

Emerging Minds Two-Generation Toolkit

DECEMBER 2023

**FRAME
WORKS**

Say This, Not That

A communications strategy starts with knowing what to say and what to leave unsaid. Messaging can be optimised by selecting the right terms and themes, whilst also knowing what to avoid. Instead of a list of words and phrases to avoid, this chart of new themes to try offers a concise overview of a refreshed framing approach. Incorporate these recommended terms and themes in your communications materials.

Used to this?	Try this instead!
'Breaking the intergenerational cycle of mental illness.'	→ 'Intergenerational approaches to building wellbeing and wellness' or 'Building wellbeing at multiple stages.'

Here's why it works:

This counters the deterministic view that mental health disorders are inevitable and underscores that societal interventions can prevent and treat these disorders, affirming the potential for change.

Used to this?	Try this instead!
'Mental illness in parents poses a threat to children and family stability.'	→ 'Supporting the mental health of both parents and children benefits everyone.'

Here's why it works:

This avoids crisis language and promotes thinking about solutions to build the public's sense of efficacy (the belief that individuals have the power to make meaningful, lasting change in society).

Used to this?	Try this instead!
'Certain groups have higher rates of mental illness than others.'	→ 'Mental health supporters are more readily available in some places than in others.'

Here's why it works:

Discussing disparities without explanation can unintentionally lead to unhelpful group comparisons. Framing the cause of these disparities as inconsistent access to care positions the issue as a systemic, addressable challenge.

Used to this?	Try this instead!
'The detrimental effects of poor mental health include...'	→ 'Mental health is closely linked to other societal issues, like...'

Here's why it works:

The reframed phrase highlights key connections across social issues without blaming mental health as a root cause of other social problems. To make it even better, it could offer examples to explain how these issues intersect with each other.

Used to this?	Try this instead!
'Broken system'	→ 'We can improve and expand upon supports for families by...'

Here's why it works:

Using terms like *broken* leads to fatalism about change. Talking about how the system can be improved with concrete examples builds a sense of efficacy.

Do's and Dont's

When discussing two generational approaches to child mental health, it's critical to be well-versed in the most effective framing strategies and understand why certain approaches may be counterproductive or misunderstood.

 Framing Strategies to Adopt	 Framing Strategies to Avoid
<p>DO expand the conversation from just children to families at every opportunity: Emphasis the tightly linked nature of child and parent mental health in every communication.</p>	<p>DON'T forget to include community and society: Highlight the role we <i>all</i> play in laying the foundation for healthy childhood development.</p>
<p>DO emphasise the importance of building family resilience: Use the Navigating Waters metaphor to talk about how parent-child relationships are affected by context, and the importance of supporting parents when they face adversity.</p>	<p>DON'T talk about families without context: Avoid emphasising <i>blame and shame</i> thinking by talking about families alone - always emphasise the role context plays in parent-child relationships.</p>
<p>DO use the Serve and Return explanatory metaphor to talk about family relationships and how they can be disrupted: Use this metaphor to talk about how bidirectionality works and how stressors on parents and families can make back-and-forth interactions between children and caregivers more difficult.</p>	<p>DON'T link children's mental health to parents without explaining how it works: Otherwise, people assume that parents are exclusively responsible for their children's mental health.</p>
<p>DO give examples of wraparound services as often as possible: Use explanatory examples of these services so your audiences see what is possible.</p>	<p>DON'T assume that people understand what holistic programs are: People see children's and parents' services as siloed. Without clear examples of holistic programs, people may not see them as feasible.</p>
<p>DO use the value of <i>Fairness</i> when advocating for better policies: Make the case that child mental health is a priority because all Australian children, regardless of background or circumstance, deserve a fair go at a healthy life.</p>	<p>DON'T use terms like intergenerational trauma without explaining their origins: Doing so can reinforce fatalistic thinking and othering of people who already face adversities such as racism and discrimination.</p>
<p>DO talk about the conditions that promote engagement with mental health services: Explain how barriers to family engagement work and how programs and policies break down those barriers. Make engagement with services a systemic issue.</p>	<p>DON'T reinforce people's belief that accessing services is solely parents' responsibility: Talking about parents' behaviour without talking about the role systems play in making those services accessible can lead to fatalistic thinking about parents' willingness to engage.</p>
<p>DO underscore that wraparound services involve regular, ongoing interaction: This broadens understanding of what holistic interventions can and should be.</p>	<p>DON'T feed into people's belief that involvement with services is limited to individual events or addressing acute problems: Avoid focusing on episodic interactions at the expense of systemic programs.</p>

Before and After

These before-and-after examples show how to reframe and highlight the interplay and mutual influence of children's and parents' mental health, emphasising its dynamic and reciprocal nature.

Reframing communications involves tailoring the presentation of information, often subtly. These paragraphs tackle key topics in adult and child mental health – prevention, disparities, care for children and families, and multigenerational approaches to health – demonstrating how to refine examples for clearer presentations.

