responsible for each other
    - These are intrinsic, altruistic values. They are essential to sustaining collective action post-pandemic. We need to nurture these values through WE/US language

Summarizing expert advice: Metaphors to embrace: From MobLab, Frameworks Institute, Public Interest and Climate Outreach (in UK)

- In other words, this is a love story
  - Not a war, crime, fight, race, competition, battle
    - This thinking leads to zero-sum thinking and excuses to abandon environmental protection measures as we have seen in Alberta and the U.S.
- Metaphor: People/country as a body: All parts working together, connected to each other
  - We are:
    - Interconnected
    - Dependent on each other
    - Have responsibilities to each other
    - Can sacrifice for each other's sake
  - Shared humanity
  - Research suggests this is framing in tune with women: we need to engage them
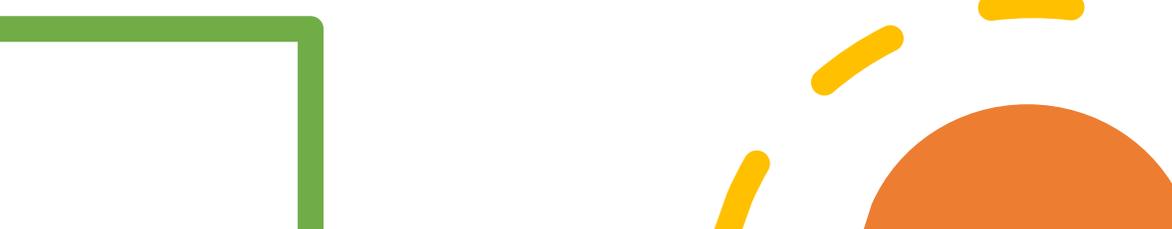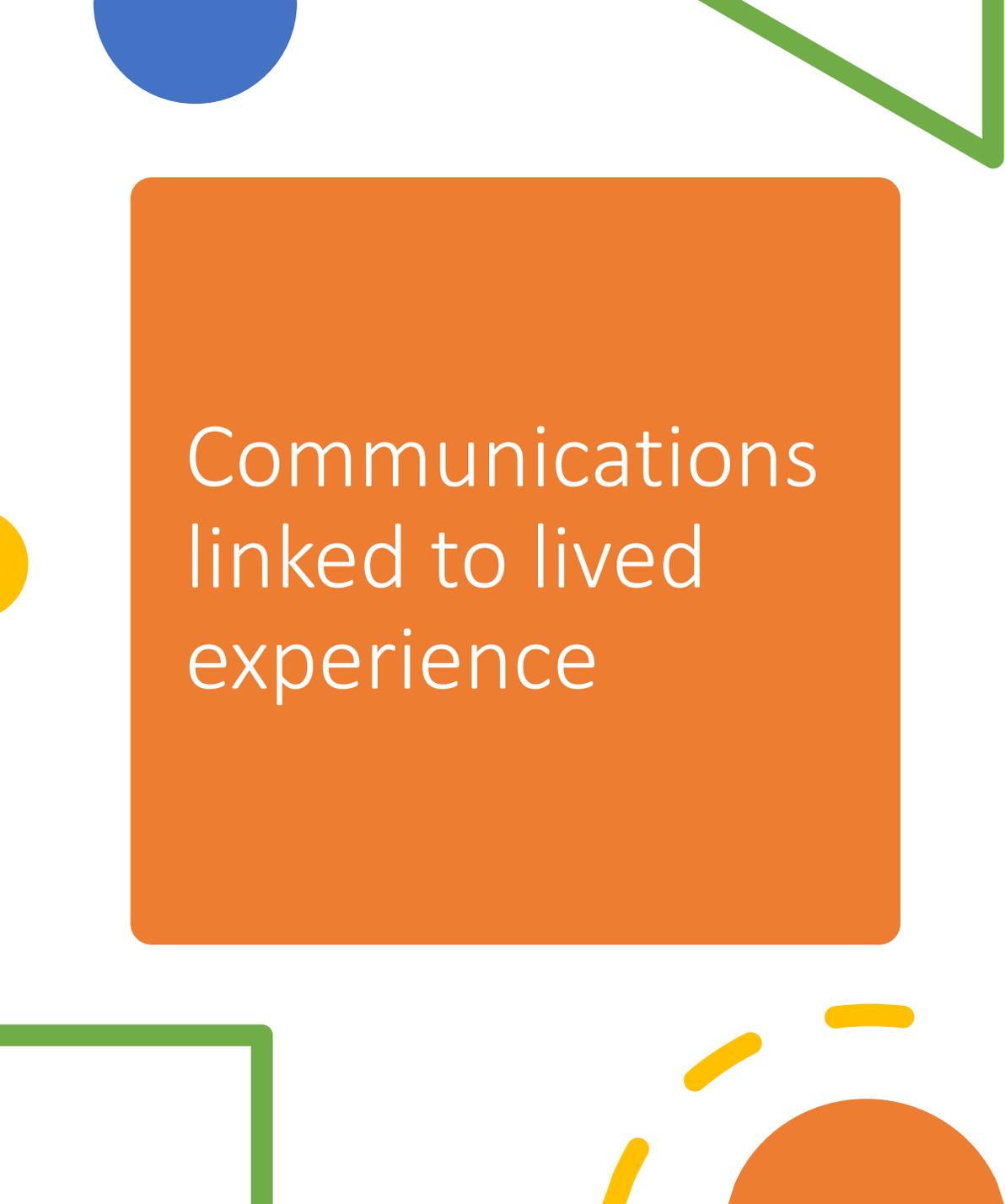
Communications linked to lived experience

