PUBLIC

Developing Community Connections:
Qualitative Research Regarding Framing Policies

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Method

The following analysis is based on discussions with six focus groups. All focus group participants were recruited to meet a community opinion leader profile (votes, follows the news regularly, engaged in the community, etc.). Groups were divided by gender and mixed on all other demographic criteria. Two groups were held in each of the following locations:

Manchester, NH – July 7, 2003
Atlanta, GA – July 9, 2003
Chicago, IL – July 14, 2003

Focus groups are a form of qualitative research; the results cannot be projected to a broader population.

Introduction and Summary

The objective of this phase of research was to determine how Prevent Child Abuse America (PCA America) can effectively frame the organization's communications to advance a broad agenda of policies for children and families, including both policies that directly address maltreatment as well as policies less directly associated with maltreatment, such as early education, health, economic security, and family work issues. To that end, focus group participants were asked to review and respond to four articles, each designed to represent one of four frames: Child Abuse, Parenting, Child Development, and Community. In real news coverage these frames can, and do, overlap, but the research deliberately kept each frame distinct to attempt to isolate the effects of each frame on a proxy list of representative policies and programs. Nevertheless, some order effects were observed and these are noted where relevant in the analysis.

The four frames were developed based upon past research. FrameWorks Institute research suggested that children's issues need to connect to a role for communities and that a child development discussion could help the public prioritize policies for children. Cultural Logic had identified the public's lack of understanding about how children develop, the influence of family-centric thinking, and the role of isolation in communicating the importance of community. These findings were further informed by work in progress from the National Scientific Panel on the Developing Child. Finally, PCA America's own research informed the research, particularly in developing the Child Abuse Frame.

Each frame provides different benefits in communicating child and family issues, and each of the four frames has a role to play in the overall communications strategy. Importantly, the communications strategy cannot exist separately from a policy agenda. This research demonstrates that each frame is effective in advancing different kinds of policies.

There are a number of deficits in existing public perceptions that communications needs to overcome. The most difficult challenge is to bring children's issues into the public arena. Historically, children's issues have been hampered by the public's inability to see societal responsibility for children. Other than education, the public cannot connect children to a broader community. Cultural Logic refers to this as the "Family Bubble" which they define as "the default mode of thinking in which events within the family (including child rearing and child maltreatment) take place in a sphere that is separate and different from the public sphere….It means that even thinking about the interaction between child rearing and public policy is difficult for people…."

The Family Bubble has several consequences for how people think about these issues. If parenting and child rearing exist in a separate sphere, then parenting is an individual choice and individual responsibility, external conditions do not matter to the success of the family, and outsiders (unless they are an extension of the Family Bubble) have no

role. The only role for outsiders is negative and represents a failure by parents, i.e., an inability to provide for their children, or abusive conditions.

To build support for policies for families and children, it is imperative to develop positive connections to a broader community. Otherwise, people will resist new policies on the basis of inappropriate "government intrusion" and the programs that do exist will always be defined as being about parents who are failing.

Child abuse as a topic represents a particularly difficult challenge. Due to the hard work by PCA America and others, the public sees child maltreatment as a serious and pervasive problem, recognizes the various forms of maltreatment, and sees a role for society in intervening to address these situations. However, the media's vivid portrayal of child abuse also paralyzes direct public intervention and reminds people that there are few viable solutions to the problem.

The Child Abuse Frame, as tested in the focus groups, was designed to reflect PCA America's existing approach to communications. This frame is very effective in raising questions about government priorities. However, it also undermines support for government solutions, which people believe are broken. The article's prevention message and its call for positive parenting go largely unnoticed due to the vivid nature of the Child Abuse and Failed Government frames.

The Parenting Frame connects with people's personal experience and reframes the idea that parenting should come naturally. It introduces the idea of inadvertent abuse, which allows people to question their own behavior in a non-threatening way. The Parenting Frame develops the idea that all Americans have a stake in good parenting, though it does not go far enough in this regard. Finally, this frame is particularly successful in creating a conversation about policies to help people balance work and family. This frame needs to be constructed carefully however, since it can easily reinforce the Family Bubble, and cause people to believe that it is not possible to prepare for parenthood.

The Child Development Frame is a "new" story that interests people. It is a non-threatening way for parents to get advice and training about infancy through the teen years. The Child Development Frame begins to connect children to community, and is less overt in the role for community than some of the other frames tested. It provides an important foundation for future support of policies. In the focus groups, participants began to use child development to reason about child and family policies, demonstrating that it will be an important element of effective communications to advance children's issues. There are also deficiencies in the frame that careful construction will have to overcome. Currently, people see every child as unique and reject the notion that a child can be limited by early experiences. Furthermore, people's thinking about child development currently defaults to parent-child interactions and disciplinary issues.

