

## Tips for Talking with the Media

- **Spell out your preventive solutions at the top of the communication.** The public often believes the only solutions to child abuse lie within the legal system. To make a case for prevention – a vague word on its own:
  - ✓ describe actual prevention activities that engage your community
  - ✓ explain why the prevention activities are needed and are successful
  - ✓ connect the dots for people so that prevention programs make sense to them
  - ✓ avoid implying that fixing “bad” parents is the end-all solution
  - ✓ bring in additional community players and use non-traditional “messengers” as advocates for prevention
- **Avoid vivid, dramatic details and the focus on the worst cases** as these only serve to reinforce people’s current understanding of abuse as specifically a criminal issue. When exposed primarily to dramatic cases (which the media favor), people tend to conclude that abuse is inevitable because it involves bad people who are bad parents. The solution that makes sense to them, then, is to remove children from danger and punish those responsible.
- **Wherever possible, tell stories of efficacy**
  - ✓ demonstrate how programs and policies have worked for the benefit of children by predicting and addressing abusive situations before they happened
  - ✓ increase examples of situations, not people or episodesFor a list of approaches and success stories, see the Child Welfare Information Gateway’s page at [Topics - Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)
- **Forget the numbers for explaining the prevalence of abuse**

People believe it is a big problem and they tend to overstate it numerically (as they do many social problems they deem important). Correcting their error is only likely to result in diminished concern for the problem. Therefore, it is not a good idea to pair prevention activities and announcements with the release of your state’s annual child abuse statistics. Also remember that if you give these numbers to the media, the story will almost certainly lead with them and a focus on the problem which takes the emphasis away from prevention.
- **Stop fighting the fight we have won** by continuing to convince people of the prevalence and seriousness of child abuse. It is time to shift to deepening citizens’ understanding of the problem and its solutions. We believe child abuse prevention is not receiving adequate public support not because people aren’t

outraged by the issue, but because they stop at outrage and lack credible solutions beyond reporting episodes of abuse.

- **Try to get multiple actors into the picture** and broaden the discussion to the larger community
- **Avoid communications that imply that abuse is only a family issue to be solved by governmental agencies who “save” or “punish.” Emphasize community responsibility and resources available for assisting parents and caregivers.**



## General Tips for Working with the Media

- **There is no such thing as “off the record” and you need to be comfortable with taking the risk that anything and everything you say may be printed or aired.**
  
- **Be sure that those identified as “contacts” for the media:**
  - ✓ are easily accessible
  - ✓ are informed and knowledgeable of the topics/issues
  - ✓ will respond promptly to media calls and requests
  - ✓ understand that they are spokespersons for the organization and should not express their personal opinions or agendas
  - ✓ will present a professional image
  - ✓ know that it is okay to say, “I do not know but I will find out for you or you could contact \_\_\_\_\_ who should be able to answer that for you.”
  
- **Stay on message.**
  - ✓ Narrow your message to one or two central points that you want to get across and stick to them.
  - ✓ You do not have to explicitly answer every question a reporter poses.
  - ✓ Answer every question in such a way that it reflects your key message.
  - ✓ Do not repeat something a reporter says that is not part of your point, even to disagree with it. For instance, by saying “child abuse is not just dramatic cases of parents killing their children,” you remind your audience of parents killing children.
  
- **Emphasize that prevention is about solutions to child abuse.**
  - ✓ Do not leave the word “prevention” unexplained.
  - ✓ Describe or suggest solutions.
  - ✓ Keep in mind that reporters will usually try to move you back to drama and tragedy.
  - ✓ Stress that child abuse is a problem with solutions that do not receive the attention they should.
  - ✓ Explain that the public cares deeply about child abuse but does not know what can be done about it.
  
- **Reporters will want data and statistics.** Instead of supplying them with the traditional child abuse statistics on reports, substantiations and deaths,

give them stats on efficacy. Provide examples of what prevention strategies are working in your community:

- ✓ mentoring
- ✓ after school programs
- ✓ parenting support groups
- ✓ parenting skills classes
- ✓ voluntary home visiting

Provide them with:

- ✓ Numbers of people reached with these services
- ✓ Impact of such services

### **General Media Tips, continued**

- **Letters to the editor are a great way to reach a general audience.**
  - ✓ Keep them short.
  - ✓ Be focused on one or two points.
  - ✓ Include a call to action whether it is to support specific legislation, display blue ribbons, or to learn more about a prevention program or service.
  - ✓ Develop an articulate group of volunteers who can write letters so that the letters do not always come from one source.
- **Become “experts” on the media in your community:**
  - ✓ Know their deadlines for going to print or being aired
  - ✓ Arrange your activities to coincide with their deadlines
  - ✓ Know what kinds of stories or features they generally cover
  - ✓ Get contact information for specific reporters or contacts and send your releases and advisories to the most appropriate person, not a general position
  - ✓ Talk to them to learn how they like to receive information – email, hard copy, phone call
  - ✓ Find out what they consider “newsworthy”
  - ✓ Convene an annual Media Advisory Board to get their input and feedback on how your Council could improve its media relations
- **Avoid using abbreviations, contractions, and the “alphabet soup” in your printed and verbal communications.**
- **Be sure that you collaborate with other social and human service entities in your community so that you are aware of the resources they offer and can refer media to the appropriate contacts at their agencies or organizations.**
- **Try to maintain consistency of the contact person(s) over a two to three year period so that positive relationships can be established.**

- **Include reference to your Council’s affiliation with Prevent Child Abuse Indiana as a way to enhance the breadth and credibility of your resources and information.**
- **When possible, give them “leads” or story ideas that have no direct relationship to your Council. This will help to build their trust and confidence in your Council as a “connected leader” within the community.**



## Samples of Specific Media Opportunities/Tools

- **Sample Language for Letter to the Editor for April**

Based on the guidelines above, here is some general language about Child Abuse Prevention Month that could be adapted for press releases announcing events, letters to the editor, or website announcements.

