

Reframing Child Abuse and Neglect Messages

Universal Values

Fairness, Community, Freedom, Responsibility,
Authority

Issue Type

Civil rights, environment, education, child welfare, law
enforcement, health

Specific Issue/Policy

Voters' rights, school readiness, rain forests, child
abuse

Universal Values like Community, Freedom and Authority help people understand big ideas. When people process new information (*like Prevention*) they naturally link new information to Universal Values.

In 2004 Prevent Child Abuse America commissioned FrameWorks Institute to assess child abuse and neglect messages. They found that Prevention advocates had historically communicated about child abuse starting from the third "Specific Issue/Policy" tier, and were trying to work in the idea of Prevention from that level.

Most of the public was caught up in the horrors and sensationalism of child abuse and couldn't move further than tier two (Issue Type) which made Prevention about law enforcement and intervention.

To reframe the Prevention issue, FrameWorks researchers suggested that advocates learn to communicate messages that start with big ideas and universal values like "children are our future," and to highlight the role that community can play. They feel reframing Prevention in this way will help engage the public.

- 1. Begin the prevention communication with a strongly held value** like "children are our future," "children deserve opportunities from the beginning," etc. (see also quote on front cover)
- 2. Provide a clear definition of the problem that does not focus on people** but rather on predictable situations, i.e. divorce, job loss, etc.
- 3. Identify solutions near the top of the presentation** in order to advance prevention messages. Tell stories of efficacy.
- 4. Avoid vivid, dramatic details** and the focus on the worst cases.
- 5. Forget the numbers** in clarifying the prevalence. People already perceive child abuse as a big problem.
- 6. Elevate the prevalence and definition of neglect** as the most common form of child abuse.
- 7. Try to get multiple actors into the frame.** Get information from community elders and others who can explain or share their new understanding of child development.
- 8. Talk about parenting as a learned skill for everyone and that all parents need systems of support.**