Finally, the Community Frame was designed to avoid the Family Bubble mindset and connect families to communities in positive ways. There are three kinds of communities that come to mind, only one of which advances policies for families. One detrimental

image of community is a nostalgic view of a 1950s community, which is strongly associated with physical discipline and which reminds people that it is no longer safe to allow children to roam neighborhoods freely. A second detrimental image of community is "community" as a government safety net for families that are failing. When connections to community are too overt, people become defensive and worry about government intrusion into families. Finally, to lead to policy support, people need to be reminded of their positive connections to community and the role of those connections in supporting families. The Community Frame is effective in developing those connections, but needs to be carefully constructed to lead to a beneficial image of community, rather than trigger an image that undermines children's issues.

All four frames have a role to play, but the balance of the four frames in future communications will depend largely upon the policy agenda that PCA America intends to pursue.

The Child Abuse Frame

The attention that PCA America and others have brought to child maltreatment over the years has resulted in several positive achievements. The public sees child maltreatment as a serious and pervasive problem, recognizes the various forms of maltreatment, and sees a role for society in intervening to address these situations. However, the vividness of the child abuse frame also paralyzes direct public intervention, reminds people that the solutions to the problem are broken, and fails to promote child-friendly policies beyond the scope of the child abuse issue.

The Child Abuse Frame, as tested in the focus groups, was designed to reflect PCA America's existing approach to communications. It is effective in causing readers to question whether or not government has the right priorities when it comes to children and families. However, it also undermines support for government solutions and does not address the perceptions that prohibit people from acting on child maltreatment. Importantly, it does not advance a prevention agenda, providing little impetus for better family support services, early intervention and referral or even parenting education. The article's prevention message and its call for positive parenting go largely unnoticed due to the vividness of the Child Abuse and Failed Government frames.

Issue Context

Child maltreatment is a high priority for the public. Focus group participants believe maltreatment is pervasive in society and are quick to label a variety of actions as representing "child abuse." "We hear it all the time," a Chicago man explained. "You can't turn on the TV or read the paper without seeing [it]." Furthermore, the public is familiar with a variety of different kinds of abuse. "There's not really one definition," a Manchester woman explained. "You've got intellectual neglect, you've got neglect at school, you've got nurturing neglect, you've got neglect of love. Then you've got the

physical and emotional and sexual abuse." "It's all those different points," an Atlanta man noted, "physical, emotional, spiritual."

For some participants, "child abuse" has come to mean any kind of negative interaction with a child. "I would even put [abuse] as inappropriate behavior," a Manchester woman described. "Even with teachers singling out kids and that's a form of abuse, like teachers, you know…God bless them for doing it, but there's some that for whatever reason, they clash with a kid or they've just been there so long that they definitely have inappropriate ways." A Chicago woman summarized: "I tell you any time that you are treating a child…treat them anything worse than nice. I think it's abuse."

The broad and vague definition of abuse is a barrier to understanding and action, in part because it makes the problem seem overwhelming. "It's such a broad topic," a Manchester woman stated. "There are so many aspects of child abuse that…sometimes you don't even know where to begin." Furthermore, this expansive understanding of abuse causes focus group participants to worry that society is going too far, for example, by equating spanking with abuse. "I even think sometimes how people take it too far. When they take child abuse too far," an Atlanta woman worried. "When they say, 'Okay, you spanked your child in Wal-Mart and so now you are going to jail.'…If that child was stealing, that child needs to be spanked and that's not child abuse."

While focus group participants recognize all forms of child maltreatment, the dominant image of "child abuse" is one of extreme physical harm. "My visualization of abuse is what I see on the TV," an Atlanta man described, "when they show malnutritioned (sic) and beaten kids with black and blue and deformed and whatever."

"Abusive behavior" conjures up somewhat different images of less extreme, but still inappropriate actions such as yelling, that could be done by any parent in a stressful situation. "Yelling at the kid," an Atlanta man explained. "Always telling them they are bad," a Chicago woman suggested. "Different degrees that's all," remarked a Chicago man. For many, "abusive behavior" is an isolated act that any parent could commit, while "child abuse" is ongoing, repetitive behavior. "I think abusive behavior can be isolated," a Manchester man explained, "while child abuse I consider to be long term; it happens repeatedly. Abusive behavior can be one incident. You can be abusive just once, but child abuse I consider to be repetitive."

According to focus group participants, child neglect is different than child abuse, and includes not paying enough attention to a child. Asked for the images that come to mind when they think of child neglect, Chicago respondents described: "dirty, homeless," "emaciated, hungry," "unloved," and "latch key kids at seven years old, letting themselves in." "You sit the child in front of a television and just let them go," an Atlanta woman stated. "I mean in today's age it's either a Playstation or the TV. That way you can do your thing and work on your work that you brought home from the office, and you just don't deal with that child."