*The month of April is devoted to celebrating everything we can do to transform our community into a place that cares about – and actively supports -- families and children. By ensuring that all parents in our community have access to quality childcare, affordable health services, parenting education resources, and substance abuse and mental health programs, we make progress toward what the month stands for: April is Indiana Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Awareness Month.*

*The majority of child abuse cases stem from situations and conditions that are entirely preventable in an engaged and supportive community. A community that cares about early childhood development, parent support and maternal mental health, for instance, is more likely to see families nurturing children who are born healthy and prepared to enter school ready to learn. Cities and towns that work to create effective school systems and who come together to ensure that affordable housing is available in safe neighborhoods are less likely to see stressed, isolated families who do not know where to turn.*

*Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Awareness Month is about connecting all of these dots so that the solutions to child abuse receive the attention the public craves. In a recent poll, 89% of Americans reported that child abuse was a “very important” moral issue to them<sup>1</sup>. But it is not enough to care about the problem and address its consequences. We have to pay attention to the kinds of efforts that will prevent it from happening in the first place. So this April, learn more about what you and your community can do to support families and parent, thereby preventing child abuse. It is a shared responsibility and we are stronger together.*

*Find out more about child abuse prevention in your community [add contact information here].*

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<sup>1</sup> Scripps Survey Research Center at Ohio University, February 2005

- **Sample Interview Answers Regarding Dramatic Fatality or Case of Abuse**

The following are actual questions posed by a CNN interviewer following a dramatic child abuse case. The suggested answers are based on the guidelines above.

**Background:** “The gruesome killing of a six-year-old girl grabbed headlines earlier this week. She was found dead in a hotel room strangled, stabbed and beaten. Police say the child was brutalized and have charged her parents with murder. This case is raising questions about the frequency of child abuse.”

**Q:** First of all, this case is not an isolated incident. Abuse of children is happening by the thousands in this country every year, isn't it?

**A:** We are certainly losing too many children to conditions and situations that are entirely preventable. Child maltreatment happens when people find themselves in stressful situations and don't know how to cope. There are plenty of sensible ways to prevent that from happening. We know much about the kind of support that families need, and how to create the kinds of communities that really value kids. One example of a program that is successful at this is Healthy Families Indiana, a community-based program that offers all kinds of useful information to new parents. This kind of program bolsters parents' confidence, reduces stress and isolation, and – importantly – sends the message to parents that information and support is available.

**Q:** You know, as a parent, it is hard to fathom why a parent or caretaker would hurt a child. Help us get some understanding of what brings them to this point.

**A:** We know what causes child maltreatment, and many of those causes are linked to the changing nature of our communities – increased economic stress and isolation combined with fewer resources to support families, particularly those that face special hardships or challenges that are common for many of us. Conditions such as the addition of new children to the family, job loss, divorce, poverty, and substance addictions – and the stress and isolation that accompany these – can also be breeding grounds for maltreatment, increasing the risks. Communities can make sure that parents have access to the services that reduce risk factors for abuse – such as programs that work to strengthen families and increase parents' knowledge and confidence about parenting and child development. We can – and should – provide families with adequate, accessible and affordable resources such as child care and parent education. By keeping focused on anything that leads to stable families and healthy child development, we help to reduce the likelihood that child abuse ever occurs in the first place.

**Q:** You know, having been personally involved with this cause, I know that this is a sort of vicious cycle -- people who have been abused often become violent people or criminals.

**A:** It is certainly true that children’s early years are extremely important in terms of their development, and that getting them off to a good start lessens the likelihood that they will have problems later on. We know, for example, that adverse childhood experiences can be responsible for not only an increased likelihood of criminal behavior, but also poorer performance and negative behaviors in school, increased substance abuse, health problems such as heart disease and obesity, and increased likelihood of risky behavior such as smoking. We can get ahead of all of these negative outcomes by making sure each child has a healthy, safe and nurturing environment. The way to do that is to support their families and engage all sectors of the community.

**Q:** Well, I know that Healthy Families Indiana and other home-based parenting support programs are helping to stop the cycle. So, help us to understand the facts.

**A:** Healthy Families Indiana and other home visiting programs such as Parents As Teachers work with new parents in their homes to increase their confidence in parenting. It is a community-based approach that works with other services across a region so that parents know what is available to them. This kind of support can be helpful to all parents, but particularly those that might be feeling isolated or unprepared. It is a great way for them to become engaged in their communities early on and to help create healthy environments for their children.

**Q:** I know you do not go in and target people that necessarily have the potential to abuse, but what are some of the risk factors? I mean, this is something that spans over all socio-economic groups.

**A:** Raising children is tough even under ideal circumstances and fewer families today have the luxury of living in ideal circumstances. Whenever and wherever you combine increasing stress on the family with a lack of community resources to support families and parents, you are creating a situation in which child abuse and neglect are more likely to occur. We need to build communities that really value children and strengthen all families in the important job of raising their kids, and provide all families with access to early childhood programs, reliable childcare, and accessible parent education and support services. We also need to offer programs and services to address the more extreme problems that families face – such as loss of income, substance abuse, special needs children, or mental health issues.



