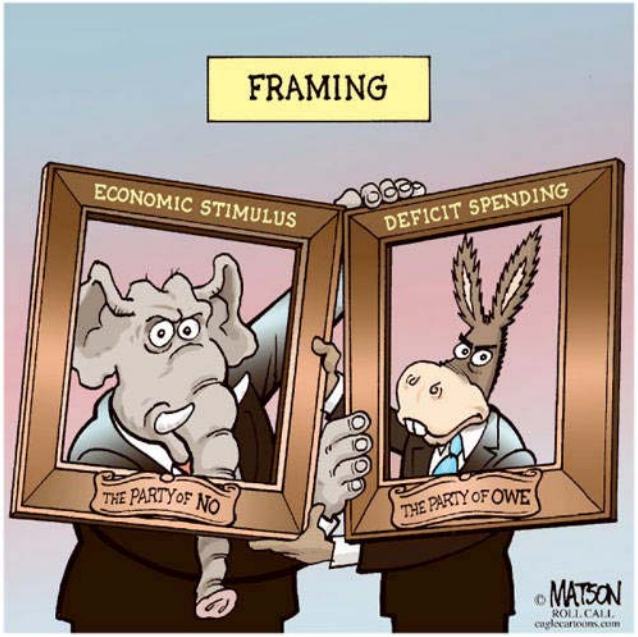
The Importance of Framing Issues in Shaping Policy

Berkeley Yorkery
Project Director
North Carolina Institute of Medicine

- Part 1: Intro to Framing
  - What is framing?
  - How does framing work?
- Part 2: Putting Framing into Action
  - Why do we need framing?
  - Framing Basics
  - Framing young child mental health

What is framing?

- A frame is an organizing principle. It is the way a story is told that triggers the internal concepts and values that we use to interpret new information.
- Framing includes the whole message- context, messengers, images, metaphors, tone



What is framing?

- "People use mental shortcuts to make sense of the world. These mental shortcuts rely on "frames" or a small set of internalized concepts and values that allow us to accord meaning to unfolding events and new information… The literature of social movements suggests that the prudent choice of frames, and the ability to effectively contest the opposition's frames, lie at the heart of successful policy advocacy."

-FrameWorks Institute, Framing Public Issues Toolkit (2002), Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute Report

What is framing?

- We use framing all the time in our daily lives to impact people's perceptions and decisions
  - You really need to start exercising more and eating healthier to improve your health.
  - If you want to be around to see your grandkids grow up you should really start exercising more and eating healthier.
  - Your college reunion is coming up, don't you want to look great for it. Maybe you should start exercising more and eating healthier.

Framing public issues

- Frames are the internal concepts and values that we use to interpret new information
- Everyone has lots of frames in their head, some of them are competing
  - Examples:
    - American Dream
    - Individualism
    - Freedom
    - Justice
    - Fairness