Prevention

Before

Studies show that by age 14, half of those who will develop mental health disorders in adulthood already exhibit symptoms. Yet, **we often overlook these signs until they escalate into crises.** Rather than prioritising prevention and early intervention, and ensuring access to necessary services, we witness **alarmingly high instances of self-harm, suicide, school absenteeism/dropouts, homelessness, substance abuse, and involvement in the youth justice system.**

While we strive to offer mental health services to those in need, the sheer volume of affected individuals underscores our delayed response.

Crisis messaging disengages audiences and depresses support for needed solutions by feeding a sense of *fatalism* - the belief that the problems we face are too big.

The focus here is on what happens when we don't prevent mental illness, missing an opportunity to help your audiences envision positive outcomes.

After

Many mental health disorders can be prevented, or their impact lessened, if we address early signs and symptoms proactively. These signs typically manifest years before a clinical disorder emerges. Adopting a holistic and multigenerational strategy stands out as an effective means to pre-empt mental health issues and enhance outcomes. We must ensure that quality mental health services are available to all family members. Beyond individual care, **promoting mental health is essential.** This involves reducing risk factors, such as inadequate access to safe and affordable housing, and amplifying protective measures, such as integrating quality mental health care into our education and social welfare **systems.**

This reframed opening introduces prevention as a collective goal and responsibility.

Here the message conveys urgency without using a crisis tone.

Including actionable solutions will increase people's sense that prevention is possible.

Children and Families

Before

Mental illness in parents is a risk for children. Children of parents with mental illnesses have a greater chance of developing similar conditions, especially in an inconsistent, unpredictable family environment. A parent's mental illness can strain a marriage or co-parenting relationship and influence their parenting effectiveness, subsequently affecting their child's mental wellbeing. **It's crucial for parents to seek treatment,** not only for their personal healing but also for the wellbeing of their children. Studies reveal that as parents with mental disorders improve or recover, their children's symptoms improve.

This suggests determination - the idea that mental illness in parents inevitably results in harm and mental illness in children, perpetuating throughout generations. This leads audiences to think there is minimal hope for positive change.

This puts the onus for mental health treatment strictly on parents themselves, leaving the door open for *blame and shame* thinking and othering of parents struggling with their mental health.

After

Healthy relationships early in life shape the mental health of both the child and the caregiver. **The back-and-forth, two-way nature** of these foundational relationships affects adults' and children's health and wellbeing, both in the moment and long term. **Programs that promote healthy interactions and relationships between parents and children can reduce household tension, enhance caregiving skills, and create consistent, predictable home environments** that uplift the health and wellbeing of families - and their communities.

When you use terms like *back-and-forth* and *serve and return* you are making the concept of bidirectionality more vivid and accessible to your audience.

In this version, the close relationship between the mental health of parents and the mental health of children is framed as an opportunity. Providing examples of how programs work creates a sense of efficacy: instead of leading audiences to throw up their hands, this communication motivates us to exercise our agency.

Multigenerational Approaches

Before

Family adversities can significantly hinder a child's growth and development and damage mental health over multiple generations. Adverse childhood experiences, such as family and domestic violence, poverty, housing insecurity, and substance use may have long-term effects that are passed down through two or more generations. Therefore, adopting a two-generation strategy has emerged as one of the most effective means to **disrupt the intergenerational cycle of disadvantages**. Years of research highlight that home visiting programs for new parents enhance newborn and maternal health; bolster school preparedness and performance; prevent maltreatment; reduce high-risk behaviours in adolescents; and **guide families towards economic self-sufficiency**. Such programs pivot the life paths of children, curbing vicious cycles of poverty, violence, and abuse.

Terms such as *intergenerational cycle* can come across as deterministic and suggest an inevitable and unchangeable fate. Emphasising a *vicious cycle* may lead audiences to question, "Why bother?" Such a perspective can overshadow the viable solutions presented in any subsequent statements.

The FrameWorks Institute's research on public thinking about human services finds that the assumption that people should be self-sufficient can backfire. Instead of focusing on public thinking about the goals of support, it reinforces the assumption that support should be temporary and only provide the most basic of necessities.

After

Family dynamics deeply influence the experiences and mental health outcomes of multiple generations within families. **Embracing an intergenerational strategy provides solutions that extend beyond children's immediate needs, benefitting grandparents, parents, siblings, and caregivers**. For instance, years of research highlight that home visiting programs not only enhance newborn and maternal health and relationships, but they also have longer-term benefits such as bolstering school preparedness and performance; improving adolescent wellbeing; and have positively impacted families' economic outcomes. **Actively supporting every family member's wellbeing established united, robust, and thriving households, which contributes significantly to societal health, and promotes a more inclusive community mindset**.

Here, the message highlights the positive *benefits* of a multigenerational approach early on.

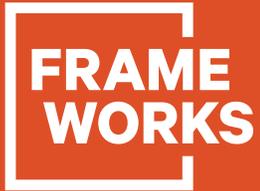
This message ends with a strong call to action and positive vision for the future.



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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