## How to Provide Examples of Effective Prevention Strategies

When relating stories of successful prevention strategies, it is important to connect the dots from the program to the prevention of child abuse. Given the public's overwhelming tendency to think about child abuse in its worst forms, the term "child abuse prevention" holds little meaning to them outside of reporting. Thus, describing a parent support program as an example of child abuse prevention will not make sense to them without some explanation. The Children's Bureau connected these dots well in its *2005 Child Abuse Prevention Month Packet*. The following is adapted from it:

- Community leaders are increasingly thinking about the personal, family, and environmental matters that strengthen families and reduce the risk of abuse and neglect. Research shows that while some things have harmful effects on children and families, others can alleviate those effects and provide benefits to parents and children.
- Successful family support activities and child abuse prevention programs are designed to promote these protective factors, which include:
  - ✓ Parental confidence and knowledge
  - ✓ Strong bonds between parents and children
  - ✓ Family social connections - to decrease isolation
  - ✓ Family knowledge of child development
  - ✓ Effective problem solving and communication skills
  - ✓ Concrete support in times of need

Research has found that the following are effective strategies that family support and child abuse prevention programs can use to bolster these protective factors:

- **Facilitate friendships and support.** Offer opportunities for parents in the neighborhood to get to know each other, develop support systems, and take leadership roles. Strategies may include sports teams, potlucks, classes, advisory groups, board leadership and volunteer opportunities.
- **Strengthen parenting.** Develop ways for parents to get support on parenting issues when they need it. Possibilities include classes, support groups, home visits, tip sheets in pediatricians' offices, and resource libraries.
- **Respond to family crises.** Offer extra support to families when they need it, as in times of illness, job loss, housing problems and other stressors.
- **Link families to services and opportunities.** Provide referrals for job training, education, health care, mental health, and other essential services in the community.

- **Support children's social and emotional development.** Some programs specifically focus on helping children articulate their feelings and get along with others. When children bring home what they learn in the classroom, parents benefit as well.

*Adapted from Building on Strengths: Enhancing Protective Factors for Children and Families, National Clearinghouse of Child Abuse and Neglect Information.*



## Tips for Working with Social Media

Social media — message boards, blogs with reader comment capabilities, podcasts, photo- and video-sharing, and other interactive functions — enable online participation and provides **Prevent Child Abuse** Indiana (PCAIN) and its Councils a new way to reach a new audience committed to preventing child abuse.

As **Prevent Child Abuse** Indiana enters into Social Media Marketing, it is important to use it wisely. Below are some suggestions for Councils that are just beginning to look into social marketing sites as a unique marketing opportunity.

### **Know Your Purpose**

Different social media tools are better at accomplishing specific objectives. For example, blogs are a great way to get feedback on PCAI programs or events from large groups of constituents, while photo-sharing programs are useful for building a sense of community and excitement around new programs or events.

### **Dedicate Resources**

Building relationships in social media requires resources. You need to have a dedicated staff member or volunteer responsible for communicating on a one-on-one level with your audience. That means that this team of people needs to read blogs, manage friend lists, write comments, join groups, upload photos, participate in forums, be active on sites like Facebook.

### **Communicate Early & Often**

Whether it's through newsletters, blogs or even forum posts, get out there and communicate about the great work of PCAIN and your council. By communicating "early" you have the opportunity to get a jump start on topics and trends in the child welfare arena. Communicating often helps to build that relationship with your audience that they can trust you will be there, informing them of the valuable information they are looking for or need.

## **Get Involved**

Use Social Media as a way to have two way conversation. It is important that do more than post links to your blog, or submit press releases in Twitter. Actually get involved with your community. If people are looking for information about PCAI or events and activities surrounding Child Abuse Prevention Month activities, point them in the right direction.

## **Remember to Listen**

Building a relationship requires that you listen more and talk less. Social media offers a unique opportunity for you to get real reactions, learn about real issues or problems as well as successes straight from your audiences' perspectives. It's remarkable the things you can learn from others just by listening to what they are saying. Take the time to read their posts in forums, comments to your blog posts, their Facebook or other social media outlets.

## **Post photos wisely**

Join active groups (activity is more important than size) and share your quality photos on sites such as Flickr ([www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)) with the group. Comment on other people's photos and join discussions. Tag your photos wisely. Link from your blog or Web site to your Flickr photos to gain additional exposure.

## **Learn from other Councils**

Search for other Council posts and groups -- and join. Learn from each other, link to one another's sites, post comments and share information. The best way to continue to spread the great work of Prevent Child Abuse Indiana is to form an on-line community and communicate with one another. Invite others to join the conversations and build a bigger audience.

## **Have fun!**

## **Common Social Media Sites**

- Facebook: [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) – a Web site used to connect with people and share information
- YouTube: [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) - a video sharing Web site where users can upload, view and share video clips
- Flickr: [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com) – a Web site used to share photos

## Web Pages for Prevention Councils

Would your Prevention Council like to have a web page to tell the world about your activities? Many Councils have investigated this possibility, only to find that the expense of paying a professional to design a website and the ongoing expenses of hosting and updating were beyond their means.

Prevent Child Abuse Indiana is now offering a web page for each Chartered Prevention Council. This opportunity includes:

- No design fees: the page comes already set as a template.
- Each page has links to educational information from the PCA Indiana website.
- No hosting fees: each web page is part of the PCA Indiana website
- A unique user name and password so that you can update the content of your page.

