

Putting the *Collective Caregiving* Frame Into Action:

A Guide for Child and Family Advocates

The following guide is a practical companion to FrameWorks' Strategic Brief entitled Collective Caregiving: A Frame for Talking About What Kids and Families Need to Thrive. Reach for this resource when you want to address topics that are easily recognized as “kids’ issues” because they explicitly reference children, youth, parents, or other providers of interpersonal care, and directly impact the home or school environment (for example, the Child Tax Credit, parental leave, universal pre-K, education reform, etc.).

Broadening our shared understanding of what constitutes caregiving *beyond* interpersonal relationships and one-to-one interactions is key to bringing children into the center of our policy conversations. Through shared adoption of the *Collective Caregiving* frame, we can inspire the public to take civic and political actions needed to meet our societal responsibility to support and care for all children.

The *Collective Caregiving* frame extends the concept of caregiving in three ways:

- *Who is responsible for caregiving?* We all are. Caregiving takes many different forms and can look a lot of different ways, but it is a shared societal endeavor. **Caregiving is collective.** It’s something we can and should do together.
- *Who do we owe care to?* Children of every race, ethnicity, background, and identity. We need to ensure care for all children—not just the ones we interact with personally or who walk down the same streets we do. **Collective caregiving must be inclusive.**
- *Where do opportunities for collective care exist?* Everywhere we can make our voices heard—for example, at public hearings, city council meetings, town halls, and the ballot box—as well as in systems and policy redesign. **Collective caregiving is expansive.** It encompasses all the decisions we make as a society.

In short, by communicating that caregiving is *collective*, *inclusive*, and *expansive*, we can stretch how we understand our society’s relationship to child wellbeing and usher in a future where we prioritize children in decision-making on all social issues.

This guide is divided into two parts.

In Part I, you’ll find annotated sample communications featuring framing tips that can help you advance the long-term goal of centering children in public policy.

In Part II, you’ll find a checklist you can use to ensure that your communications are on frame.

For additional inspiration, we recommend checking out the guides for Social Change Advocates and Youth-/Parent-Advocates.

Part I: Sample Communications

Sample Communication #1: LinkedIn Post

Social media can be an ideal platform for sharing well-framed messages. Every click, share, like, follow, and forward is an opportunity to expand public thinking beyond the value of interpersonal relationships alone to also appreciate the importance of civic and social action. The sample LinkedIn post below promotes the idea that caregiving can be collective and that collective action is a form of care.



Building sustainable infrastructure for collective caregiving demands collaboration—families and community members minding our kids together.

The Play Outside Act, which funds maintenance of city parks and tree-planting on every residential street, is just one example of how we can come together to nurture kids' health and positive development. Parks and green spaces provide people of all ages with opportunities for outdoor physical activity, social connection, and relaxation. These spaces also help cleanse the air, filter storm water, and cool temperatures.

Learn how you can help provide for the children in our community by joining the growing network of collective caregivers working to pass the Play Outside Act: bit.ly/2sSylJO

Connecting the idea of collective caregiving to a concrete action (in this case, a policy) helps build public understanding of what collective caregiving entails and how we can all play a part in making it happen.


Naming a specific policy, rather than referring generically to “the government,” helps any conversations this post might inspire to stay on frame. While it’s easy to rail against “the government” as an abstract concept, it’s harder to push back on commonsense policies likely to help children in specific ways.

Beyond just naming the proposed legislation, describing what it will actually do promotes further understanding of how collective actions such as this (and our vocal support for them) are ways of caring for children.

Using language typically associated with interpersonal caregiving—minding, nurture, provide for—to talk about what the Play Outside Act can do for kids reinforces the *Collective Caregiving* frame. It also sets the stage for ongoing conversations about civic actions we can take to hold our public institutions accountable for the wellbeing of all children.

Sample Communication #2: Instagram Post

The Instagram Post below illustrates how text combined with imagery can inspire lots of different kinds of people to engage in collective caregiving and, in doing so, evoke a sense of citizenship that includes all members of society.



