



Investing in Early Childhood: Reframing the Message

Michelle Hughes, Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina
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Michelle Hughes, MA, MSW

Executive Vice-President

Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina

3701 National Drive, Suite 200

Raleigh NC 27612

(919) 256-6605

mhughes@preventchildabusenc.org

www.preventchildabusenc.org



About Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina and our work with Frameworks Institute....

- ❑ Our communications not effective in moving public to understand/support child abuse prevention
- ❑ Body of research conducted for PCA America
- ❑ Translation of research into communications practice needed MORE support in the field
- ❑ NC Strategic Frame Analysis TM Study Circle



Presentation Goals

1. Increase knowledge of the Frameworks
Institute research on public understanding of child development
2. Increase awareness of Frameworks Institute strategic frame analysisTM and concept of “reframing”
3. Introduce the child development frame



Thinking About Communication

- ❑ What is it good for?
- ❑ Who communicates about our issues?
- ❑ What do we need to know to do it well to advance solutions to social problems?



Communications is a powerful tool for change

- How you communicate defines the problem, sets the parameters of the debate, determines who will be heard, and influences how the public and leaders understand your issue and take action for (or against) your issue.
- Everyone in your agency has the opportunity to communicate and advance your agenda.



How do we communicate effectively?

- ❑ How do people process information – new information about a specific social issue?
- ❑ How does the public already view your issue (what are dominant cultural models)?
- ❑ How can you construct your messages so that the public/leaders better understand and support your issues? (what frames are most effective)?



How We Process Information

- People are not empty vessels that we fill with data and information



- The mind is a swamp of hypotheses based on prior experience, expectation and knowledge. “Schema”



Changing the Lens:

How do humans process information?

- ❑ “**Schema**” are activated by new information
- ❑ Young children are just beginning to process information and develop “schema”
- ❑ Dog \longrightarrow Animal









How We Process Information

- We use mental shortcuts to make sense of the world
- Incoming information provides cues that connect to the pictures (schema) in our heads
- Finding some familiar element causes us to activate an existing picture/story in our heads, and we understand the new information as if it were an exemplar of that old story.
- Understanding means finding a story you already know and saying, ‘Oh yeah, that one.’
- Once we have found (the) story, we stop processing.

- We make inferences about **specific** examples given more abstracted **general** categories.



- ▶ We make inferences and judgments about **specific** social issues by using **general** cultural models



What is a cultural model?

- Cultural models are a small set of shared schema; internalized concepts and values that allow us to accord meaning to new information or unfolding events.
- Widely shared and understood across the society.
- Our mental shortcuts (how we process new information) rely on “cultural models” or “worldviews.”

Henry is a short, slim man. He likes to read poetry. He has been active in environmental and feminist causes. Henry is a(n)

_____.

MOST PROBABLE _____ **LEAST**
PROBABLE

A. TRUCK DRIVER

B. IVY LEAGUE CLASSICS PROFESSOR

C. A TRUCK DRIVER WHO IS A MEMBER OF THE
AUDUBON SOCIETY AND MENSA



- As advocates, we want to trigger cultural models that advance our cause versus triggering dominant cultural models that may work against us.
 - *Early childhood education as investment in North Carolina's prosperity versus overpriced babysitting for parents who should be home with their kids anyways.*
- Framing refers to way we construct a communication — the language used, visuals and messengers — so that it signals to the listener how to interpret and classify new information.



Examples of how frames trigger cultural models:

- ❑ In discussing the need to change tax policy, a political candidate describes his proposal as “tax relief”
- ❑ In an editorial about juvenile crime, the author uses the word “superpredator”
- ❑ Starting a proposal for investing in child abuse prevention by discussing a child’s death at the hand of his parents.



Are You Using the Right Frame?

- Understanding is theory-based NOT data-based; frame-based NOT fact-based
- People will not process new information/new data if it doesn't conform to their existing cultural model (even if their model is wrong)
- **Helping the public to understand and support respite care is NOT about giving them more information, it IS about ensuring the frame you offer is one that triggers cultural models congruent with the solutions you are advancing.**



Frameworks Research on Children and Youth

- ❑ How does the public think about school readiness and the larger context of early child development?
- ❑ Are there dominant models that appear automatic and how do these models affect policy choices?
- ❑ How are these models reinforced in the media and other communications?
- ❑ How can young children's issues be reframed to evoke a different way of thinking, one that reveals alternative policy choices?