The actual web address would be [www.pcaain.org/councils/yourcountyname](http://www.pcaain.org/councils/yourcountyname). We realize that's a pretty long web address, so we're also offering an option of purchasing a unique domain name that would be forwarded to your web page. For instance, a Council in fictional Jones County might choose [www.pcajonescounty.org](http://www.pcajonescounty.org) as their address. People who type this address into their browsers will be redirected automatically to [www.pcaain.org/councils/jones](http://www.pcaain.org/councils/jones).



Web domain names generally cost \$10-20 per year. We can purchase the domain name for you, and bill your Council for the cost.

We can also set up the forwarding as well.

One recommendation is to purchase both the dot org and dot com versions of the domain name. Anyone who accidentally types in the dot com extension will still be directed to the correct web page. This also prevents someone else from purchasing the dot com version of your web address. (Sometimes unscrupulous people do this in order to try to force you to purchase it later at an inflated price by putting up a website that has offensive material on it.)

Most sellers of web domain names offer an email account as well. We can set up the email to forward to a person (or people) on your Council.

If you are interested in this opportunity, call at 317-775-6439

# Reframing Child Abuse and Neglect: A Practical Tool Kit

## Framing Theory Explained

*Adapted from “Reframing Child Abuse & Neglect for Increased Understanding & Engagement”*

*By Kevin T. Kirkpatrick, (Chicago, 2004)*

### Strategic Frame Analysis

Founded in 1999 by Susan Nall Bales, the mission of the FrameWorks Institute is to advance the nonprofit sector’s communications capacity by identifying, translating and modeling relevant scholarly research for framing and reframing the public discourse about social problems. More specifically, FrameWorks designs, commissions, manages and publishes communications research to prepare non-profit organizations to expand their constituency base, to build public will, and to further public understanding of specific social issues.

Since 1999, its funders have included the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the W.T. Grant Foundation, Benton Foundation, David & Lucile Packard Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Foundation, A.L. Mailman Foundation, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation, among others.

The concept of “strategic frame analysis” was developed by Susan Nall Bales in partnership with UCLA’s Center for Communications and Community. Although the concept is relatively new, Bales reports that it is grounded in theory and practice going back to the 1922 publication of Walter Lippmann’s book, Public Opinion. This book represented the first attempt to connect mass communications to public attitudes and policy preferences by recognizing that “the way in which the world is imagined determines at any particular moment what men will do.”<sup>2</sup> The current concept of “frames” harkens back directly to Lippmann’s definition of the “way in which the world is imagined.”<sup>3</sup>

Strategic reframing has been employed by numerous social causes in recent years. Advocates for HIV/AIDS prevention, for example, failed to galvanize widespread public support in the early years of the epidemic at least in part because of the public’s frame of reference on the issue,

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<sup>2</sup> Lippmann, Walter. Public Opinion. (New York: Macmillan), 1922.

<sup>3</sup> Bales, Susan Nall.

which was then limited to the homosexual community and intravenous drug users. It wasn't until the issue was reframed to include children like Ryan White and women like Elizabeth Glaser that status as a public policy (and funding) priority was finally awarded.

In applying strategic frame analysis, Susan Nall Bales describes how the process employs a multidisciplinary team of researchers and practitioners to ask and answer important questions about how the public perceives a specific issue and what consequences those perceptions hold for the policies that advocates wish to promote. The initial goal of the process is to arrive at a situation analysis of what advocates are up against in advancing their issue, and which reframing strategies hold the best potential for galvanizing public support for their positions and policies.

### Framing Theory

As described by Bales on the website for the FrameWorks Institute, framing refers to the construct of a communication – its language, visuals and messengers – and the way it signals to the listener or observer how to interpret and classify new information. In practice, framing recognizes that messages can be encoded with meaning associated with existing beliefs or ideas to allow for easier public comprehension of new information or ideas.<sup>4</sup> To increase acceptance of messages and the likelihood of behavior change, reframing is sometimes necessary.

Strategic frame analysis helps discover existing frames of reference for a variety of issues. It gets at the heart of “how” not just “what” people think about an issue by looking at how people process new information and their patterns of reasoning.

According to Bales, we process information based on our deeply held worldviews and assumptions. Framing theory recognizes that people use “mental shortcuts” to make sense of the world around them. And when presented with new information, we look for “cues” to help us connect the new information to our “stored images of the world.” Essentially, our view of the world determines our frames of reference; in other words our mindset.

Frames then become the organizing principle under which we categorize ideas. Messages and new information enter through specific frames and their meaning is interpreted later. If any

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

information contradicts the initial value or frame conjured up, we discard the new information. Once evoked, frames provide the context in which we process information and solve problems. This processing and sorting of incoming information based on past experiences or our view of the world is called “indexing.”<sup>5</sup>

Susan Nall Bales reports that the frames allow us to process information more efficiently. “If people believe that kids are in trouble (and they do), they will be drawn to facts in a news story that reinforce this notion, and will disregard those that deny it,” she writes. “If the facts don’t fit the frame, it’s the facts that are rejected, not the frame.”<sup>6</sup>

This may help to explain why the public has never come to accept the premise that any parent could be “an abuser,” including themselves.