Remember that village?
This is how it looks.

Raising kids is an enormous responsibility, and we all have a role to play. By **educating ourselves, lifting our voices, mobilizing our friends and neighbors, and calling on our elected officials**, we are meeting our collective responsibility to secure the best possible outcomes for all children.

Join the #village of **#collectivecaregivers** who are working together to improve the wellbeing of our children: bit.ly/4x3DR

Images can advance and strengthen our language-based framing choices because they have the potential to activate productive assumptions and associations, while deactivating unhelpful ones, in the same way that words do.

Offering concrete examples of caring community-level activities evokes a sense of citizenship that includes everyone, and reminds people that collective caregiving involves multiple forms of civic and political action—both inside and outside the ballot box.

Featuring parents and primary caregivers as active members of the wider community helps explain how collective caregiving builds on and complements interpersonal caregiving. It also establishes caring for kids as a continuum: something people can engage in at multiple levels, through private interactions as well as civic participation.

Sample Communication #3: Press Release

The sample press release below brings together many different elements of the *Collective Caregiving* frame to illustrate that, in order for all children and families to do well, we must ensure the care we provide as a society is collective, inclusive, and expansive.

Press Release

September 1, 2024



ALBANY, NEW YORK – As New York state faces widespread child care shortages, a multiracial coalition of parents is calling for change. Through a letter-writing campaign in coordination with Kids1st, parents are pushing for funding that would expand preschool options for all who want them, reduce families' out-of-pocket costs, and increase early educator compensation.

“High-quality child care is simply not available to many families, and it’s increasingly out of reach for many providers too. For example, funding is currently allocated through a competitive grant process rather than distributed equitably,” explains Shawna Jones, a parent of two involved in the campaign. “This practice advantages providers with the resources to hire professional grant writers, which tend to be located in predominantly white, middle-class neighborhoods, and it puts further strain on providers in neighborhoods of color that are working with fewer resources to begin with.” Jones and her coalition suggest that’s the opposite of what’s needed to improve New York’s child care system. “We are asking that funding be distributed in ways that increase access, not limit it.”

“As parents, we’re so much more powerful when we come together to care for children, instead of thinking just about our own,” said Mark Alvarez, a parent of three who recently joined the campaign. “We all want the best for our kids, and the changes we’re seeking will help every child and every family thrive.”

Talking openly about families' intersecting identities, and race in particular, can reduce cultural assumptions about white people being "the norm." Keeping the lens on our common interests and shared future, across groups and identities, also helps reduce latent but toxic patterns in public thinking about "other" communities being responsible for "their own" children.

Naming a specific civic action that anyone in the community can contribute to makes the idea of collective caregiving more concrete in people's minds, and also feel more inviting and inclusive.

It's important to emphasize that the wellbeing of children, families, early educators, and caregivers of all kinds is intertwined. This prevents people from falling into a "zero-sum" mindset, where the needs of one group are presumed to be in competition with the needs of others. Make it clear that collective caregiving delivers benefits across the whole of society.

Pointing to a specific instance where collective care is being provided unevenly—to some children more freely than to others—goes a long way to build public understanding about existing social inequities and their root causes.

Proposing a collective action that clearly advances racial justice (for example, an improved process for distributing funds) is a powerful way to build broad public support for equity-focused policy change. It's also much more effective than simply dropping contested and potentially confusing terms like "racial justice" or "equity" into communications without sufficient context and explanation.

A key part of the *Collective Caregiving* frame involves defining our various public policies, programs, services, and supports as "care," and therefore thinking of ourselves—all members of society—as caregivers.

Portraying parents as actively engaged community members who advocate on behalf of all children helps illustrate that interpersonal caregiving and collective caregiving are complementary, and that people can hold multiple caregiving roles.