- We can give people what they need right now:
  - People are cooking, thinking about gardens/food security
  - Home-based and lifestyle activities that are good for people and planet

- We don't have to talk only about climate change to serve people and the climate

The ground is shifting

- There is soaring demand for seeds/gardening supplies

- People are easing anxiety and desire for self-sufficiency through gardening

- Concerns about food security is an opportunity

- Some memes we are using at the Conservation Council of New Brunswick…

Plant a garden

Hug a tree
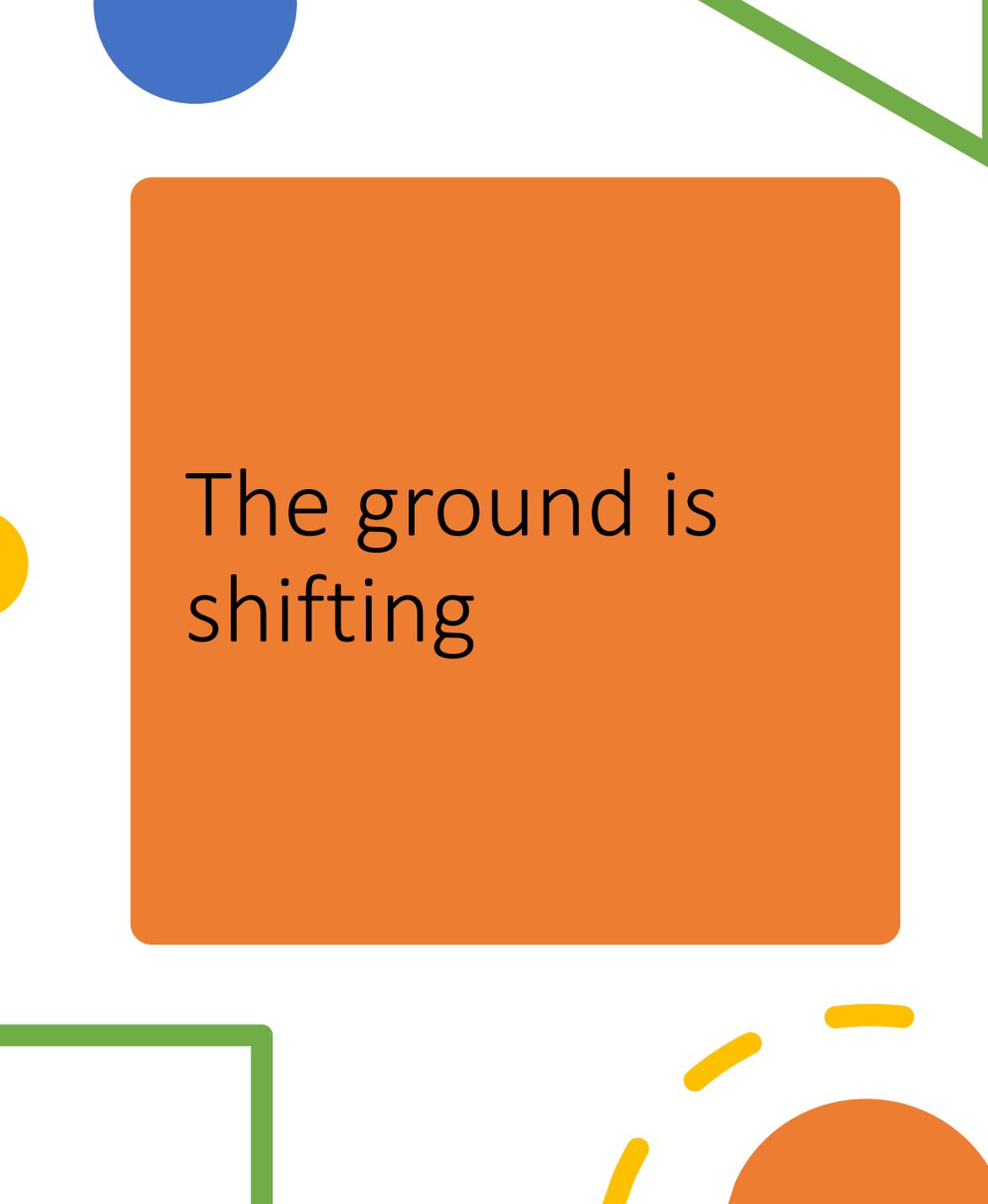
The ground is shifting

- The slower pace, less commuting, working from home have upsides.
  - Leger reports April 21st: 50% of Canadians are working from home and 79% of them report that they are having a positive experience

- Could see more acceptance of teleworking, but also a more balanced life overall

- Could see less acceptance of flying/cruising

- More acceptance of government role in protecting Canadians and in environmental regulation and policies

The ground is shifting

- Leger reports: "Canadians are becoming more aware of the importance of buying local.
  - *With their consumer world turned upside down since the beginning of the crisis, more and more consumers are buying locally. Canadians say they are buying local products more often or for the first time.*
- Food and health are at the heart of Canadians' concerns
  - *Cooking with basic ingredients is the fastest-growing habit across the country."*

We are moving into recovery phase communications: Let's be careful and thoughtful