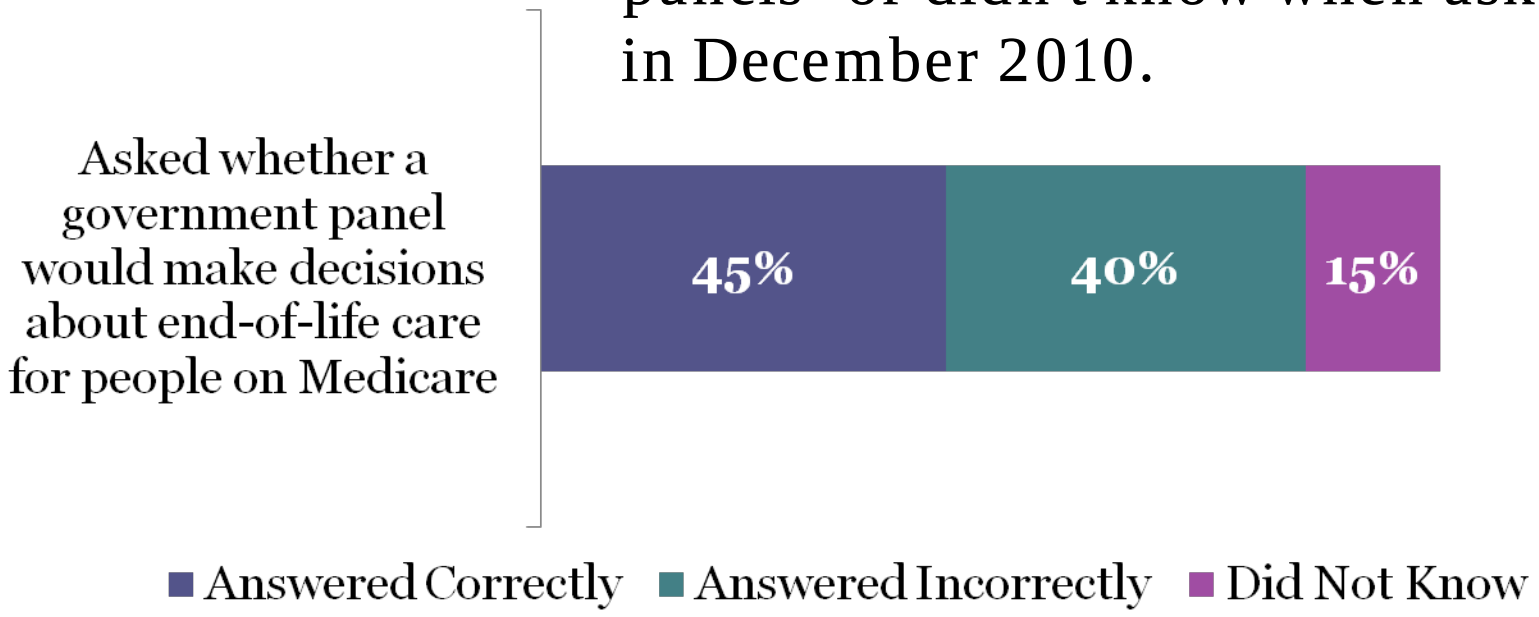
People Make Decisions Based on Values

- "[Public health] has been under the illusion that if only people understood the facts, we'd be fine. Wrong. The facts alone will not set us free. People make decisions about politics and candidates based on their value system, and the language and frames that invoke those values."

  -Don Hazen, AlterNet.Org in the introduction to George Lakoff's *Don't think of an elephant*.

People Reject Objective Facts when They Don't Fit Internal Frames

55% of the public either believed that the ACA included "death panels" or didn't know when asked in December 2010.



Kaiser Family Foundation. Public Opinion Data Note. Feb. 2011.

Mixed Messages:

Advocates often speak passionately about their issues using language grounded in knowledge and data. Unfortunately such arguments do not always translate well to the public and policymakers because of preexisting concepts about who is responsible for a problem and who should solve it

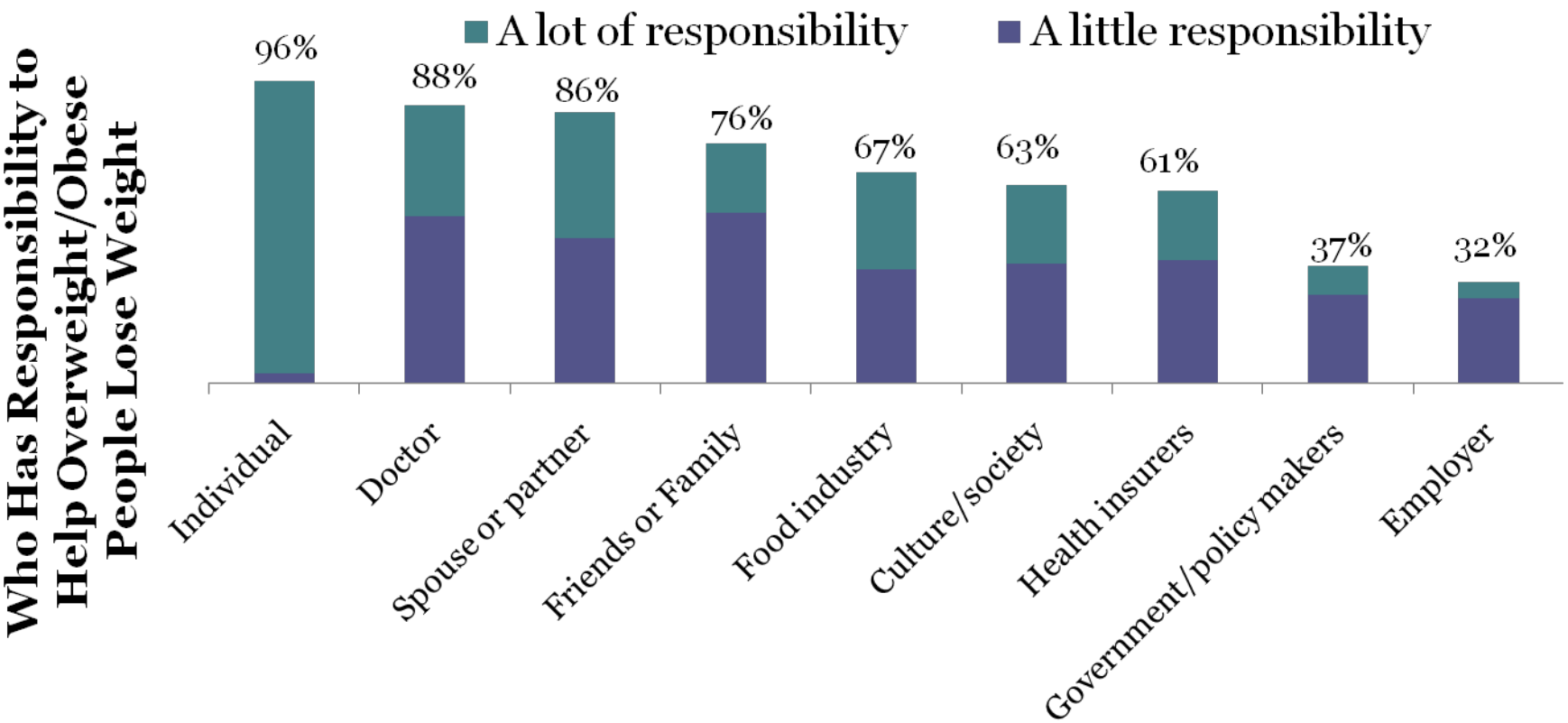
Advocates say…	Public hears…
• Early childhood tooth decay is on the rise	• Poor oral health is a symptom of bad parenting
• To prevent cavities, children need access to preventive services like sealants and fluoride protection	• Kids need to do a better job brushing their teeth
• Low-income children are more likely to develop dental disease	• Poor kids have more important problems than their teeth