Frameworks Institute Research

- Review of materials that advocates use to examine frames advanced
- Meta-analysis of existing public opinion on school readiness and early child development, as well as parenting, child development, child abuse, etc.
- interviews with civically active adults and business leaders
- focus groups with civically active adults in seven states
- Content analysis of 11,000 news stories to see how children's issues covered in six cities
- “Talk Back Testing” of more than 400 informants to identify more conceptual models for discussing early childhood science

Situation Analysis: The Swamp of Early Childhood Frames

Something about “the brain”/
complicated/
can’t understand

Momma knows best
Bad parents
Private not public issue

**Family
Bubble**



**Self-made
Child**

Development is
automatic
Discipline = focus
Stress is good for you
We turned out okay

Achievement

Pre-K = Old K
Hurried Child
Fancy Parents
Flash cards in cribs

Safety
Physical Focus

Control and contain
Community = Predator

Opportunity
Children = future
Begins in school



Black Box of Child Development

- Little understanding among Americans about how children develop – no coherent theory or organizing principle
- **When in doubt, default.** This leads Americans to “default” to three explanations of how children develop
 - The Family Bubble
 - Self-Made Child
 - Safety First



The Family Bubble

- Child rearing takes place inside the family and parents are solely responsible for the way children develop.
- “I think it’s all at home. I think its from the parents. You start your kids out right when they’re young, they are going to stay good”
(man)



When parents are the problem,
government's role is dismissed.

Inappropriate

“They have shifted the burden to the government to raise our children pretty much” (man)

Programs Exist

“They have programs and programs and programs that come out in all sorts of prevention (man)

Too Costly

“It sounds great on paper but the state of Connecticut does not have this kind of money” (woman)



Self-Made Child

- Goal of family-centered child-rearing is to raise a successful and self-reliant child who can “stand on his own two feet in the world.”
- Emphasis on autonomy over interdependence leading to less focus on social, emotional and regulatory development



Safety First

- ❑ Priorities for child-rearing are defensive: protect from harm and disease, keeping children physically safe
- ❑ Fueled by media focus on crime and safety in news coverage of children's issues
- ❑ Physical growth trumps emotional/social development
- ❑ Children as “precious objects”



What do these frames conceal

- **Kids' environments:** housing, neighborhoods, schools, parks, museums, libraries, community resources
- **Kids' relationships:** caregivers, neighbors, other children, adults in addition to parents
- **Kids' healthy development:** five domains, age-appropriate stimuli and opportunities, interactive nature of development between children and their environments
- **Their learning and values:** social, cognitive, emotional and moral. The “hearts, minds, and souls”



What Do We Know?

- ❑ People have minimal access to a working model of child development.
- ❑ When considered at all, it is closed private system.
- ❑ There are strong entrenched cultural models that get in the way of development: family autonomy, safety, individualism
- ❑ The reframes currently in use are not yielding the desired result
- ❑ The main problems to solve are: (1) a concrete understanding of development; and (2) values that attribute responsibility beyond the child and family

What do we want the public to understand?

- ❑ Brains develop over time and brain's plasticity
- ❑ Experiences wire the brain.
- ❑ Children develop within an environment of nurturing, emotionally responsive relationships.
- ❑ Cognitive, emotional and social competence are inextricably intertwined
- ❑ Getting it right early is less costly to society and individuals than trying to fix it later
- ❑ Children's development as a foundation for community development and economic development: the building blocks of society
- ❑ Toxic stress damages the developing brain.



How do we get there?

Frame that allows for:

- Increased public understanding of childhood development and the environmental factors (family AND greater community) that influence development

Thus leading to....

- Increased public support for policies and programs that support children and families



Remember....

- ❑ Helping the public to understand and support prevention/treatment policies and programs is NOT about giving them more information, it IS about ensuring their “cultural model” is one that allows them to see your solutions.
- ❑ We facilitate this by framing our communications. Framing refers to way we construct a communication — the language used, visuals and messengers — so that it signals to the listener how to interpret and classify new information.



Elements of a Frame

- Value
- Context
- Metaphors and Models
- Solutions
- Numbers/social math
- Visuals
- Messenger
- Tone



Framing: Levels of Thought

<p>Level 1</p>	<p>Universal Values Fairness, Prosperity, Freedom, Responsibility, Authority, Charity</p>
<p>Level 2</p>	<p>Issue Type Civil rights, environment, education, child welfare, law enforcement, health</p>
<p>Level 3</p>	<p>Specific Issue/Policy Funding for home visiting; EITC; health insurance for children; capping carbon emissions</p>



VALUES

- ❑ You want your frame to connect to enduring cultural values
- ❑ Values that work well for children's issues: future, opportunity, prosperity, stewardship
- ❑ You want to lead with values in your messaging. Tell your listener what values your issue is connected to.