- Don't talk about economic stimulus: Talk about just recovery, rebuilding, renewing, reimagining
  - These are "journey" metaphors
- We too quickly fall into reform thinking and messaging
  - For the last 30 years we have spent too much time on the inside game, modest reform
- We want recovery, economic resilience, ecological resilience and community and personal and social preparedness to be secure, safe and healthy

- We need a cultural discourse that generates lasting change
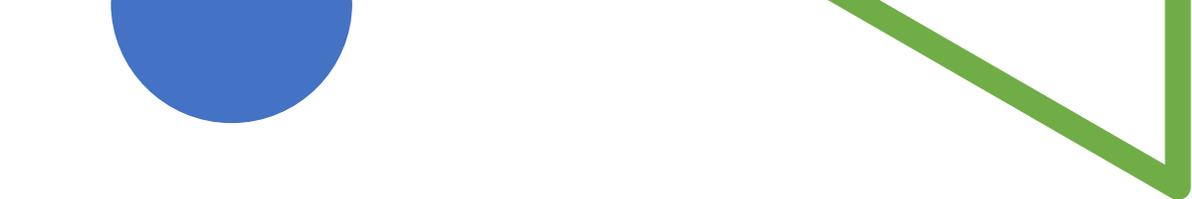
Recovery framing: Summarizing expert advice: Communications tips: From MobLab, Frameworks Institute, Public Interest and Climate Outreach (in UK)

- Recovery solutions framing is an opportunity for social and environmental solutions:
  - Protecting the most vulnerable: guaranteed annual income/minimum wage improvements
  - Show solidarity
  - Look for the intersectionality to build community
  - Nurture setting aside differences and focus on large wins for everybody with emphasis on most vulnerable and most affected: this is the just recovery, re-imagination story

This is also a teachable moment

- We can re-educate people on what it means to be prepared

- That includes having resources on hand at home and in our communities

- Safe, secure and healthy is achievable in ways that sustain the environment and slow climate change

But let's not be naive

- But we still need to confront efforts by power elites to control framing, economic recovery focused on "yesterday's solutions" (Ed Maibach, George Mason, Climate Access webinar)

- We need to call out attempts to undermine environmental protection as was done last week with the leak of CAPP's letter