Sample Communication #4: Talking Points

The sample talking points below help convey that parents and other direct providers of care play an essential role in collective caregiving and that their deep understanding of children’s needs can help chart a path toward better societal outcomes.

Note: The following are just sample talking points that model the framing strategy, not prescribed language to be adopted verbatim. These points can be adapted for various target audiences and modified to suit particular contexts or objectives.

Five Talking Points About Parents

- 1 Being a parent builds knowledge, experience, commitment, and countless skills.
 - 2 The contributions of parents reach far beyond individual kids—they help whole communities thrive.
 - 3 We can all learn from parents about how to meet our shared responsibility as collective caregivers.
 - 4 To create a society that supports the wellbeing of children from every zip code, race, religion, background, and identity, we need to gather insights from an equally diverse range of parents and families.
 - 5 Incorporating the wisdom of parents and families into our education, child care, health care, housing, environmental, and all other policies is a critical way to improve how we care for our society’s kids.
- 1 Talking Point #1 positions parents as engaged members of society who hold valuable knowledge and relevant experience. (This counters toxic, often racialized stereotypes about "certain" parents being lazy, irresponsible, or a drain on public resources.)
 - 2 Talking Point #2 widens the lens beyond individual households to portray parents as contributing community members and parenting as a pillar of society.
 - 3 Talking Point #3 emphasizes the value of listening to parents and other direct caregivers, honoring their vast experiences, gleaning their deep insights, and heeding their uniquely relevant expertise.
 - 4 Talking Point #4 serves as a powerful reminder that children and their families have a wide variety of needs, interests, and experiences, and that our collective caregiving must be responsive to such differences. By naming race in particular, it de-centers whiteness and explicitly brings families of color into the sphere of collective concern.
 - 5 Talking Point #5 highlights the need for elected officials, representatives, leaders, and decision-makers of all kinds to follow parents' lead when determining how society can best provide for children. (Importantly, this depicts parents as key agents of social change, rather than passive recipients of public supports and services.)

Sample Communication #5: Success Story

Sharing success stories, like the one below, about collective caregiving efforts that have produced inspiring results for our children and communities is a compelling way to demonstrate the power of bringing kids into the center of our collective decision-making processes.

“

We are all here today because we see a better future for children and families—one in which we all, as a society, care for and prioritize the needs of kids. In this future, when we make collective decisions about the environment, health care, and the economy, we consider their impacts, direct and indirect, on children.

Our work is inspired by children like Sandra, who is 12 years old and in the seventh grade. She has a good life, support from an involved and caring community, and a promising future. Sandra’s city used to have problems with lead in the water, but city officials fixed this, so she now has clean water to drink. When Sandra was 3 years old, she began attending a public child care center, which set her up to thrive in elementary school. At the age of 8, Sandra was diagnosed with cancer, which dealt a blow to her whole family. Fortunately, her state’s robust Medicaid plan meant Sandra received the treatment she needed to make a full recovery. She’s now two years into remission, and even contemplating a future career in medicine.

Sandra is healthy and active. She has access to nutritious food, which fuels her at swim meets, and a stable home she shares with her two parents, three siblings, and great-Aunt Betts. She also participates in enriching activities, like science camp, that foster her continual academic and social development. All of this is supported by the \$1,000 per child afforded by the Child Tax Credit (CTC). As Sandra’s dad tells her every month when the check arrives, “See? It’s not just your mom and me. Our whole community is looking out for you.”

Sandra’s mom also spoke at a recent town hall meeting where she was invited to share her experience of the CTC. She said, “As parents, we all want our kids to be able to dream big dreams. Having extra cash on hand means I can spend less time figuring out how to fill my gas tank or pay the phone bill, and more time helping my daughter build a spaceship out of toothpicks and marshmallows so she can take second prize in her school’s engineering fair.”

Caring policies like the ones that have touched Sandra’s life carry enormous impacts. We can all support children’s positive upbringing by increasing our public investments in critical supports like infrastructure, child care, and health care, and by alleviating unnecessary burdens on families wherever possible. This is how, together, we can raise a generation of capable, happy kids—and help them pursue their dreams.