Sex abuse is perceived as a different category from other forms of child maltreatment. For some, it is a criminal act. For others, it is an illness. "I think it's a little different because it's not the parent," a Manchester man explained. "It may be a parental figure for the child, but it's not their parent." "It is a crime, pedophilia is a crime," a Manchester woman argued. "I don't see why it's falling under church jurisdiction here. I think people should be slammed for it." "I think it's illness," a Manchester woman remarked. "I think they're pretty sicko's; they're sick, sick people." Furthermore, while many acts of child maltreatment may be unintentional, "sexual abuse is very intentional." (Manchester woman)

Most say they are willing to intervene personally if they see an extreme case of child abuse. At the same time, most are also uncomfortable with the prospect of intruding in another family's affairs. "I think there's a balancing act in our society," a Manchester man noted. "There's something that tells us that the family is sacred, and that we hesitate to intrude upon that family unit unless it's very extreme." When reasoning in this frame, focus group participants cannot see a positive way to be involved with children other than their own. Instead, involvement is confrontational and accusatory. Focus group participants report that people are reluctant to intervene, in part because there are differing definitions of abuse and it is within the prerogative of the family to draw the line between discipline and abuse unless the situation is extreme. "It would be my definition of abuse versus your definition of abuse," stated an Atlanta woman. At the same time, most say they would intervene in the case of obvious maltreatment: "If I saw something that in my mind I knew was wrong, nothing would stop me." (Atlanta woman) Problematically, the "proof" of maltreatment is significant. Focus group participants indicate that they would have to see repeated inappropriate acts, or would need to see extreme evidence, such as iron marks, etc.

To protect the child, the public expects government intervention. At the same time, people are uncomfortable with government intrusion into families and worry that the definition of "abuse" goes too far. "I think it has a lot to do with the government being involved in how you rear your children," an Atlanta woman complained. "I just think they have too much say in the whole matter. I don't agree with the yelling and screaming and belittling your child, but I think children need to be disciplined and when they aren't, you end up with a monster."

Furthermore, everything focus group participants hear about government's handling of children who have been mistreated tells them that the solutions are broken. "Their caseloads are phenomenal," a Manchester woman remarked. "One person has a load of caseloads."

"Child abuse" cues government intervention in focus group participants' minds. Similarly, when they think of government's role in families, focus group participants think of children who have been mistreated. This close mental connection between child maltreatment and government intervention creates a barrier for promoting positive government solutions, including most forms of prevention, and community interventions for families.

Framing Effects

The child maltreatment article tested in the focus groups was able to convey persuasively that the government has the wrong priorities, i.e., politicians are ineffective and make the wrong choices. "There are other places they could cut that money," an Atlanta woman argued. Another added, "I do think we pay a lot of lip service to saying we want to take care of the children but we don't want to put our money where our mouth is and we don't want to fight the good fight to save them."

However, this approach also reminds focus group participants of all the other bad choices that government makes, such as funding an expensive war in the Middle East. This distracts participants from children's issues. "What I can't understand," a Chicago man stated, "I'm not a mathematician, just the average guy. If they can cut $13 million of whatever amount of money from programs that would benefit citizens, how in the world can we get up and allocate $50 billion to go to another country to build that country?" "I am so sick of it, all these promises," a Manchester woman emphasized. "From the top all the way down, I've had it. It's like I've almost become to the point where I'm almost ashamed to say I'm a registered voter."

Furthermore, the article does not address any of the existing perceptions that prohibit people from acting on this issue. It does not clarify the definition of maltreatment, nor help focus group participants see the problem as manageable or solvable. Without these important clarifications, it appears to them to be an overwhelming problem. "This is enormous, to sit here and even begin to think how would we do this. It's just beyond putting into words. It's enormous. It's horrifying," a Manchester woman stated. "And you can see that two or three times a week," noted a Chicago woman, "these kids dumping babies in the garbage." The article reminds them that, like the families they equate with the problem, the presumptive responsible agent for resolving this problem is also "broken." "They are desperate. They need to place these kids somewhere, so they will accept anybody," a Manchester woman explained. "They really don't check the backgrounds." "The caseload just gets larger and larger and there is not enough time," remarked an Atlanta man.

Though focus group participants recognize that child abuse and neglect can occur in any family, this frame quickly becomes about the poor, drug abusers, teen mothers, etc. "I think it's more prevalent when you have a lower socio-economic scale," an Atlanta man noted, "because they have a lot more hardships. Sometimes they don't know where their next meal may be coming from. They don't know if they are going to pay the rent." This dynamic could be helpful if people linked the problem to economic conditions that can be prevented, and not some flaw internal to poor people – a challenging task. "If you can somehow alleviate their socio-economic position so there are not as many pressures," an Atlanta man suggested. "If a single mom has three kids to feed and she has a high school education, she is going to have a lot of pressure to feed those children. So somehow you can

improve her condition whether it is through education, whether it is through housing, whether it is through day care."