Framing Can Help Move People to Collective Action

- "When it comes to specific issues, people are not ideologically consistent. In other words, their value systems are more dynamic and flexible than one might expect. That is why framing is so important. By putting together a set of frame elements—beginning with values—we can guide people away from more automatic thinking that renders policy solutions invisible and towards a way of thinking that elevates the need for collective action."

  -FrameWorks Institute, Frequently Asked Questions about Framing. Issue No. 41, Revised Nov. 2008.

Obesity Still Largely Viewed as Individual Problem



Harris Interactive. Weight and Obesity in America. June 19, 2007.

People Reject Policy Solutions to Reduce Obesity

As long as obesity viewed as an individual problem, it is less likely to garner support for broad-scale public policies.

There have been discussions regarding taxing soft drinks and fast food as a way to deter obesity. How much would you support or oppose this tax going into effect?

■ Oppose ■ Support ■ Not Sure

Harris Interactive Poll. Over Half of Americans Opposed to Taxing Soft Drinks and Fast Food. June 2010.

Dominant Frames

- Every social issue has a variety of dominant frames that, if cued, can pull public opinion in different directions
  - If do not like the current dominant frame around a given issue, must work to “reframe” the issue in popular discourse

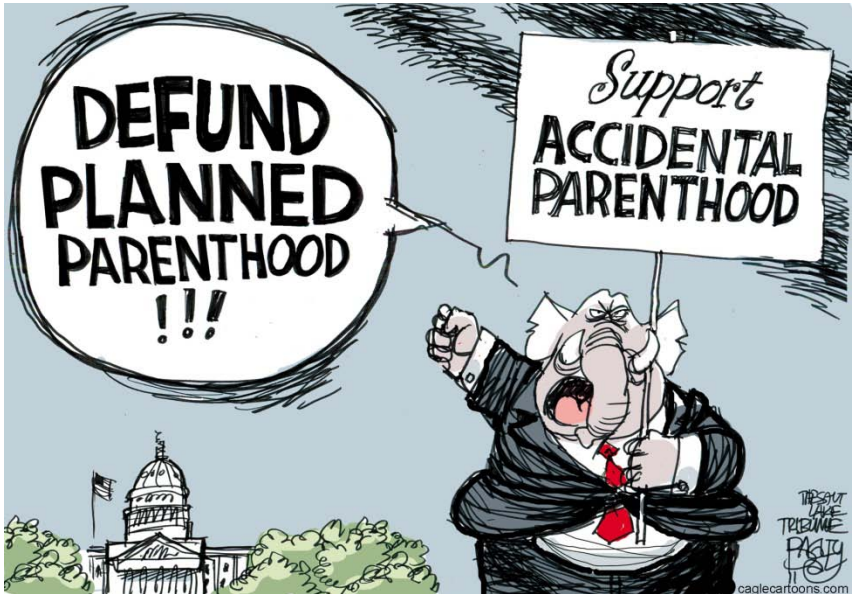
Effects of Framing

- Presenting the same concept in different formats can alter people's decisions

People on welfare		Poor people
Climate change		Global warming
Exploring for energy	**vs**	Drilling for oil
Tax relief		Tax responsibility
Stimulus		Recovery
Fixing		Enhancing