”

Notice how a variety of words and phrases related to care are used throughout this piece to describe the actions every one of us can engage in as collective caregivers.

An effective way to illustrate the holistic nature of collective caregiving is by featuring kids themselves in our stories, and especially taking on their points of view. This doesn’t necessarily have to involve narration in the voice of a child (though it certainly can!) but should incorporate various different factors and influences they experience.

Talking about local environmental issues like water and air quality, the responsibility for which clearly falls outside the purview of individual parents or households, can effectively stretch people’s understanding of how public policies play a critical role in ensuring children’s wellbeing.

Naming a specific policy or collective action that we can take together reduces skepticism about the feasibility of social change, and also boosts the public’s sense of collective responsibility.

An effective way to prevent harmful or even racist stereotypes from being activated is to depict parents of color as having a valuable vantage point and deep understanding of what kids need to do well. Take every opportunity to describe the knowledge and insights that all different kinds of direct caregivers bring, as well as how society as a whole benefits when we listen to and learn from them.

Painting a comprehensive picture of a future in which we prioritize children in decision making across all different kinds of issues gives people a sense of what it actually looks like when we take collective caregiving seriously.

Part II: Checklist

Work through each of the following questions, one at a time, to ensure that a specific piece of communication is on frame. (Don't worry if you aren't able to incorporate every tip below into every single message, but the more you include, the greater your potential for impact and the stronger your frame.)

- Does this communication **talk explicitly about collective caregiving**?

Yes **No**

If **NO**, consider how the solutions you want to promote will “nurture,” “provide for,” “raise up,” “protect,” “support,” or otherwise care for kids. Then, look for opportunities to bring that language related to care—or even the phrase “collective caregiving” itself—into your communication.

- Does this communication evoke a sense of civic responsibility that **includes all members of society**?

Yes **No**

If **NO**, consider how individuals who might be inclined to feel “outside” the issue could be encouraged to step in. Beyond voting and paying taxes, which are important but largely restricted to documented citizens, describe other ways that community members can lift their voices, coordinate their actions, demonstrate their support, and demand needed change.

- Does this communication explain what collective caregiving is, or **provide a concrete example** of collective caregiving?

Yes **No**

If **NO**, think of a specific policy, shared practice, program, community-level decision, or civic action that you could mention to help illustrate the concept of collective caregiving and make the idea more concrete.

- Does this communication clearly connect the policy/action it names to **children's wellbeing**?

Yes **No**

If **NO**, describe the real-world impacts of a needed policy or action on the lives and experiences of actual kids and their families. Make the link between collective caregiving and a healthier, happier, stronger community.

- Does this communication **avoid jargon**, technical terms, and vague or abstract phrases like “public policy,” “whole child,” or “universal pre-K,” which could cause confusion or invite multiple interpretations?

Yes **No**

If **NO**, either swap out the jargon for a simple explanation using plain language or provide a clear definition and relevant context to accompany the specialized term.

- Does this communication **refrain from calling for “government” action in a generic sense**, and instead identify a particular mechanism for change, such as a policy adjustment or agency-level decision?

Yes **No**

If **NO**, bump the word “government” to the end of your communication or consider omitting it altogether. Build people’s understanding of and appreciation for the public sector by illustrating (rather than merely claiming) that collective action is both feasible and necessary.

- Does this communication explain how **collective care is unevenly provided** in our country, particularly in terms of race and class?

Yes **No**

If **NO**, connect any disparities in the outcomes experienced by different groups to the unjust policies that produced them, for example to the mismatch in available resources, the lack of parity in opportunities for political participation, or the incongruity in other forms of collective care.

- Does this communication describe a **concrete solution for extending care** to kids in communities that have been denied it previously?

