

Putting the *Collective Caregiving* Frame Into Action:

A Guide for Social Change 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 advocate for progressive social change on any issue that is not typically recognized as a “kids’ issue,” but which holds significant implications for children, youth, and families. Relevant topics include everything from housing, transportation, student loan forgiveness, job training, and immigration, to climate action, gun violence prevention, and criminal legal system reform.

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 Child and Family Advocates and Youth-/Parent- Advocates.

Part I: Sample Communications

Sample Communication #1: Mural

Communications about collective caregiving exist in many different formats. The sample mural below, which could be found on the side of a library, aquarium, or science museum, invites all community members to think of themselves as caregivers. It also connects the idea of collectively caring for our kids with the natural environment and the need to address climate change, communicating that caregiving closely intersects with a broad range of other social issues.




- 1 Talking broadly about all of society's kids as "our kids", rather than addressing individual parents or teachers and referring narrowly to "your kids" or "their kids", is a helpful way to expand our shared thinking beyond interpersonal caregiving to include collective caregiving as well. It also promotes an inclusive understanding of caregiving that recognizes every kid of every community, race, and zip code, to be equally valued recipients of our collective compassion and concern.
- 2 A key feature of the *Collective Caregiving* frame is the idea that caregiving takes many different forms, and is carried out by many different caregivers. As this mural explains, one way we can all be caregivers is by engaging in collective action to address climate change.
- 3 Using invitational language (both figuratively and literally!) is a great way to encourage more people to see themselves as caregivers who have the responsibility as well as the capacity to improve the lives of children.

Sample Communication #2: Instagram Ad

Public-facing messages, especially short-and-sweet ones, often benefit from an attention-grabbing intro. These “hooks” are excellent framing opportunities. The sample Instagram ad below introduces the concept of collective caregiving by referring to a bus as a vehicle for care—an idea that might prompt a double take—and then inviting people to learn more.

**Sometimes a bus ...
... is more than a bus.**



It's a vehicle for care.
Click here to see how.

In March 2020, when **Kansas City officials made public buses free for everyone**, we unlocked better outcomes for all kids. Most riders (68%) take the bus to go work or school—or to find a new job—so better access to transportation means better access to employment and education, too. **That gives children and families more resources, more reliable routines, and greater stability.** Find out how to **make public transit more accessible in your community and unlock better care for kids** at www.bustobetter.gov.

- Featuring something so everyday as a bus reminds us that we have many opportunities to do well by our kids, and it doesn't have to be all that complicated. Sometimes a small collective action—like voicing support for public transportation—can make a big difference in the lives of children.
- Highlighting a real-world success story shows people that change is possible and fosters a shared sense that collective caregiving is something we can do together.
- Describing how a particular collective action or community-level decision affects the daily routines or experiences of children is key to building public understanding about the critical role of policies in ensuring positive outcomes for children.
- Inviting all community members to see themselves as collective caregivers evokes an inclusive sense of citizenship, inspires a can-do spirit, and motivates coordinated action.

Sample Communication #3: Bella's Story

The story below paints a picture of the policy-shaped environment and social conditions experienced by fourth grader Bella. It's more than a story about an individual child. It's a story about a community of caregivers engaged in decision-making about how to tackle shared challenges and achieve common goals—and how that process intimately affects the lives and daily experiences of children.



“

Meet Bella. She loves amphibians and reptiles, and hopes to see an alligator in the wild one day. She was a straight-A student until a few years ago, when an uptick of violence in her neighborhood made it impossible for her to concentrate on schoolwork. Bella began suffering from anxiety when her school initiated regular lock-down drills. Now in fourth grade, Bella is old enough to understand that those drills are a response to active shooter events happening across the country.

We can make things better for Bella and so many other children like her. We have the power and the responsibility to create more caring environments for kids. We can start by making changes that positively impact communities of color, whom our collective caregiving efforts have historically neglected—and still do. According to research from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities, Black youth between the ages of 1 and 19 are nearly twice as likely to be killed by gun violence as their white counterparts.

We know what's needed. Bella's parents, along with other parents in her community and teachers at her school, are pushing for measures that limit the purchase of ammunition, restrict use of military-style weapons, and prevent gun ownership by people with a history of abuse. These policies represent effective, commonsense legislation. They extend essential care into communities where it's most needed, and they have broad support across the political spectrum. Let's enact them today and work together to reduce gun violence. Bella and her family, like countless other children and families across the country, are counting on us to be better caregivers.

”

A key component of storytelling for social change involves the careful attribution of responsibility. In this case, the problem that needs solving is not a child who is “struggling,” which could easily be interpreted as evidence that her parents are at fault for making poor decisions. The problem is community violence, which is bigger than individual children and individual parents. We are all responsible for improving our current situation.

Reminding people that targeted interventions are needed precisely to correct existing structural inequities is critical to ward off fears about “undeserved handouts” or accusations of preferential treatment.

Positioning parents and other direct care providers as drivers of social change helps illustrate their valuable roles in society and in collective caregiving. It also counters assumptions that parents are solely to blame for any and all negative outcomes.

By naming a policy that clearly advances equity in concrete and tangible ways, this communication increases people's awareness of our collective power to make change, and boosts our shared sense that even long-standing disparities can be addressed.