Climate change communications in the time of COVID-19

Climate change strategic plans, campaign tactics upended, what now?
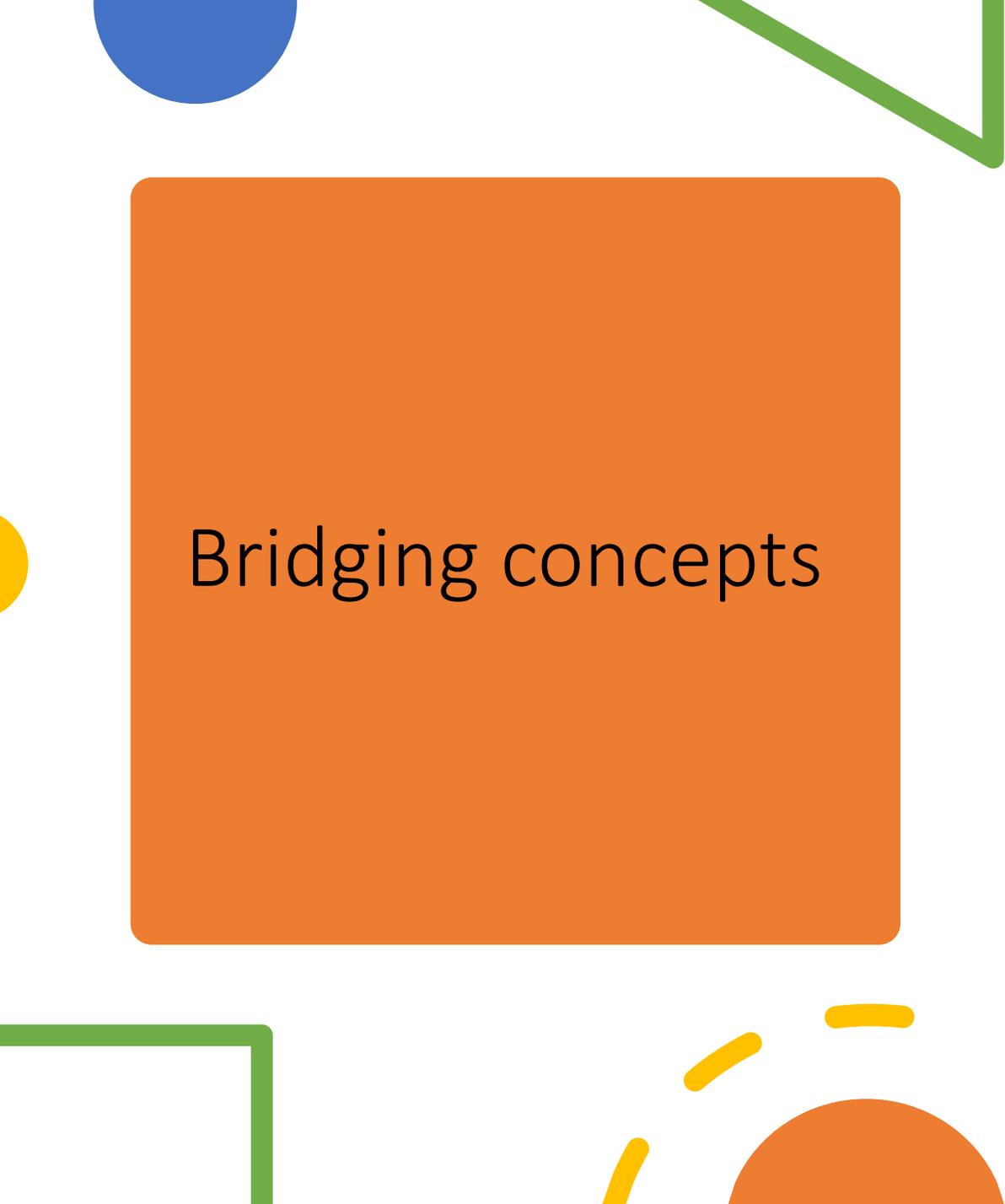
Bridging concepts

There are similarities between pandemic response and climate change response:

- Requires global response
- Collective action is needed
- Foster conversations on how as a planet we should live together
- Requires government intervention and regulation

- These may be bridge points that can be made in post-recovery communications
  - Not clear the moment is now

Be sensitive to where your audience is at and their needs

- We do need to be sensitive to timing:
  - What does the public need at any given moment?
    - Moving target but media starting to look for recovery stories
      - Recovery phase is opening door to solutions framing

- BUT keep policy discussions for policy-makers for now
  - Inside voice to provide detailed proposals for pandemic recovery and re-imagining solutions

- The public: Be cautious about triggering fear
  - Attend to the need to grieve, frame solutions as making us feel safer, more secure, healthier
  - For the Love of…Women will be key

Issue
COVID-19 triggers strong security values displacing other values. Climate change communicators must articulate a vision of how a climate friendly world keeps families and communities safe, secure and healthy making it a desirable vision for investment and economic recovery.

