

Quick-Start Guide to Framing CSA Prevention

MAY 2024

**FRAME
WORKS**



JOHNS HOPKINS
BLOOMBERG SCHOOL
of PUBLIC HEALTH

**Moore Center for the
Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse**

Quick-Start Guide to Framing CSA Prevention

This quick-start guide is designed to give a broad range of communicators support in strategically framing their CSA prevention efforts. It includes guidance on how to avoid common communications traps and a bank of grab-and-go starter language.

Framing research speaks to the power of telling a new narrative about CSA prevention. The “Help Provided” narrative focuses on people who are at risk of committing CSA who *don’t* commit abuse due to the systemic supports they receive. Research shows that this new narrative is highly effective in overcoming the public’s fatalism about CSA and building understanding among the public that prevention is possible, which reduces their support for extremely punitive solutions and helps build support for systemic change to prevent CSA.

Interested in learning more? Check out the “Help Provided” Narrative Toolkit and the strategic report, *Changing the Story of Child Sexual Abuse Prevention: Build a More Effective Narrative*.

Avoiding Common Communications Traps

Avoid framing CSA prevention as a public health issue

Members of the public don’t have a firm grasp of what “public health” means and are largely unaware of the connection between a “public health approach” and a preventive one. By using the language of prevention rather than the language of public health, you can make your communication more understandable and compelling.

What this looks like:

Shift from “public health” framing ...	→	... to “prevention” framing
Child sexual abuse is a public health issue that requires a public health response.	→	Child sexual abuse is a serious issue that can be prevented.

Avoid front-loading your communication with stark statistics

To make sure your audience engages with your communication, be sure not to spark fatalism and turn people away by opening with bleak facts. Instead, start with an affirmation of the efficacy of prevention and save statistics about prevalence and scope for later in your message.

What this looks like:

Shift from starting with prevalence statistics to supporting your narrative with statistics
Child sexual abuse has devastating lifelong impacts and harms an estimated 3.7 million children every year.	→ Child sexual abuse can be prevented before children get hurt.
By investing in CSA prevention, we can stop more children from getting hurt...	→ Investing in CSA prevention has the potential to make a huge impact: An estimated 3.7 million children are harmed by CSA each year...

Avoid unframed data

Presenting data without explanation leads to two potential pitfalls: First, audiences might not know what a number “means.” Is it big or small? How much bigger or smaller is one number than another? Second, without context, an audience fills in the story about data for themselves. Remember, you are not your audience. Make sure to add cues to help your audience reach the conclusion you want them to reach (for example, that we need to be spending more money on CSA prevention research).

What this looks like:

Shift from using numbers on their own to putting numbers in context
In 2021, the United States spent approximately \$5.4 billion on incarcerating adults convicted of sex crimes against children, and \$2 million on funding child sexual abuse prevention research.	→ With the right investment, we can stop child sexual abuse before it happens. But right now, the U.S. invests only \$1 in prevention research for every \$3,125 we spend in punishment after the fact.

Avoid “yes, but” statements that reinforce the Law and Punishment narrative

Use your limited “communications real estate” to make your case for prevention, and don’t reinforce people’s existing belief that punishment is the only solution to child sexual abuse.

What this looks like:

Shift from “yes, but” to making the affirmative case
Of course punishment is important, but it can’t be our only approach. Preventing child sexual abuse is crucial.	→ Preventing child abuse before it happens is crucial. We need to do more than only focusing on punishment after abuse has happened.

Grab-and-Go Starter Language

Here we have pulled together some phrases and key ideas that can be used to get started on communications pieces such as blogs, reports, flyers, websites, invitations to meetings, and emails. Use them as is or as inspirational jumping-off points to craft communications for your stakeholders in your own voice.

Advance the affirmative case

Ideas like the ones below probably can’t be repeated enough. They instill a sense of efficacy: the idea that difficult challenges can (and must) be solved.

- Child sexual abuse (CSA) is preventable.
- Prevention is key to ending child sexual abuse.
- We have strong evidence that programs focused on preventing abuse before it happens are highly effective.
- Prevention programs can play a transformative role in the lives of people who are at risk of committing child sexual abuse.
- We have seen how our current national approach to respond to child sexual abuse only after harm has occurred does not do enough to prevent it from happening in the first place. We need to prioritize prevention *before* child sexual abuse happens.

Shared responsibility/Shared benefit

Point to “the why of the work” to help new constituencies understand why your work matters to all of us. Also, these communications strategies remind those who are doing the work why it matters, and what’s at stake:

- We all have a role to play.
- We can do better as a society to prevent child sexual abuse.
- We know the risk factors, and we know what works to prevent child sexual abuse.
- We have a responsibility as a society to prevent child sexual abuse.
- As a culture, we need to change the normalization of sexual violence—which would make things better for all of us.
- It is in our interest as a society to ensure there are prevention programs for people who are at risk of committing child sexual abuse to receive the help they need, so they never commit harm against children.

Solutions

Make sure to bring the focus to collective solutions, policies, and programs, highlighting the role of non-parental adults and public systems. We don’t want to place responsibility for safety solely on the shoulders of families, much less individual children. One powerful way to expand responsibility in our communications is to describe how proposed interventions actually work to prevent child sexual abuse:

- When we provide prevention programs to people who are at risk of committing child sexual abuse, we can make a real difference in the lives of so many.
- We can do more to provide appropriate clinical services to individuals who are at risk for committing child sexual abuse.
- We can do more to offer appropriate clinical services for youth who exhibit problematic sexual behaviors.
- We also need interventions like comprehensive sex education classes in schools, which provide all children with age-appropriate information about bodily autonomy and what is and isn’t an accurate portrayal of sex and sexual intimacy.



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.

Learn more at www.frameworksinstitute.org

Produced in collaboration with the Moore Center for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. Supported by Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development of the National Institutes of Health.



JOHNS HOPKINS
BLOOMBERG SCHOOL
of PUBLIC HEALTH

Moore Center for the
Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse

Quick-Start Guide to Framing CSA Prevention

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the FrameWorks Institute.

Please follow standard APA rules for citation, with the FrameWorks Institute as publisher:

FrameWorks Institute (2024). *Quick-Start Guide to Framing CSA Prevention*. FrameWorks Institute.

© FrameWorks Institute 2024