Why? Because different words trigger different internal frames

The Same Issue Can Be Perceived Very Differently, Depending on How it is Framed



- "Behind every policy issue lurks a contest over conflicting, though equally plausible, concepts of the same abstract goal or value."
  -Deborah Stone, *Policy Paradox*

Episodic vs. Thematic Frames

Episodic

- Individuals
- Events
- Psychological
- Private
- Appeal to Consumers
- Better Information

→ Fix the Person

Thematic

- Issues
- Trends
- Political/Environmental
- Public
- Appeal to Citizens
- Better Policies

→ Fix the Condition

Episodic vs Thematic Frames Example: Tobacco

- Early on, tobacco control communications efforts focused on individuals
  - Trying to convince individuals to quit
- Shift to focus on broader community and external forces
  - Move to banning advertising, developing treatments for tobacco addiction, smoke-free policies

How An Issue is Framed Leads to Certain Solutions

- If people see the issue as one of personal responsibility, they will devise solutions focused on the individual.
- If people see the issue as a broader societal problem—then they will develop societal responses, including regulation and higher taxes:
  - 88% support greater restriction on sale to minors (2008).
  - 84% support greater oversight of tobacco company health claims (2008).
  - Polls show support for increased tobacco taxes, generally by 2:1 margins. (State polling data, 2001-2010).

Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids. Public Support for FDA Authority over Tobacco Products. April 20, 2009, citing Mellman Group poll, May 19-22, 2008; Voters in All States Support Large Increases to State Tobacco Tax Rates. April 29, 2010.

Tobacco Industry Viewed as Not Trustworthy—Preying on Innocent Victims

Source: *LA Times* quoting Richard Pollay; *University of British Columbia study.*

Underage smokers are three times as likely as adults to be swayed by cigarette advertising.

" It's funny to hear politicians accuse us of lying and distorting the truth. "

- “New insights fail to get put into practice because they conflict with deeply held internal images of how the world works ... images that limit us to familiar ways of thinking and acting. That is why the discipline of managing mental models -- surfacing, testing, and improving our internal pictures of how the world works -- promises to be a major breakthrough for learning organizations.”

  -Peter Senge

Putting Framing Into Action: Framing Young Child Mental Health

Berkeley Yorkery
Project Director
North Carolina Institute of Medicine

Questions to Keep in Mind

1. How do we get people to think about young child mental health?
2. How do we get them to think about young child mental health in a way that they will want to solve the issue through public policies (not only through individual actions)?
3. How do we get them to support our public policies?

Information from: FrameWorks. How to Talk About Children's Mental Health: A FrameWorks Message Memo (2010) available online at http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/toolkits/cmh/resources/pdf/CMH_MM.pdf

Why do we need framing?

- Although there is a large body of scientific evidence about the importance of early childhood mental health, there is a lack of public understanding about
  - What young child mental health is
  - Relationship between young child mental and physical health
  - Why young child mental health matters: the implications of poor mental health on a child's social and interpersonal relationships

Information from: FrameWorks. How to Talk About Children's Mental Health: A FrameWorks Message Memo (2010) available online at http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/toolkits/cmh/resources/pdf/CMH_MM.pdf

Problem

- Lack of understanding (in spite of)
  - Far greater public awareness of mental health problems in general
  - Access to information

- Confusion and Resistance to efforts to create or sustain effective public program and policies

Information from: FrameWorks. How to Talk About Children's Mental Health: A FrameWorks Message Memo (2010) available online at http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/toolkits/cmh/resources/pdf/CMH_MM.pdf

Solution

- Need to explain the fundamental principles of young child mental health in terms the public understands

AND

- In a way that elicits a societal (rather than individual) response

The Solution is Framing

Kids Don't Have It

No emotional capacity
No memory

Children are Little Adults

Same but less complicated
Need the same treatment as adults

What's in the swamp of...