BEFORE (currently on website which will be redesigned)

Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina is the only statewide, nonprofit organization dedicated to the prevention of child abuse and neglect in all its forms. We are a state chapter of Prevent Child Abuse America with a thriving statewide Prevention Network. Our Prevention Network consists of over 300 organizations and professionals working to implement critical child abuse prevention programs in their local communities.

The impact of child maltreatment is far greater than its immediate, visible effects. Early experiences in a child's life can affect their development and have consequences that last years, even lifetimes. Children do well when their parents do well. And parents do better when they live in communities that actively support families.



AFTER (example of new language)

Today's children are North Carolina's future leaders, parents and workers. Our state's prosperity depends on their healthy development and growth. With the support of engaged communities and nurturing families, all of North Carolina's children can thrive and have the opportunity to grow into caring, contributing, and healthy adults.

Helping our communities and families create healthy, nurturing environments for children is one of the best investments North Carolina can make.



BEFORE

The Adolescent Parenting Program (APP) is a secondary prevention program that was begun in 1984 through the Division of Social Services and transferred to the Division of Public Health in 1998. It is available to teens 17 years of age or younger, who are either pregnant or parenting for the first time. The primary goals of the program are to (1) help participants delay a subsequent pregnancy; 2) assist teens in completion of secondary education of G.E.D., and 3) encourage teen parents to avoid abuse and neglect of their children through promotion of positive parenting techniques.

*The former webpage of the Adolescent Parenting Program at the NC Division of Public Health



AFTER (currently on website)

Ensuring the health and well-being of pregnant and parenting adolescents protects the future of two generations—the young parents themselves and their babies. Supporting adolescent parents to get an education, acquire job skills, improve parenting abilities and prevent future pregnancies will not only ensure self-sufficiency and economic self-support of the young parent, but it will also establish a strong, stable foundation upon which the baby will be raised. The Adolescent Parenting Program (APP) is an investment in adolescent parents that will be paid back by these young people, and eventually by their babies, through a lifetime of productive contributions to their communities.

APP serves first time pregnant or parenting adolescents who are 17 years of age or younger...



Values To Use For Early Childhood

- ❑ Prosperity
- ❑ Future



Context Matters

Different kinds of Stories Set Up Different Policy Solutions

- ❑ As advocates, we want our communications to move from a focus on the individual to a focus on the community (because that is where our solutions lie).
- ❑ Move from episodic stories to thematic stories



- **Episodic frames** reduce life to a series of disconnected episodes, random events or case studies.

"Betty Jones and her family of four are braving the elements tonight because the homeless shelter was full."... Such a news story might go on to describe how the children miss their toys, how cold it is, when they last ate, etc.

- Does not describe trends or conditions that give context to the problem and shape it as a community problem -- how many people are homeless in this city, whether the numbers are increasing or decreasing, or the root causes of homelessness.



- Thematic frames provide details about trends, not just individuals; they identify shortcomings at the community or systems-level that have contributed to the problem.

"The homeless shelter at 4th and Q was full again tonight because of drastic reductions in city allocations, and this situation is taking its toll on families like Betty Jones'. But the mayor says the Jones family will have to brave it because there is no more money in the city to pay"

- Thematic frames help the audience see the solution at the community/environmental/government level versus with individuals only



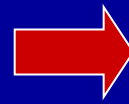
Context

Episodic Frame	Thematic Frame
Individuals	Issues
Discrete Events	Trends Over Time
Personal/Private	Political/Public
Appeal to you as consumer	Appeal to you as citizen
Solution: Better information	Solution: Better policies
Goal: Fix the person	Goal: Fix the condition



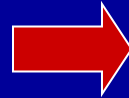
Two Ways of Framing Tobacco

Episodic: Smoking as Personal Vice



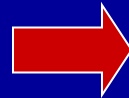
Thematic: Smoking as Defective, Harmful Product

Bad behavior of Individuals



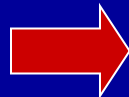
Bad behavior of Big Tobacco

Drug Addiction: Personal Vice



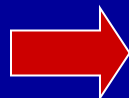
Manipulation of drug addiction

Responsibility of Parents



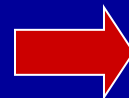
Responsibility of Government

Vital industry



Corrupt industry

Fix the Person: Individual responsibility to just say no



Fix the Condition: Societal responsibility to protect consumers



- If you want to move prevention into the “public square” ...
 - Do not use individual stories as the main focus of your communications. This only reinforces the belief that child development happens in families, is a private issue and not a community investment.
 - Be wary of cuing up the family bubble because difficult to move audience toward public solutions if their thinking is stuck in the bubble.
 - Do highlight the primary role of the community in supporting healthy children and families.



