

Reframing Child Abuse and Neglect: A Practical Tool Kit

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Recommendations for Talking About Community

*Adapted from “Making the Case for Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention”
By Susan Nall Bales (FrameWorks Institute, 2004)*

Key Challenges

While the Community frame is one solution that presents the most promise, it is not without some obstacles. The FrameWorks Institute cites several challenges of the Community frame:

- A disconnect exists between the broader community, and families and children. Due to the “Family Bubble,” few can imagine an appropriate role for community in promoting families.
- This frame often leads to nostalgia for a time gone by. It reinforces Americans’ deep concern over the loss of traditional values and the deteriorating quality of life, triggering the need for more traditional forms of discipline like spanking.

Despite these challenges, if a positive, contemporary community is clearly defined as the vital link between families, this frame can cross class and reduce the stigma of outside help as only being associated with failed families and troubled parents. It can also significantly help penetrate the “Family Bubble” by creating an acceptable and positive role for outside members of the community.

Key Message Elements

When defining a role for community, the FrameWorks Institute recommends the following framing elements:

- **Begin with a strong vision or description of community.** Use analogies that define community as the environment in which children, like plants, grow, as well as others that demonstrate how members of a community can have a positive impact on children and families over time.



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- **Avoid nostalgia for the “good ol’ days,”** which only reinforces Americans’ deep concern over the loss of traditional values and may, ironically, send them back to more traditional forms of discipline like spanking. Instead, talk about and use visuals that promote contemporary communities.
- **Avoid creating the idea of community as the safety net for failed parenting.** Show how community is a positive factor in all parents’ lives, not just those in trouble. Portray community as a source of positive development and support, not just for the prevention of the negative.
- **Stress community connections,** such as libraries, recreational organizations, schools or community centers, which affect and benefit children and their families. Be careful not to fall into the trap of putting the responsibility on the parents to make these connections or imply that these programs are abundant (leading to the conclusion that only ineffective parents fail to find them).
- **Stress interactivity and mutuality of benefits** – we give to children now so that they can give back to the community and society in the future.
- **Get other community members into the picture, and avoid tightly framed communications that reinforce the “Family Bubble.”** Use unexpected messengers to broaden the discussion to the community. For example, use community elders or pediatricians to explain child development, or bring in front-line program directors who have worked with kids and families. Try to promote trust, as opposed to safety measures required to prevent stranger danger.
- **Show other community actors interacting with children and enjoying it.** Stress that it is a pleasure to be involved in the lives of children and families. Portray community as an attractive place, not a place where children are dumped so their parents can pursue work or bad priorities.