Levels of Thought

The FrameWorks Institute’s “Talking Children’s Issues,” a CD-Rom communications presentation for the Kids Count network, identifies another important element of frames. According to FrameWorks, issues and ideas come in hierarchies. These ideas direct our thinking and link specific issues to broader issue types and deeply-held, cultural values. Essentially, frames work at three levels, as shown in the chart below:

<b>Level 1</b>	<b>Universal Values</b> <b>Examples:</b> Fairness, Community, Freedom, Responsibility, Authority
<b>Level 2</b>	<b>Issue Type</b> <b>Examples:</b> Civil rights, environment, education, child welfare, law enforcement, health
<b>Level 3</b>	<b>Specific Issue/Policy</b> <b>Examples:</b> Voters’ rights, school readiness, rain forests, child abuse

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

At the highest level of frames, the Institute asserts, are universal values like community, freedom and authority that help the public understand big ideas. When people process new information and address issues and ideas that are unfamiliar, they ask “What is this about?” People will inherently link new information to level one values. It’s important to understand the universal values at level one that your messages and issue triggers, and use these to your advantage.

For example, advocates have historically communicated about child abuse starting from level three, trying to work in the idea of prevention from this level. However, most people get caught up in the horrors and sensationalism of child abuse and don’t move further than level two, making prevention about law enforcement and intervention. To reframe our issue, FrameWorks researchers suggest that advocates learn to communicate messages that start with big ideas and universal values like “children are our future,” and the role of community to better engage the public in understanding prevention.

	<b>Child Abuse &amp; Neglect (Current Frame)</b>	<b>Child Abuse &amp; Neglect (Reframed)</b>
<b>Level 1</b> <i>Universal Values</i>	Justice, Protection, Authority	The Future, Community
<b>Level 2</b> <i>Issue Type</i>	Law Enforcement, Child Protective Services	Child Development, Education
<b>Level 3</b> <i>Specific Issue/Policy</i>	Child Abuse	Child Abuse Prevention

More information about strategic frame analysis and the work of the FrameWorks Institute is available at <http://www.frameworksinstitute.org>.

# Reframing Child Abuse and Neglect: A Practical Tool Kit

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## General Guidelines on Reframing Child Abuse & Neglect

As a result of the reframing research conducted by the FrameWorks Institute and its partners, Cultural Logic and Public Knowledge, four frames were identified – parenting, child abuse and neglect, child development and community – that the field can use to advance a variety of policies and behavior changes. All four frames have assets and liabilities advocates must be aware of when talking about this issue, but the child development and community frames do present the most promise for advocates. There are recommendations for using each frame, which can be found in the Implementing the Research section. However, there are some guidelines relating to general recommendations on graphics and messaging, evaluation, and working with the media and consultants that will also be useful in developing a more effective strategy for communicating about, and advocating on behalf of, child abuse and neglect prevention.

### General Guidelines

While one should follow appropriate recommendations for each frame, the FrameWorks Institute recommends the following general guidelines when developing messages and communications strategies<sup>7</sup>:

- **Solutions must be spelled out early and often, and must match the problem.** Don't choose imagery to talk about a problem like child deaths from abuse and offer a solution of preventative actions for individuals to follow. In most cases, people find child abuse deaths too extreme a problem to help prevent it from happening in the first place. In addition, start communications by focusing on the solutions to child maltreatment, not the problem. Talk about programs and services that help keep families strong and children safe.

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<sup>7</sup> Making the Public Case for Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention: A FrameWorks Message Memo.  
Susan Nall Bales, FrameWorks Institute (April 2004)

- **Define the role of community taking into consideration the challenges of the “Family Bubble.”** Remember that parenting is seen as an individual responsibility of the parents that takes place within the privacy of the family. Outside help is seen as inappropriate and judgmental. Try to bring community in without excluding parents. And don’t cross the line by boldly asserting a prominent role for government or reinforcing the widely held fear that someone will come and take your children away for arbitrary reasons.
- **Be clear and consistent in your calls to action.** Don’t have a call to action asking people to report suspected abuse, in other words “turn their neighbors in,” while asking people to reach out and support parents and families in their community.
- **Choose thematic stories** that deal with issues, trends, the public realm and fixing the condition rather than episodic frames that only deal with individuals, events, the private realm and fixing the person.
- **Avoid triggering cognitive mistakes**, such as portraying children as willful or defining abuse as an internal flaw in people.
- **Choose messengers carefully.** Use unexpected messengers to broaden the discussion to the community and give people a new angle from which to view the issue. For example, use teachers or pediatricians to explain child development, bring in front-line program directors who have worked with kids and families, or use law enforcement officers to speak up for prevention programs. Using a variety of messengers helps reinforce the idea that all members of a community are responsible for the wellbeing and safety of children.
- **Use images that portray a positive, engaged community.** Visuals that accompany a message are strong triggers of existing frames or values and must be in line with reframing recommendations. For example, avoid tight shots of only kids and parents as this image reinforces the “Family Bubble,” and excludes community. Instead, choose visuals that illustrate community interaction with children and families. Be sure to include unexpected messengers in the images as well. Avoid using parents as messengers – except when promoting a parenting program or program retention – as this further validates the “Family Bubble” and the existing tendency to look to other family members or non-experts for advice.
- **Wherever possible, tell stories of efficacy.** Demonstrate how programs and policies have worked for the benefit of children by predicting and addressing abusive situations before they happen. Doing so increases the idea of situations, not people, as the

appropriate focus for child abuse interventions. For additional resources on what works in prevention, see the Child Welfare Information Gateway's Prevention page (formerly the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect) [Preventing Child Abuse & Neglect - Child Welfare Information Gateway](#)

### Campaign Evaluation

In order to have an effective communications campaign and to truly shift public will around child abuse and neglect prevention, advocates must make evaluation a priority. Budgeting for effective evaluation is well worth the time and money involved. It is a critical way to ensure that the campaign reaches the outcomes determined at the onset. Research prior, during and after the launch of new communication strategies will help advocates reach their audiences with the most effective messages. There are a variety of methods that can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of a communications campaign. For example, you could track media coverage of the issue in your community, gauge public opinion of your issue through opinion surveys, and use focus groups to test messages and understand the public's frame of reference.