Children's Mental Health

Mental Health is Emotions

Just be happy
Need to learn self-control
Better discipline will help

Mental Illness is Chemi

Genetic; set in stone
Nothing we can do
Drugs are the only treatment

Environments Matter

BUT mostly home and parents

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Existing Dominant Frames

- Mental Health
  - Mental health is emotional health
    - If you do not have good mental health, it is due to negative emotional experiences for which the individual (or parents) is responsible
    - Solution is to learn to manage one's emotions
  - Children cannot have mental health
    - Children cannot understand or remember emotional events and, therefore, cannot have mental health
  - Children can have mental health
    - Children are "little adults" so must have mental health
    - Solution is treating the individual

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Existing Dominant Frames

- Mental Illness
  - Mental illness is located in the brain and caused by a chemical imbalance
  - Chemicals are the products of genes
  - Genes are set in stone

- Dominant frame is that mental illness is predetermined and immune to treatment other than drugs

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Gaps in understanding limit treatment options

- When the issue is
  - Mental Health: encourage the individual to take responsibility for and manage their emotions
  - Mental Illness: drugs are the appropriate treatment to rebalance brain chemicals

If we do not change the frame, then it is virtually impossible to get people to see policy solutions as the answer

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You Say... They Think (Children's Mental Healt

You Say...	They Think...	What's Triggered in Their Minds?	What Helps?
Mental healthcare is dispersed across multiple systems: schools, primary care, the juvenile justice system, child welfare and substance abuse treatment. But the first system is the family.	It's all about the parents: they need to make a good home environment for their kids. There's not much anyone else can do.	Home environment matters most	Use value of Future Prosperity to explain w this matters to all of us, and value of Ingenuity to encourage a public response.
The suffering experienced by children with mental health needs and their families has created a health crisis. Growing numbers of children are suffering needlessly because their emotional, behavioral, and developmental needs are not met.	I see children as little people. Poor mental health to me is like like a little person that has to deal with more adult things.	Children are Little Adults	Use the Brain Architecture simplifying mod to explain how the development process works and how children's brains are differe than adults'.
Children's mental health problems are very common, and the onset of major mental illness can occur as young as age 7.	Those kids are so young. I don't think you've even developed much of a personality, let alone a mental health profile. I don't know that you could diagnose something yet.	Children Don't Have Mental Health	Use the Toxic Stress simplifying model show how excessive stress damages the developi brain, and how buffering that stress suppo mental health.
Opportunities are available to prevent mental health disorders before they occur. Effective prevention includes strengthening families and individuals by building resilience and skills, and promoting mental health in schools.	Mental illness is about your brain — your wiring. Your chemicals and your brain are either working, or they're not. It's got to be up there. Good mental health is about being happy, laid-back, easy going. Kids being kids.	Mental Illness is Chemical and/or Mental Health is Emotions	Use the Leveling simplifying model to expla how children's mental health affects their functioning, and how factors beyond the family can promote good mental health.

Reframing young child mental health

1. Prime communications with values that point the audience towards collective importance of ensuring children's mental health
   - Prosperity
     - *Child well-being is important for community development and economic development. Young children with strong mental health are prepared and equipped to develop important skills and capacities that begin in early childhood. These children then become the basis of a prosperous and sustainable society — contributing to things like good school achievement, solid workforce skills, and being strong citizens.*
   - Ingenuity
     - *Innovative states and communities have been able to design high-quality programs for children, which have solved problems in early childhood development and shown significant long-term improvements for children.*

Excerpts from: FrameWorks. How to Talk About Children's Mental Health: A FrameWorks Message Memo (2010) available online at http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/toolkits/cmh/resources/pdf/CMH_MM.pdf

Reframing young child mental health

2. Explain child mental health and its importance using a simplifying model
   - Levelness: metaphor used to simplify the explanation of young child mental health, its importance, determinants are multiple, long-term impact, and that mental health can be influenced
   - In testing, levelness model
     - Easily understood
     - Generated a brain-based understanding of mental health
     - Understanding of importance for overall functioning, existence of multiple influences, and need for intervention strategies

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Elements of the Levelness Model

One way to think about child mental health is that it's like the levelness of a piece of furniture, say, a table. The levelness of a table is what makes it usable and able to function, just like the mental health of a child is what enables him or her to function and do many things. Some children's brains develop on floors that are level. This is like saying that the children have healthy, supportive relationships, and access to things like good nutrition and health care. For other children, their brains develop on more sloped or slanted floors. This means they're exposed to abuse or violence, have unreliable or unsupportive relationships, and don't have access to key programs and resources. Remember that tables can't make themselves level — they need attention from experts who understand levelness and stability and who can work on the table, the floor, or even both. We know that it's important to work on the floors and the tables early, because little wobbles early on tend to become big wobbles later. So, in general, a child's mental health is like the stability and levelness of a table.

