



Catalog of Potential Reframes for Child Nutrition

August 2008

This catalog is meant to provide child nutrition policy advocates with positive frames at a glance -- a kind of quick reminder of the ways you might choose to position the issue. These frames often link to one another, allowing you to use message points across frames.

FrameWorks suggests four new frames for communicating about child nutrition. Each section provides the building blocks for messaging: an overview and goals for the reframe, relevant high-level values to link to the issue, the simplifying model on which the reframe is based, talking points, and suggestions of other issues communicators must consider when constructing new messages.

Together, these four reframes provide concrete ways to overcome the challenges identified by the companion reports: *Through A Glass Narrowly: Media Coverage of the Child Nutrition Act and Related Issues*, and *Framing and Reframing Child Nutrition- A FrameWorks Research Report*. While FrameWorks has not conducted a full investigation of child nutrition as a discrete topic, the messages in this catalog are based on related research conducted by the FrameWorks Institute and represent our best thinking at this time.

Reframe #1: Healthy Child Development

Overview:

Poor nutrition in childhood has a documented impact on current and future health and development of children. Based on FrameWorks' past research, this strategy has the potential to reframe discussions about child nutrition and hunger in a more productive direction.

Simply put, nutrition is bound up with cognitive development, which is further connected to both social and emotional development. FrameWorks' most recent research on public

understanding of early childhood development found that articulating the connection between the social, emotional and cognitive development of children increased the impact of messaging and listeners' understanding of child development.

Goals of the Reframe:

- To connect childhood hunger to child development, making clear the impact of childhood hunger and poor nutrition to our future prosperity and strength as a community/state/country.
- To unify the domains of Health and Education so that childhood hunger can draw power from both areas, positioning malnutrition as a violation of societal investments in both systems.
- To move people beyond a charity mindset and to help them understand the critical importance of good nutrition for optimal growth and development.

Values: Prosperity, Future

Simplifying Model: Brain Architecture

Talking Points:

- Healthy child development is a foundation for community and economic development.
- This development is constructed through an ongoing process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. Like the construction of a home, the building process begins with laying the foundation, framing the rooms, and wiring the electrical system in a predictable sequence.
- Stressors such as hunger negatively impact this process. If unaddressed, these early stressors become permanently built into a child's immune system, cardiovascular system and brain.
- Programs that support child development by ensuring that all children are well-nourished are a critical component in raising healthy, strong and smart children.

Other Considerations:

This frame must begin with a community-oriented value to avoid a default to the dominant frame of the "bad parent." In other words, people are quick to say that children experience problems because inadequate parents have neglected their children's early development. This "bad parent" frame does not leave room for discussions of systemic reforms, expansion of child nutrition programs, school breakfast programs, WIC, etc. It is very difficult for people to see systemic solutions to a problem they have framed as being caused by individuals.

Research:

Talking Early Child Development and Exploring the Consequences of Frame Choices: A FrameWorks Message Memo

Reframe #2: Improved Food Environments

Overview:

Drawing on findings from our research on Food and Fitness, the focus of this frame is on the environments that surround children that either encourage or discourage good health. It leaves behind the highly individualistic, consumer-oriented dominant frames that Americans hold, and directs their thinking to the food-related structures surrounding children, including school nutrition environments, convenient access to full-service grocery stores and farmer's markets, community gardens, etc. that significantly impact children's nutrition.

Goals of the Reframe:

- To help people understand the connection between environments and children's health.
- To encourage a Big Picture view of children's nutrition that puts the goes beyond the family to inspect communities – places, not people.
- To show that the locus of change can be systems, programs and policies rather than individual behavior.

Values: Prevention, Fairness (between communities, not individuals or groups)

Simplifying Model: Food and Fitness Environment

Talking Points:

- Some communities are struggling because they are not given a fair chance to be healthy.
- Preventing ill-health in communities by helping them now saves money and lives in the long run because being healthy and fit in adulthood is largely determined by the communities that we live in as children.
- Where children live, play and go to school, or their food and fitness environment, is one of the most important things determining whether they end up healthy or not. When children do not have access to a healthy environment, their health and quality of life are impaired. When we improve the food and fitness environment, the health of the children who live there improves as well.
- Being healthy and fit in adulthood is largely determined by the communities that we live in as children. The decisions made in our states and nation about child nutrition programs affect these communities, which then shape the lives of the children who live there.
- We have let the food environments in which our children live decline, by not adequately supporting school lunch and breakfast programs, and by making it more difficult for pregnant women and young children to access WIC. This leads to hunger, poorer diets and impaired health for our kids.

- It's a mistake, but fortunately one that we can easily reverse. Serving high-quality school breakfasts and lunches to all children in the schools and eliminating waiting lists for the WIC program are two important ways to improve the food environment and, therefore, children's health.

Other Considerations:

FrameWorks' research on how Americans think about food and fitness identified one of the strongest, dominant frames operating in the public's mind as Health Individualism. Health individualism is the belief that each person creates his or her own destiny, and it is therefore a personal responsibility to make healthy choices. The consequences of these choices only affect the individual and their loved ones. Any individual or group disparities are perceived to be due to: lack of knowledge about what constitutes healthy living, lack of self-discipline, bad priorities, lack of willpower to make better lifestyle choices, and the influence of popular culture over what's fashionable and acceptable. Using the Food and Fitness simplifying model will help steer communications away from Health Individualism and keep the focus on how to improve the environments that affect child health and nutrition. Using the value of Ingenuity (we know how to solve this problem) and the domain of Children moved a set of policies related to child health by roughly 20 points in one FrameWorks experiment.