Evaluating communications is imperative to gauging the outcomes of the campaign and the effectiveness of the messages and strategies. Was your message or strategy effective in changing public will? Did you succeed in shifting the public's frame of reference regarding child abuse and neglect prevention, parenting or child development?

To gauge effectiveness, FrameWorks suggests that communicators ask the following five questions when evaluating communications:

- **What does the suggested message tell people this issue is about, or connected to?** (Is it about child abuse and thus protection and punishment, or is it about healthy child development?)
- **Does the suggested message expand or narrow the constituency for this issue?** (Do we just need to fix bad parents, or do we owe all parents appropriate support and resources?)
- **Does it promote a frame on the issue that favors your position, or does it default to a negative frame?** (The child abuse and "blame the parent" frames aren't as helpful as the "we all have a stake in healthy children" frame.)
- **Does it increase or decrease the salience of the issue?** (Why should the audience be interested? Why should they act?)

- **Does it assign responsibility for the problem to those who have the power to solve the problem?** (Bad parents should learn how to correct their behavior vs. Community members should recognize the value of and support resources for families.)

### Guidelines for Talking to Media

When working with media, the following guidelines will help advocates be more effective in getting their desired messages to the public:

- **Stay on message.** Narrow your message to one or two central points that you want to get across and stick to them. You do not have to explicitly answer every question a reporter poses. Answer each question in such a way that it reflects your key message. Do not repeat something a reporter says that is not part of your point, even to disagree with it. For example, by saying “child abuse is not just dramatic cases of parents killing their children,” you remind your audience of parents killing children.
- **Emphasize solutions to child abuse.** It’s about prevention, but don’t leave the word “prevention” unexplained. Describe the solutions. Keep in mind that reporters will usually try to move you back to drama and tragedy, but you can stress that child abuse is a problem with solutions that don’t receive the attention they should. Explain that the American public cares deeply about child abuse, but doesn’t know what can be done about it.
- **Reporters will want statistics.** Instead of supplying them with the traditional child abuse statistics on reports, substantiations and deaths, give them stats on efficacy. What works? How many people do you reach with services? What has been the impact of such services?
- **Letters to the editor are a great way to reach a general audience.** Keep them short and focused and be sure to include a call to action whether it is to support specific legislation or to learn more about a program.

### Guidelines for Working With Consultants or Agencies

Many organizations choose to work with an outside public relations or advertising agency on a contract or pro-bono basis to produce marketing materials and communications campaigns. However, communications professionals will not necessarily know and understand the reframing research on child abuse and neglect prevention. This information is relatively new to the child advocacy field and it introduces an entirely new perspective on promoting the issue of child abuse and neglect prevention. Make sure that the communications professionals hired are

informed and have a strong understanding of the strategic frame analysis research and how to apply it to the development of your campaign. Following are some guidelines from Childspeak Creative President Anne Durham for increasing consultants' understanding of the reframing research:

- **Provide background information on reframing.** Supply resource materials on reframing at the first meeting with your communications specialist. This toolkit will be helpful, as will the research reports and white papers. The Frameworks Institute website, [www.frameworksinstitute.org](http://www.frameworksinstitute.org), can also provide a thorough background on the philosophy of strategic frame analysis.
- **Use materials from reframed campaigns as examples.** If possible, show consultants before and after samples of materials that have been reframed both nationally and locally. Point out the nuances of reframing in each piece – the messages, the design, the photos, etc. These examples can provide consultants with an excellent starting point for creative development.
- **Be clear about expectations and desired outcomes of the campaign.** Many consultants will be tempted to employ strategies that have been successful for a number of years in evoking emotion and garnering public attention in order to clear through the communications clutter. Sensational stories and images only reinforce the horrors of child abuse and neglect, and do nothing to advance a message of prevention.
- **Review and test reframed messages at different stages of the process.** Developing a reframed campaign may take longer than past initiatives simply because a new way of communicating is being used. Plan to review materials at several points in the development phase and test them with representative groups of the target audience. If formal focus testing is not affordable, look for alternative ways to test the messages with similar audiences, such as childcare programs, parent groups, etc.

Working with an outside agency or consultant to reframe messages can be an exciting yet challenging effort. Make note of what you are learning and share this information with others in the field. This is an excellent opportunity for the child abuse and neglect field to create new messaging together and change the way our culture supports and protects its children.