1. Levelness is a quality
2. Determines degree of functioning
3. Many degrees of levelness
4. Many reasons table could be unlevel
5. Positive mental health can be achieve through intervention
6. Tables don't level themselves, require intervention by knowledgeable people

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Reframing young child mental health

3. Embed discussion of child mental health in larger discussion of child development
   - What is at stake
   - What develops
   - How development can be derailed

A Message Template for Children's Mental Health

LEVEL ONE
Values

Prosperity, Ingenuity

LEVEL TWO
Issue Category

Children's Mental Health

TO CONCRETIZE LEVEL TWO
Simplifying Model

Leveling (How it works) +

Brain Architecture (What develops)

Toxic Stress (What can disrupt it)

LEVEL THREE
Specific Policy Solutions

Expand children's mental health services; impro
coordination between pediatricians and ment
health specialists; screen children for problems
child care, school and other settings

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Child Development

- Existing Dominant Frames
  - Black Box
    - Vague idea that zero to three is important time, but no understanding of what is happening developmentally during early years
  - Default to the Family
    - Family is responsible for child's development
    - Leaves out influence of physical environment, community of relationships, social and emotional growth

Information from: FrameWorks. Framing Early Child Development Message Brief (2009) available online at http://www.ncicdp.org/documents/ecd_message_brief_2009.pdf

Reframing Child Development

- Prime communications with values that point the audience towards collective importance of child development
  - Prosperity: connection between child development and economic development
  - Ingenuity: show we have solutions that work
  - Responsible Manager: addressing problems before they get worse is the responsible way to manage our shared future

Information from: FrameWorks. Framing Early Child Development Message Brief (2009) available online at http://www.ncicdp.org/documents/ecd_message_brief_2009.pdf

Child Development Framing in Action

Priming Communications with Values Examples

A vital and productive society with a prosperous and sustainable future is built on a foundation of healthy child development. By creating and implementing effective early childhood programs and policies, society can ensure that children have a solid foundation for a productive future.

Health in the earliest years—beginning with the future mother's wellbeing before she becomes pregnant—lays the groundwork for a lifetime of vitality. When developing biological systems are strengthened by positive early experiences, children are more likely to thrive and grow up to be healthy adults. Sound health also provides a foundation for the construction of sturdy brain architecture and the achievement of a broad range of skills and learning capacities.

Excerpts from: FrameWorks. Framing Early Child Development Message Brief (2009) available online at http://www.ncicdp.org/documents/ecd_message_brief_2009.pdf

Reframing Child Development

The Core Story of Development:

1. Child development is a foundation for community development and economic development, as capable children become the foundation of a prosperous and sustainable society (Prosperity).
2. The basic architecture of the brain is constructed through an ongoing process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood (Brain Architecture).
3. Brains are built from the bottom up (Skill Begets Skill).
4. Interaction of genes and experience shapes the developing brain and relationships are the active ingredient in this Serve and Return process (Serve and Return).
5. Cognitive, emotional, and social capacities are inextricably intertwined, and learning, behavior and physical and mental health are inter-related over the life course (Can't Do One Without The Other).
6. Toxic stress damages the developing brain and leads to problems in learning, behavior, and increased susceptibility to physical and mental illness over time (Toxic Stress).
7. Brain plasticity and the ability to change behavior decrease over time and getting it right early is less costly.

Information from: FrameWorks. Framing Early Child Development Message Brief (2009) available online at http://www.ncicdp.org/documents/ecd_message_brief_2009.pdf

Traps to Avoid

- Black Box
  - Need to make developmental processes explicit through simplifying models
- Mental Health
  - Avoid emphasizing emotional control, personal actions, or individual responsibility
- Mental Illness
  - Avoid discussions of chemical imbalances, episodic stories of individuals, crisis stories
- Environments Matter
  - Need to widen the lens to show broader community/environment impacts child development
- Prevention
  - Prevention does not garner support without explaining development
- Vulnerable child
  - Research shows that talking about investing in the most vulnerable children does not increase policy support