Challenge
To rise above our COVID-19 fears and be heard, we need a story showing how we can reduce inequality and have a climate-friendly world that keeps people safe, secure and healthy.

The Story
Safe. Secure. Healthy. That's what we want for families and communities. Let's take care of each other by reducing inequality. Let's take care of each other by protecting the environment. We can invest in affordable, reliable and renewable electricity to power our lives. We can build greener infrastructure, local food supply, gardens, and green spaces. Let's use economic recovery to create a safer, more secure, and healthier world.

Solution
Frame climate change solutions as solutions that make Canadians safer, more secure and healthier, while putting people to work, cutting pollution, reducing inequality, and taking care of each other. #BetterthanNormal to #BeWell

Opportunity
We can frame a narrative that builds an accurate mental model of the sources of air and climate pollution and that links safety, security and health concerns to reducing inequality, and environmental destruction.

Questions
Discussion

Language to bridge divides

Frank Luntz, conservative phrasing left of the "OR"; liberal right

- Cleaner, safer, healthier OR Sustainable/sustainability
- Solving climate change OR Ending global warming
- Reliable technology/energy OR Ground-breaking/State of the art
- New careers OR New jobs
- Peace of mind OR Security
- Working together OR One world

Focus groups: Bridging language: Women and ideological divides

All age cohorts prefer:

- New careers
- Peace of mind
- Working together

Older women (35 years old and older) prefer

- Cleaner, safer, healthier
- Reliable
- Consequences
- (18 to 34: Sustainable, as well as ground-breaking)

We created narratives for women we tested in a survey:
Climate change primer, Vulnerable

Is climate change something we really need to worry about?

How can a degree or two make much difference to the weather?

What happens when human activity heats the Earth?

We stand at a crossroads. Which future will we choose?

We can work together to prevent this climate crisis. We can make our communities better, and have peace of mind. let's get started.

We created narratives for women we tested in a survey:
Vulnerable, Take a stand, Be a hero

WE STAND AT A CROSSROADS. WHICH FUTURE WILL WE CHOOSE?

CLIMATE CHANGE HARMS THE MOST VULNERABLE. THAT ISN'T FAIR.

WE CAN PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE, BUT WE NEED TO ACT NOW TO BUILD THE FUTURE WE WANT

TO BUILD THE FUTURE WE WANT, WE NEED TO CONFRONT IGNORANCE, SPEAK TRUTH TO POWER, AND BE A CLIMATE HERO

WE CAN WORK TOGETHER TO SOLVE THE CLIMATE CRISIS. WE CAN HAVE PEACE OF MIND, BUT WE HAVE TO TAKE A STAND. WE HAVE THE POWER TO TURN THE CLIMATE CRISIS AROUND.

We created narratives for women we tested in a survey: **Vulnerable, Turnaround decade, Take charge**

CLIMATE CHANGE HARMS THE MOST VULNERABLE. THAT ISN'T FAIR

WE CAN PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE, BUT WE NEED TO CONFRONT THOSE IN POWER PUTTING OBSTACLES IN OUR WAY