# Reframing Child Abuse and Neglect: A Practical Tool Kit

FRIENDS National Resource Center for CBCAP 800 Eastowne Drive, Suite 105 Chapel Hill, NC 27514 919-490-5577 x222  
www.friendsnrc.org www.preventchildabuse.org

## **Recommendations for Talking About Child Development** *Adapted from “Making the Case for Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention” By Susan Nall Bales (FrameWorks Institute, 2004)*

### Key Challenges

The biggest challenge in using the Child Development frame is the simple fact that the general public does not have a solid understanding of child development. The public often views children in an emotional way that obscures an understanding of physiological development. This misunderstanding is one of the biggest hurdles advocates face in advancing a social movement to prevent child abuse and neglect. According to the FrameWorks Institute, this frame poses the following challenges:

- The public’s view of children in an emotional way is illustrated by the overuse of folksy terms in discussions about children (i.e., all you need is love, children are like sponges, the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree, etc.).
- The misperception that children are capable of intentionality at very young ages increases the likelihood that age-inappropriate discipline will be used (e.g. corporal punishment).
- Spoiling becomes a bigger concern than over-discipline.
- There exists the notion that children can “pull themselves up by their bootstraps,” and “get over” bad experiences in life; that their success is a matter of character not related to healthy physiological development.
- In addition, there is the misperception that the cycle of abuse is a result of “having learned bad habits” instead of as a consequence of developmental damage caused by the abuse or neglect.
- Ultimately, the misunderstanding of child development leaves no room for understanding the lasting, damaging effects abuse can have on the development of a child.

### Key Message Elements

Crafting messages that center on the importance of an increased understanding of child development offers some of the most promising opportunities for child abuse prevention

advocates. If the public better understood child development, advocates could more easily frame child maltreatment as a detriment to it, giving people scientific – rather than purely emotional and moral – language and frames to use in understanding its causes and solutions. When discussing child development, the FrameWorks Institute recommends that advocates consider the following elements when developing communications:

- **Use new research on child development to get people into the conversation and to reconsider what they know.** Use this new information in a non-judgmental way establishing an informative and reasonable tone. This also connects to Americans' insatiable desire for more and better information.
- **Use simple but highly descriptive models** to help people understand how the brain develops (see section below on Brain Architecture). Do not leave scientific jargon untranslated.
- **Describe the process of child development as affecting the whole child.** As Cultural Logic writes, "messages that incorporate information about the brain must be carefully framed in order to affirm that they are about emotion, character and values, and not just about a child's intellect."
- **Avoid directly addressing highly charged issues like spoiling and spanking.** This is likely to cause people to defend the importance of discipline, even if the techniques are not perfect. Instead, counter them through indirection. For example, describe developmentally appropriate behavior as necessary to increase the odds that a child will thrive and succeed, or describe spanking as a technique that doesn't work well because it makes children weaker in developing self-discipline.
- **Demonstrate alternatives.** Don't tell people what not to do without telling them why and what to do instead and why the latter is preferable. Educate, don't lecture.
- **Tell a developmental story,** by using effective metaphors and models to help people understand that the developing brain is a system that can be damaged and needs nurturing from its environment in order to grow.
- **Back up experts with front-line messengers.** When you rely on scientists and new reports, back this up with people from the community (the unexpected messenger) who can attest to the validity with their own eyes, such as people who run programs for kids, pediatricians or teachers.

### Brain Architecture

In FrameWorks' and its partners' research regarding public perceptions of early childhood development, they identified several barriers to the public's understanding of the topic. A top concern was the aforementioned tendency to think about children in an emotional way often using folksy terms in discussions about children. As a result, the public overlooks the important physiological development of the brain. Cultural Logic researchers developed and tested a simplifying model – a metaphor to increase understanding of a complex issue – regarding brain development. After extensive testing, researchers found the model “Brain Architecture” to be the most effective in conveying the essential features of child development. Researchers caution that simplifying models are not silver bullets to explaining issues. However, when used in conjunction with careful messaging, they can help the public better understand the point, in this case the importance of healthy brain development.

FrameWorks has not yet tested the model's efficacy in furthering specific policy proposals. However, researchers did find that once primed with the model “Brain Architecture” people moved away from thinking about children only in emotional ways, which reinforce the “Family Bubble.”

For instance, according to Cultural Logic, which developed the model:

“When lay people are told that *stress releases chemicals in the brain*, and that these chemicals *weaken brain architecture*, or *hinder its development*, they find this explanation important and memorable. When they understand the situations that can cause a baby to feel stress – including lack of interaction, or interaction with an adult under stress – they are able to extrapolate to the kinds of situations which are detrimental to the development of a baby's brain architecture, including the effects of poverty on families.”

There are several benefits to using this simplifying model in addition to the other key findings and recommendations from the reframing research:

- Helping the public understand child development, could aid in alleviating people's discomfort in interfering with the “Family Bubble.” If brain development is understood as physiological, not just emotional or intellectual, then providing information to parents seems less intrusive and less judgmental regarding their parenting skills.
- When children's development is viewed in terms of building or stagnating the brain – the effects of which benefit or cost society – then we all have a stake in the healthy

development of children. Ensuring that parents know how to deal with stress, understand nutrition and so on is not intrusive in this view, but helps to ensure the health of society's future citizens.

- The research that FrameWorks completed will be widely distributed among those in the field of early childhood development. As a result, advocates and communicators from the field will begin to work “Brain Architecture” into their messages, giving it that much more credibility. This concerted effort could ultimately impact the public's views on child development and help put programs that promote healthy development on policy agendas.

### Sample Brain Architecture Messaging

Following is some language that was developed and used by FrameWorks and its partners to test the term “Brain Architecture.” It illustrates the importance of communication tools such as messengers (doctors are mentioned first, parents very briefly) and tone. It also shows that the term “Brain Architecture” is not a quick fix for explaining development, but a tool that can help people understand the issue better.