Research:

Framing Community Health as if Food and Fitness Mattered: A FrameWorks MessageMemo

Reframe #3: Opportunities to Succeed

Overview:

This reframe focuses on the systems and structures that are counted on by all Americans and that have not been adequately developed in certain areas. This problem must be addressed so that all communities can prosper. Advocates know that hunger is a problem among the lowest income families and children, and this is the population to which the programs funded by the Child Nutrition Act are directed. Drawing on research on the public's thinking about race, rural issues, and health care, this reframe directs people's thinking toward opportunity for all children, and the structures that either support or hinder this opportunity.

Goals of the Reframe:

- To ground the discussion in the shared values of opportunities and interdependence rather than charity for the less fortunate.
- To avoid unproductive distractions that accompany discussions of poverty and race, from assessments of individual effort to standards of worthiness.

- To make visible the structural conditions that contribute to the problem of child hunger.

Values: Opportunity for All, Interdependence

Model: Patchwork

Talking Points:

- In this country, we believe that all Americans should have the same opportunities. But the reality is that children in some places are not enjoying the same benefits as the rest of the nation because of a patchwork of uneven distribution of goods that sometimes fails to reach those in need. By assuring more uniform distribution of goods like healthy food and school breakfasts, we can level the playing field and make sure that those parts of the country/state that are disadvantaged get their fair share of opportunities.
- What affects Americans in one part of the nation affects us all and we will only be successful as a nation when all children in our country are healthy and well-fed.
- When some communities are underfinanced or ignored, it results in an uneven patchwork of markets without healthy foods, schools with under-financed school meal programs, and residents without access to education and employment. These conditions result in communities where too many children go hungry and lack access to nutritious, healthy foods.
- When we improve the resources and connectedness of a community, the health of the children who live there improves as well. We have the ideas, energy and resources to make sure that our communities, states, and country prosper and thrive.

Other Considerations:

Talking about the disparities between poor and non-poor families and children is a challenge, because references to “low-income families” and “inequities” are likely to cause people to think about the characteristics of low-income individuals that lead to poor health choices and behaviors, rather than the structural and societal causes of poverty. It can also trigger a zero sum mentality which overcomes solidarity with those experiencing disparities. In other words, what are “they” going to get at “my” expense? However, focusing more on community benefits for all, rather than social and health inequalities, will trigger more productive thinking and minimize the potential problems associated with discussions of disparities.

Research:

FrameWorks MessageBrief: Framing Race
How to Talk Rural Issues Toolkit

Reframe #4: Government as a responsible manager

Overview:

Federal and state government food assistance programs are pivotal in addressing the problem of child hunger. In research on how Americans think about government as well as their understanding of health care reform, the frame of responsible manager helped people understand what the role of government can be in addressing important social problems. Government has a unique role and responsibility in advancing the common good, relying on citizens working together to improve our country. Our responsibility includes safeguarding the health of our communities and our country. Our collective prosperity and quality of life depend on the public structures we have created and maintained, updated and repaired.

Goals of the Reframe:

- To help people see the essential role of government in supporting child nutrition.
- To position child nutrition programs as public structures which support overall well-being and prosperity.
- To introduce the idea that periodically reviewing, updating and repairing outdated or insufficient programs is the way that government exercises its responsibility.

Values: Common Good, Responsible Manager

Model: Public Structures

Talking Points:

- Our nation's success is based upon the power of people working together. We all benefit when citizens work with the public sector to identify problems and come to consensus on a vision to address those problems. Our nation's quality of life now and into the future depends upon citizens and public agencies working for the common good.
- One thing that has made America so successful is the effectiveness of our Public Structures. The Public Structures we have created – such as laws, highways, health and safety agencies, and schools and colleges – are the machinery that produces American success and quality of life.
- The Public Structures that support our children's health and nutrition – specifically school meal programs, the WIC program, and other child nutrition programs – require wise and responsible management in order to operate effectively.
- We can address and correct irresponsible actions when we see them, by improving the management of these programs so they work efficiently and effectively to improve our collective well-being.

Other Considerations:

While it is necessary to point out needed changes in program enrollment policies, program administration, etc. it is important to not frame government as the source of the problem rather than part of the solution. Making the role of government more concrete, and not playing into people's dominant frames about government incompetence will make government part of the solution to child hunger, rather than an impediment.

Research:

How to Talk About Government: A FrameWorks Message Memo

About the Institute

The FrameWorks Institute is a national nonprofit think tank devoted to framing public issues to bridge the divide between public and expert understandings. Its work is based on Strategic Frame Analysis™, a multi-method, multi-disciplinary approach to empirical research. FrameWorks designs, commissions, publishes, explains and applies communications research to prepare nonprofit organizations to expand their constituency base, to build public will, and to further public understanding of specific social issues – the environment, government, race, children's issues and health care, among others. Its work is unique in its breadth – from qualitative, quantitative and experimental research to applied communications toolkits, advertising campaigns, workshops, FrameChecks, and Study Circles around the country. See www.frameworksinstitute.org.

© FrameWorks Institute 2008