TO BUILD THE FUTURE WE WANT, WE NEED TO TAKE CHARGE

CHANGE IS NOT EASY. WITH HARD WORK, WE PERSEVERE TO MAKE THE NEXT 10 YEARS THE TURNAROUND DECADE

SORRY IS NOT ENOUGH. WE CAN WORK TOGETHER TO SOLVE THE CLIMATE CRISIS. BUT WE HAVE TO TAKE A STAND

Summary

- We need to go back to basics:
  - Explain the basics of climate change, how it works, and why it's changing, explain risk to our most vulnerable
    - Blanket metaphor, Bathtub metaphor
- We need less focus on technology, and policy at least until we bring people into the CCNB fold: work them into it!
- Solutions focus for women:
  - Use narratives to build agency to engage on conversation
  - Connect climate change to women's lived experience with households, food, waste and travel
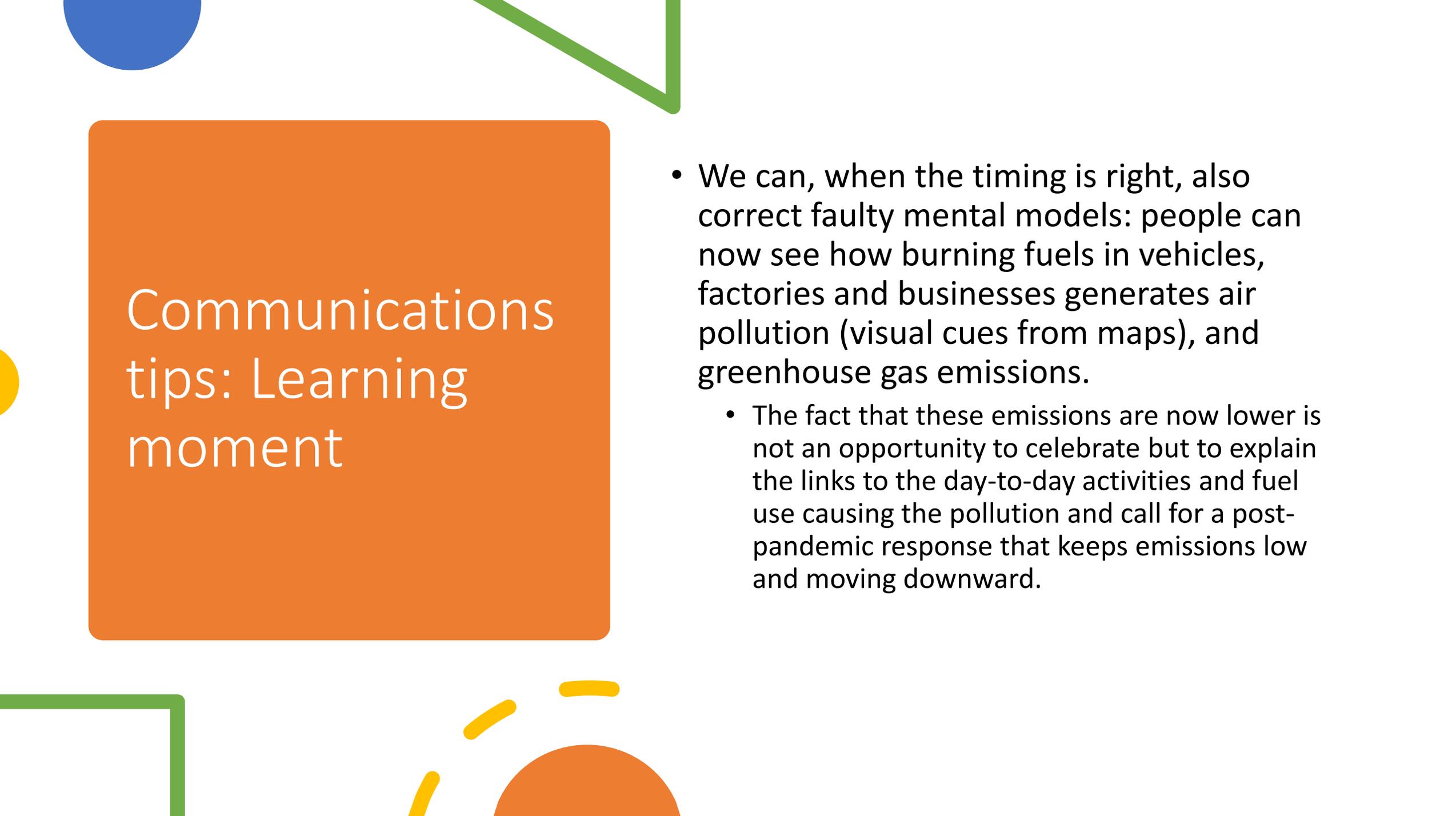
Communications tips: Learning moment