“More and more doctors are talking to parents and communities about what they call ‘Brain Architecture.’ Brain architecture refers to the structure of the brain. We now know that if a baby doesn't have the right kinds of interactions in the first few years of life the baby's brain architecture doesn't build itself properly. And if the brain architecture doesn't build itself properly, kids can be at a disadvantage in long term ways. We know a lot about what helps and hurts the growth of brain architecture. What weakens and damages brain architecture is frequent stress – from fear, hunger, or interacting with a parent under stress, for example. Stress releases toxic chemicals in the baby's brain. These chemicals corrode and weaken brain architecture. This stops brain cells from growing and forming connections with each other.”

Conversely, this language can be used to show how positive interactions strengthen and develop the brain. It clearly explains the benefit of early intervention in a child's life without blaming parents. This paragraph cleverly brings the issue of child abuse – though not the *words* – to the surface, providing an opportunity to discuss preventive strategies without triggering ideas that will lead the reader down the wrong path.

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## Recommendations for Talking About Community

*Adapted from “Making the Case for Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention”*

*By Susan Nall Bales (FrameWorks Institute, 2004)*

### Key Challenges

While the Community frame is one solution that presents the most promise, it is not without some obstacles. The FrameWorks Institute cites several challenges of the Community frame:

- A disconnect exists between the broader community, and families and children. Due to the “Family Bubble,” few can imagine an appropriate role for community in promoting families.
- This frame often leads to nostalgia for a time gone by. It reinforces Americans’ deep concern over the loss of traditional values and the deteriorating quality of life, triggering the need for more traditional forms of discipline like spanking.

Despite these challenges, if a positive, contemporary community is clearly defined as the vital link between families, this frame can cross class and reduce the stigma of outside help as only being associated with failed families and troubled parents. It can also significantly help penetrate the “Family Bubble” by creating an acceptable and positive role for outside members of the community.

### Key Message Elements

When defining a role for community, the FrameWorks Institute recommends the following framing elements:

- **Begin with a strong vision or description of community.** Use analogies that define community as the environment in which children, like plants, grow, as well as others that demonstrate how members of a community can have a positive impact on children and families over time.
- **Avoid nostalgia for the “good ol’ days,”** which only reinforces Americans’ deep concern over the loss of traditional values and may, ironically, send them back to more

traditional forms of discipline like spanking. Instead, talk about and use visuals that promote contemporary communities.

- **Avoid creating the idea of community as the safety net for failed parenting.** Show how community is a positive factor in all parents' lives, not just those in trouble. Portray community as a source of positive development and support, not just for the prevention of the negative.
- **Stress community connections,** such as libraries, recreational organizations, schools or community centers, which affect and benefit children and their families. Be careful not to fall into the trap of putting the responsibility on the parents to make these connections or imply that these programs are abundant (leading to the conclusion that only ineffective parents fail to find them).
- **Stress interactivity and mutuality of benefits** – we give to children now so that they can give back to the community and society in the future.
- **Get other community members into the picture, and avoid tightly framed communications that reinforce the “Family Bubble.”** Use unexpected messengers to broaden the discussion to the community. For example, use community elders or pediatricians to explain child development, or bring in front-line program directors who have worked with kids and families. Try to promote trust, as opposed to safety measures required to prevent stranger danger.
- **Show other community actors interacting with children and enjoying it.** Stress that it is a pleasure to be involved in the lives of children and families. Portray community as an attractive place, not a place where children are dumped so their parents can pursue work or bad priorities.



## Pinwheels for Prevention

For over thirty years the blue ribbon was symbol of child abuse prevention. When **Prevent Child Abuse** America was first established, ribbons as symbols of causes were fairly new. These days, though, there are hundreds of causes using ribbons of various colors to bring attention to their message. In fact, the blue ribbon is now also a symbol of prostate cancer awareness.

During the past several years, **Prevent Child Abuse** America and **Prevent Child Abuse** Indiana introduced the pinwheel as a new symbol of the effort to prevent child abuse and neglect.

Pinwheels are a positive and loving symbol of childhood. As a campaign symbol, a pinwheel conveys the message that every child deserves the chance be raised in a healthy, safe, and nurturing environment.

According to **Prevent Child Abuse** America, *"for over a decade, market research consistently has shown that the public views child abuse and neglect as a serious problem. As a national organization whose mission is **"to prevent the abuse and neglect of our nation's children,"** we must apply that research to engage all people in our society to act to prevent abuse and neglect from ever happening in the first place. Therefore, **Prevent Child Abuse** America is proud to unveil its new campaign, **Pinwheels for Prevention**™, introducing the pinwheel as a symbol for child abuse and neglect prevention nationwide.*



*Through this campaign, we will create a national effort to effect measurable change in the public's beliefs and behaviors regarding the prevention of child abuse and neglect. This goes beyond making Americans aware of our issue to motivating them to take an active role in prevention and in their community.*

*The pinwheel represents Prevent Child Abuse America's efforts to **change the way our nation thinks about prevention**, focusing on community activities and public policies that prioritize prevention right from the start to make sure child abuse and neglect never occur."*

Ideas for implementing a **Pinwheels for Prevention** campaign include\*:

- Choose a highly visible location and “plant” a pinwheel “garden.” Equate pinwheels with the number of children served by your agency or the number of births in your community. Use your pinwheels to promote the good you are doing in your community. **Pinwheels, however, do not stand for deaths from child abuse or reported cases of child abuse.** Pinwheels for Prevention is a positive campaign focused on solutions.
- Offer people in your community the chance to make a personal statement in support of your work by purchasing pinwheels.
- Let the media know about your pinwheel garden and its significance.
- Ask your local radio stations to run public service announcements in support of your campaign.

*\*Thanks to **Prevent Child Abuse New York** for these ideas.*