Simplifying Models/Metaphors

- Takes complex issues and uses an analogy to help public understand new information in a familiar context
- Examples: heart is a pump; ozone hole is like a hole in the roof

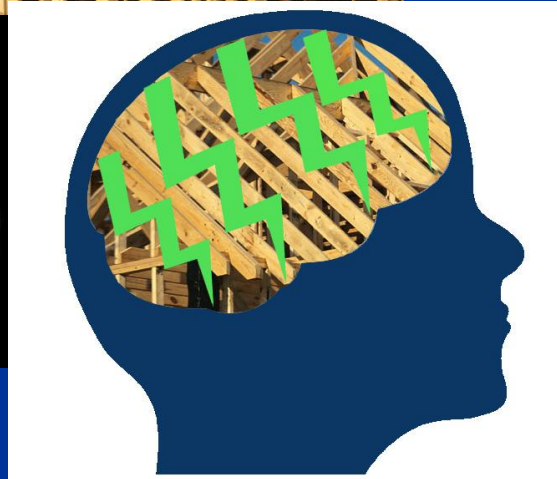


Framework's "Brain Architecture" Model

- ❑ Translates complex "science" of childhood development into a simpler model that public can more easily understand
- ❑ A "common model" that can be used by diverse array of advocates for children (child abuse, early childhood development, violence prevention, health care, anti-poverty)
- ❑ Empirically-based model: Developed through extensive research and testing

Filling in the Blanks:

What Develops? The brain's architecture....



The early years of life matter because early experiences affect the architecture of the maturing brain. As it emerges, the quality of that architecture establishes either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all of the development and behavior that follows --- and getting things right the first time is easier than trying to fix them later.



Simplifying Model: Serve and Return

Nurturing, responsive interactions build healthy brain architecture and a strong foundation for future growth and development. Central to the impact of relationship in the early years is their quality, particularly as it is expressed in the “serve-and-return” or continuous back and forth interaction that takes place between an engaged child and an invested adult. When relationships are supportive, responsive, and predictable, they increase the odds of desirable outcomes. These positive experiences literally wire the brain’s architecture, laying the foundation for all future learning.



Simplifying Model: Toxic Stress

When a young child experiences excessive stress, chemicals are released in the brain that damage its developing architecture.

When interpersonal experiences are disruptive, neglectful, abusive, unstable, or otherwise stressful, they increase the probability of poor outcomes. **Toxic stress** releases harmful chemicals in the brain that impair cell growth and make it harder for neurons to form healthy connections.





Impact on public understanding...

“ I think what really gets me...is that it could actually have a chemical or biological or some sort of impact on the child’s brain...Behavior is one thing, and attitude and personality is one thing, but if it can really negatively impact...the chemistry and the makeup of the brain – you can damage that that early—that’s really serious. That’s more than just having a bad personality, that’s really screwing up a kid.” Talk Back Informant

The Basic Reframing Equation

Level One Value

Fairness, Opportunity for All, Ingenuity, Future

Simplifying Model

Brain Architecture, Toxic Stress,

Solutions

FMLA, Child Nutrition Act, Head Start

Issue Domain

Health, Education, Race, Workforce Development



Benefits of the “Development Frame”:

- ❑ Dramatically influences public understanding of child development
- ❑ Includes parents while expanding definitions of important relationships
- ❑ Explains why relationships matter to development
- ❑ Explains how violence and other negative environmental issues impact children – they literally “rewire” children’s brain architecture
- ❑ Demonstrates how this is a community problem that needs environmental/policy attention



Next Steps for Audience:

- ❑ Become aware of the frames you are currently using in your prevention messages
- ❑ Provide alternative way of seeing the problem and be intentional about the Level I values you are trying to connect with (prosperity vs. charity/sympathy)
- ❑ Resist temptation to make sympathy/charity/crisis/safety the motivation
- ❑ Appeal to people as problem solvers.



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