Yes **No**

If **NO**, If **NO**, offer a path forward, or at least a first step in the right direction. Name an agency, organization, official, or entity with the decision-making power to address an existing inequality. Or mention a policy change that would produce a different result than what we have now.

- Does this communication keep the focus on caregiving as a collective endeavor, and therefore **shut down opportunities for individual parents to be unjustly blamed** or scapegoated for children’s poor outcomes?

Yes **No**

If **NO**, be sure to clearly attribute any poor outcomes or negative experiences to the policies that contributed to them. Don’t leave any room for overly simplistic and harmful assumptions about “bad” parenting.

- Does this communication clearly attribute any disparities in children’s outcomes between demographic groups to systemic failures, and therefore **shut down opportunities for certain groups, especially people of color, to be characterized as culturally deficient?**

Yes No

If **NO**, be sure to link any differences in perceived “performance” or “achievement” to the disparate levels of public funding, accessible infrastructure, and policy support made available to the various groups in question. Don’t leave any room for the toxic but all-too-common assumption that struggle is an indicator of inferiority.

- Does this communication **give parents a clear role** in collective caregiving?

Yes No

If **NO**, feature a parent (or close family member, teacher, or other direct caregiver) taking on a societal role that serves the interests of kids across the entire community. Collective caregiving is made possible when all people—parents and non-parents alike—are encouraged to think and act beyond their own households.

- Does this communication help the public understand why **listening to parents, especially parents of color,** is crucial to adequately caring for our society’s kids?

Yes No

If **NO**, depict parents and other direct caregivers as having valuable expertise. Emphasize that different parents/families/caregivers in different situations bring unique sets of knowledge, perspectives, and skills. Rather than framing parents as recipients of support, highlight the insights they hold and the many ways our policy structures could be strengthened by them.

- Does this communication build understanding about how **all different types of policies impact children?**

Yes No

If **NO**, consider venturing beyond easily recognizable “kids’ issues” and gesture toward the many other topics we grapple with and decisions we make as a society that profoundly impact the lives of children. Telling a story from a child’s point of view can help convey how the daily experiences of children are shaped holistically by the contexts, environments, and systems we design for them.

- Does this communication stress the ultimate goal of **ensuring that every child is cared for** and able to thrive?

Yes **No**

If **NO**, consider venturing beyond easily recognizable “kids’ issues” and gesture toward the many other topics we grapple with and decisions we make as a society that profoundly impact the lives of children. Telling a story from a child’s point of view can help convey how the daily experiences of children are shaped holistically by the contexts, environments, and systems we design for them.

- Does this communication stress the ultimate goal of **ensuring that every child is cared for** and able to thrive?

Yes **No**

If **NO**, zoom out to the societal level to explain that collective caregiving and all its activities—especially those focused on stepping up care in certain under-resourced areas or for particular underrepresented communities—are ultimately aimed at optimizing health and wellbeing for all children and all families everywhere.

- Does this communication provide a **vision for a future where we make children more of a priority** in all our decision-making?

Yes **No**

If **NO**, step back and help people see the bigger picture. What are we striving for? How could things be better than they are now? What will it look like when we get this right? Providing answers to these questions is critical to cultivating the public’s sense of possibility—as well as motivation to get to work.



About FrameWorks

The FrameWorks Institute is a nonprofit think tank that advances the mission-driven sector's capacity to frame the public discourse about social and scientific issues. The organization's signature approach, Strategic Frame Analysis®, offers empirical guidance on what to say, how to say it, and what to leave unsaid. FrameWorks designs, conducts, and publishes multi-method, multidisciplinary framing research to prepare experts and advocates to expand their constituencies, to build public will, and to further public understanding. To make sure this research drives social change, FrameWorks supports partners in reframing, through strategic consultation, campaign design, FrameChecks®, toolkits, online courses, and in-depth learning engagements known as FrameLabs. In 2015, FrameWorks was named one of nine organizations worldwide to receive the MacArthur Award for Creative and Effective Institutions.

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