It helps to remind people at every opportunity that, whatever our position in society, as community members we are all caregivers.

Sample Communication #4: Pitch to Elected Officials

The *Collective Caregiving* frame is a flexible structure that can be applied to countless different contexts, topics, and messages. It can also be tailored to particular audiences, messengers, communications platforms, channels, and objectives. The following sample pitch to policymakers highlights the frame's adaptability by illustrating a few different ways it could be flexed to appeal to differently situated audience groups—including some who already support a progressive agenda and just need to be mobilized, as well as others who are skeptical of, or even averse to, the very notion of collective action.

Pitch to elected officials about the need for workplace policy reforms that better care for kids

The frame can be flexed to appeal to skeptics of social change.	←————→ <i>Same message flexed for different audiences</i>	The frame can be flexed to dial up enthusiasm among allies.
In a post-COVID world, we all understand that flexible work arrangements are not only possible—they can actually increase performance and productivity. This is an issue that directly impacts kids.	In a post-COVID world, we all understand that flexible work arrangements are not only possible—they improve worker conditions and promote <u>work-life balance, which directly impacts kids.</u> ¹	In a post-COVID world, we all understand that flexible work arrangements are not only possible—they are necessary to advance social justice and increase worker power. And they directly impact our kids.
During the pandemic, parents and other primary caregivers shed light on the need for flexible hours, part-time allowances, remote options, and modified schedules to accommodate weather events, holidays, and illness.	During the pandemic, <u>parents and other primary caregivers led the way</u> ² advocating for employee-directed benefits and schedules, <u>revised loan structures that support minority worker-ownership, and a \$15 minimum wage.</u> ³	During the pandemic, parents and other primary caregivers banded together to demand system upgrades like benefits passports for gig workers, access to emergency cash payments, and Universal Basic Services.
These improvements mean employees have more say over their lives and employers experience less turnover. Families of all shapes and sizes have more freedom to set their own priorities and routines, and our nation's children have the stability they need to thrive.	These improvements allow workers in essential low-wage occupations, who are disproportionately women and people of color, to set the standard of living for families and children. <u>Workers know better than wealthy CEOs or corporations how to care for our nation's kids.</u> ⁴	These improvements center Black, Latine, and Indigenous workers, wage-earners, and women, whose experiences should be driving labor policy. When moms—not shareholders—write the rules, our system can actually deliver justice to families and raise up our children.
These policies represent collective caregiving in action.	These policies represent collective caregiving in action.	These policies represent collective caregiving in action.

- 1 It's important to draw explicit connections between our policy choices and kids' outcomes. This is especially true on issues beyond individual households, where the links aren't immediately obvious to most people.
- 2 Portraying parents wearing other hats, for example as members of the paid workforce, reminds people that direct caregivers bring their expertise and knowledge about what kids need into multiple different contexts and decision-making arenas.
- 3 The *Collective Caregiving* frame can be adapted to call for a wide range of needed policies and civic actions. These details may vary message to message, but the overarching focus on care as collective, inclusive, and expansive remains the same.
- 4 At the heart of every social issue are people who have the potential to be collective caregivers.

Sample Communication #5: Event Flyer

The sample flyer below announces a community event using the *Collective Caregiving* frame. In doing so, it illustrates how even seemingly mundane and informational communications can contribute meaningfully to our public discourse and cultural narratives. In this case, the flyer effectively categorizes “infrastructure” policy under the heading of “youth and families” policy too, broadening our shared understanding of what constitutes care for young people and children.

Join Us.
We're lighting the way for youth in our community.

Community Forum,
 this Friday, 8 p.m.,
 St. James Rec Center
 (on 9th and Greene Streets)

All are welcome.

Policies that affect our communities are policies that affect our youth. Consider the difference that just one simple streetlight can make. It can keep young people safe as it lights their way home, enabling them to play outside a bit longer, or maybe attend a mentoring program or participate in STEM learning as part of an afterschool program.

If one streetlight can do all this, imagine what else we can do with our funding from the Community Benefits Plan, allocated by the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

Join a public forum this Friday, co-hosted by the Department of Energy and Health and Human Services, to learn how you can be a part of the changes we are making across our community.

When we support public infrastructure, we support young people's health and wellbeing.

- Emphasizing that everyone is welcome helps convey that we're all collective caregivers, and that each of us has a role to play.
- An important feature of the *Collective Caregiving* frame involves making a connection between our shared responsibility to support young people and our civic duty to inform and shape public policies.
- Linking particular policy decisions to their tangible impacts on children and youth helps people appreciate the importance of collective caregiving.
- Remember that collective caregiving is an ongoing process, not an isolated activity. Well-framed communications encourage people to imagine for themselves how our social systems and public structures can be continually improved to better care for kids.
- Simply asserting that "the government" should act tends to evoke fears about inefficiency and overreach, but naming relevant public agencies or officials in relation to specific initiatives actually builds support for appropriate public sector involvement.
- The *Collective Caregiving* frame reiterates that we all want young people to be healthy and do well, which taps into a deeply held and widely shared sense of responsibility to care for kids.

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,” “key stakeholders,” or “entitlement programs,” 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**, 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 *telling a story from a child’s point of view* that 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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