



Community Health Toolkit: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

This document is not intended to provide “the right answers” to questions you might be asked, but rather as illustrations of how to work with themes that FrameWorks research has proven to be effective. In the following Q and A, we demonstrate how an advocate might think about turning unproductive frames embedded in questions into opportunities to discuss more productive topics. Communicators will find their own ways of putting these principles into practice.

Q: So tell me about your new initiative to get folks eating better and up off the couch.

Less Effective Response:

Our project is trying to help people eat right by encouraging people to make better food choices by giving them better places to shop, and to educate them about healthy eating. We also want to get people to become more active by building more walking trails and increasing the hours that community rec centers are open.

Analysis:

- By not reframing the issue, people’s dominant frame of Health Individualism will make policy solutions seem irrelevant.
- The focus on this response is on people’s choices rather than the surrounding environments.

More Effective Response:

A growing number of forward-thinking communities have been able to implement effective policies and programs that would make their residents healthier and we are planning to join them to make [our city] a healthier place. Just how strong and healthy our citizens can be depends on the public structures we create and maintain as a city, such as adequate transportation

systems that support walking and biking, and a network of farmers markets located throughout the city. When these public structures are well maintained, they form a kind of machinery that makes it possible for us to maintain our health and quality of life. When we improve these public structures that support physical activity and access to nutritious food, the health of the people who live and work in our community improves as well.

Analysis:

- This response begins with the value of Ingenuity, and uses the Public Structures simplifying model.
- It leads people to understand how changes to the built environment are the starting point for improving the health of individuals.
- It connects the fate of various groups to the ability of the city to support health, what we sometimes call “shared fate”, while redirecting thinking away from individual and group lifestyles.

Q: Isn't it the parents' responsibility to make sure children eat healthy diets and get enough exercise?

Less Effective Response:

Children get much less exercise than they did a generation ago. New media like television and computers keep them on the couch. But it's not hard to help kids eat better and get active. Just try sneaking a few more fruits and vegetables into their diets, and having them move around even 30 minutes each day. This is a good start to improving their health.

Analysis:

- This response focuses on children's and parents' behaviors rather than directing attention to how environments can be more supportive of physical activity and healthy eating.
- It includes distracting issues such as television watching and computer use, which remind people of the press of modern life and the futility of fighting what may be inevitable.
- It does not offer a role for communities, schools, government, and other institutions to contribute policies to effect change.

More Effective Response:

Being healthy as adults is largely determined by the communities we live in as children. However, communities differ in the quality of their food and fitness environments and that has a big effect on the children who grow up there. Our local school district has let our children's food and fitness environments decline, cutting back on opportunities for physical activity, and providing less than healthy food in school lunch and breakfast programs. This leads to poorer diets, less physical activity and worse health for our kids. Other communities have more opportunities for physical education and healthier foods in the schools, two important ways to support children's health.

Analysis:

- This response begins with a value of Fairness, and uses the Food and Fitness simplifying model. It focuses on places, not people – the school and community environment, rather than children and parents.
- It introduces school-based solutions to the problem.
- It emphasizes the role that communities can play in supporting child health.

Q: How can more government regulation and intervention really help people eat better and get more exercise? People make the choice to eat right and take care of themselves, or they don't.

Less Effective Response:

There are many things that the government can do to improve health, such as requiring stronger nutrition labeling on food products, reducing the amount of food advertising directed at children, changing zoning laws to create mixed-use development, and requiring schools to meet the federally recommended physical activity standard for all students.

Analysis:

- Without more effort at reframing the nexus of public health and government, trying to convince people that government should intervene in what are seen as largely individual problems will only reinvigorate their unhelpful thinking about the "nanny state" or government's inappropriate attempts to control individual choice. In effect, food and

- fitness policy will suffer further from its association with government – a double whammy.
- Because a strong reframe is not provided here, the audience is likely to retain its default frame of Health Individualism, or the belief that it is a personal responsibility to make healthy choices. This default frame does not lead to support for policy change.

More Effective Response:

We can act together to improve the health of our community by building and supporting strong public structures, such as our parks and open spaces, walking and biking paths, farmers markets and other sources of healthy food. When we improve and maintain these structures, they form a kind of machinery that makes it possible for us to maintain our health and quality of life. Supporting public health, and especially protecting children’s health, are important ways of promoting the common good, and that is what government should and can support.

Analysis:

- The value of Ingenuity, combined with a Public Structures simplifying model changes the conversation toward civic engagement and away from unhelpful beliefs about government.
- The mission of government – supporting the common good, protecting children’s health – are introduced as explicit values cues to help guide the conversation toward productive ways of thinking about government.

Q: Kids don’t walk to school or play outside any more because it isn’t safe. When I was a kid, you could just run around the block, or walk back and forth to school, but now it’s too dangerous.

Less Effective Response:

Safety is an important concern, and of course, we want children to be safe. We are working on a “Safe Routes to School” campaign right now to try to create safe ways for children to walk and bike to school, where we protect them by having them walk in groups led by responsible adults.

Analysis:

- This response “takes the bait” and runs with the Safety frame introduced by the questioner. At the very least, this stereotypes some communities as unsafe and fails to recognize assets that can be built upon to make the community stronger.
- Getting people to think of their community as unsafe further undermines their interest in other collective actions for the common good. Safety becomes a pre-requisite to all else. When concerns about safety are raised, issues such as crime prevention come to the forefront, trumping seemingly less important issues such as physical activity.
- It also raises the issue of modernism, in which crime is an inevitable byproduct of modern life, from television to transportation.

More Effective Response:

Making sure that all of our children have access to a good food and fitness environment is important if communities are to see them grow into healthy adults. We are part of a coalition of schools, parents and community leaders that have created a new campaign because we believe communities can and should do more to support public health. The “Safe Routes to School” campaign is pushing for changes to road design, creating more biking and walking paths. When children have access to biking and walking paths, it encourages them to walk and bike to school, which improves their physical fitness and future health.

Analysis:

- This response begins with the value of Prevention, which tells the audience why your project matters for children.
- It uses the simplifying model of the Food and Fitness Environment to avoid the trap of Health Individualism.
- It presents the policy solutions in a causal way, linking a positive outcome to the policy activity.