- We can, when the timing is right, also correct faulty mental models: people can now see how burning fuels in vehicles, factories and businesses generates air pollution (visual cues from maps), and greenhouse gas emissions.
  - The fact that these emissions are now lower is not an opportunity to celebrate but to explain the links to the day-to-day activities and fuel use causing the pollution and call for a post-pandemic response that keeps emissions low and moving downward.
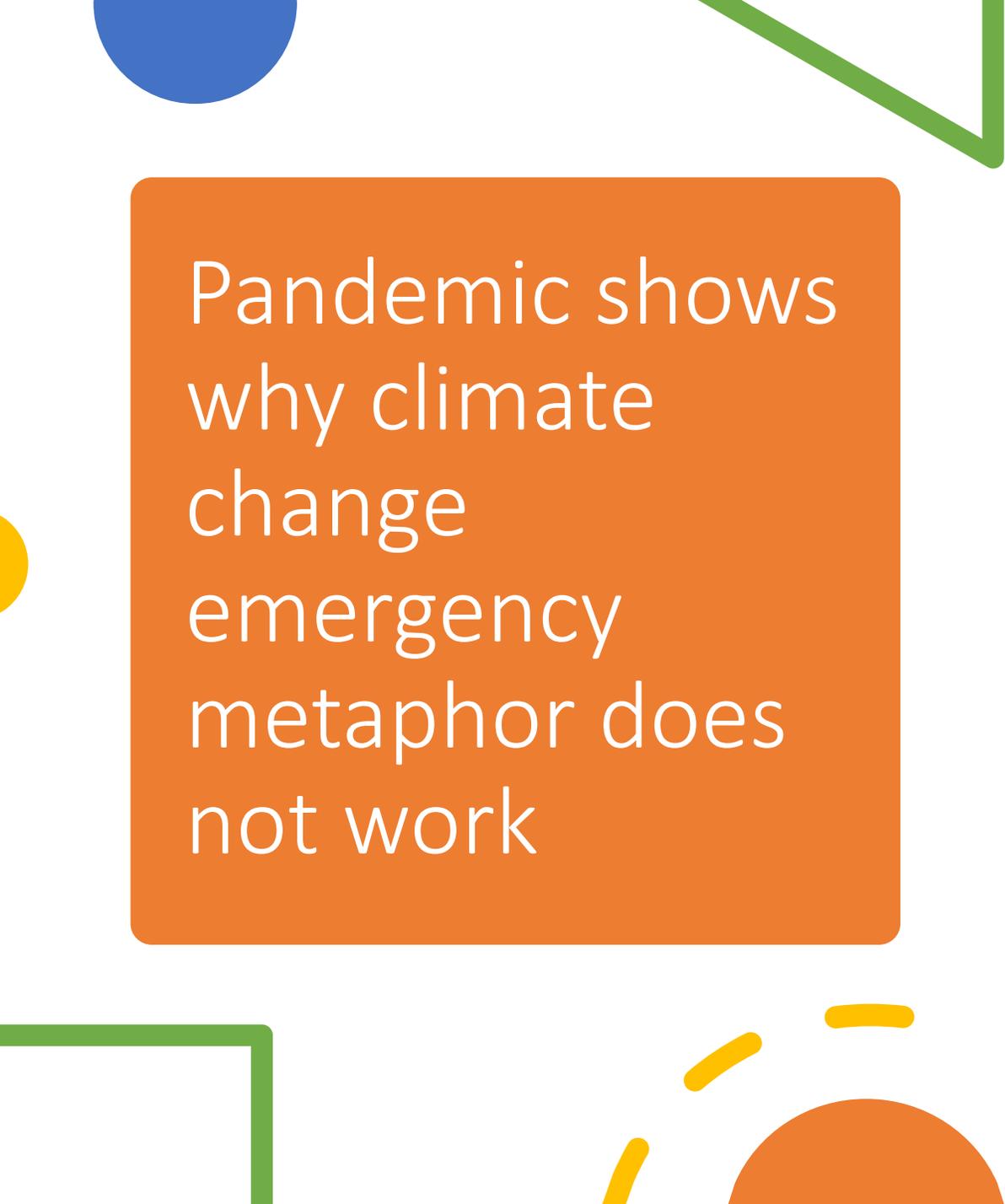
Pandemic shows why climate change emergency metaphor does not work

- COVID-19 pandemic IS an emergency generating an emergency response
  - The pandemic response demonstrates WHY it is a mistake to call climate change an emergency
- Climate change is not an emergency in the way a non-specialist understands the concept: COVID-19 is
  - Climate change is a crisis that weakens our ability to keep each other safe, to protect each other from future pandemics or other extreme events
  - What happens when there is a pandemic and flooding or wildfire and we can't protect people in common locations?: Highlight parallels: Be prepared!