Many participants miss the article's prevention message. For some, prevention seems impossible. "I think it's almost impossible to prevent it," a Manchester woman confessed, "and I know that sounds just so negative but if you look at how long it's been going on, and it's always been a problem and no one has seemed to stop it or deter it yet, I just don't know." For others, prevention means deterring people from having children before they are ready. "Don't teach a teenage mother how to take care of a kid," an Atlanta man argued. "Teach her not to have that kid, if she is not ready for it." This perspective makes life education in high school an obvious solution. A Chicago woman described a high school parenting class: "They have to take care of the baby so it makes them aware that this child cries. They cannot turn it off. I think that is a good thing. I think actually abstinence is not a bad thing to teach either. So there is a lot of things like that I think if we postpone having children -- I'm sure there are studies about child abuse being more prevalent among certain ages versus other ages."

The article's positive parenting message is also overwhelmed by the vividness of the child abuse frame. When prompted, participants discuss positive parenting favorably. According to a Manchester man, it means "doing the things that we mentioned, spending the time, providing for the kid, not leaving them to fend for themselves. Make them feel loved." Atlanta women described positive parenting as "a good role model," "nurturing, loving," and "encouraging."

Finally, focus group participants begin to see child maltreatment as inadvertent, which creates a sympathetic view of abusive parents and underscores that any parent can engage in abusive behavior. "When this one child continues to be defiant and disobedient over and over and over again cause you got this strong willed child," a Manchester woman explained, "they don't intentionally want to scream 'shut up' at the top of their lungs…but they don't have another coping skill." This perspective allows parents to question their own behavior in a non-accusatory way. "I think all of us that have been parents," an Atlanta man explained, "we've been doing something, the child has been bothering you and you turn. 'Wait a minute. Hold on, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to say that. What do you need?' We all get in that thing."

It is important to note that, while focus group participants make most of the sympathetic comments in the course of discussing the child abuse article, it is fairly clear that the parenting article (discussed in the following section) creates this perspective, not the child abuse article. Comments about abuse being inadvertent only occur in Atlanta and Manchester, when the parenting article preceded the child abuse article, and did not occur in Chicago, when the parenting article came after the child abuse article.

The Parenting Frame

Historically, children's issues have been hampered by the public's inability to assign societal responsibility for children. With the exception of education, the public has a difficult time identifying the ways in which children connect to a broader community. Cultural Logic refers to this as the "Family Bubble" which they define as "the default mode of thinking in which events within the family (including child rearing and child maltreatment) take place in a sphere that is separate and different from the public sphere.…It means that even thinking about the interaction between child rearing and public policy is difficult for people…."

The Family Bubble has several consequences for how people think about parenting. If parenting and child rearing exist in a separate sphere, then parenting is an individual choice and individual responsibility, external conditions do not matter to the success of the family, and outsiders (unless they are an extension of the Family Bubble) have no role. The only role for outsiders is negative and represents a failure by parents. To build support for policies for children, people need to see positive connections to the community. Otherwise, policies will always be defined as being about parents who are failing.

The Parenting Frame tested in the focus groups was designed to frame parenting as a job which requires training, rather than a natural instinct or morality taught by family. It also sought to define a societal stake in the success of families.

While the Parenting Frame is not able to completely overcome all of the existing perceptual barriers, it does have several benefits that advance the conversation. It connects with people's personal experience. It reframes the notion that parenting should come naturally and instead helps people to see that most people are not prepared for parenthood. As discussed in the previous section, the Parenting Frame allows people to see abuse as inadvertent, which allows them to question their own behavior in a non-threatening way. It establishes empathy, not sympathy – an important distinction in constituency building for social policies. Moreover, it takes some small steps toward helping people understand that all Americans have a stake in good parenting. Finally, this frame is particularly successful in creating a conversation about policies to help people balance work and family.

Issue Context

When focus group participants' attention is centered on parents, their default thinking strongly suggests that parenting is an individual choice and responsibility, and people have to live with the consequences of the choices they make. "They made a choice," an Atlanta man noted, "and if the choice is to work the 12 hour days and have a nanny or a grandmother do it, that's a choice they made that they have to live with."

Furthermore, focus group participants indicate that parenting is either an innate ability, or, that it should be taught by family. "Good parenting breeds good parenting," an Atlanta

man stated. "Trust your heart," a Chicago man recommended. "You can't be naive and think of raising your child by yourself and just do everything from How to be a Good Parent Handbook, that my wife got when she was pregnant," a Chicago man sneered. "It's good to read all of that stuff but you've got to listen to your mom, your grandmother, your aunts, your cousins. Those people had babies before you."

Conditions are largely irrelevant in raising children successfully, according to focus group participants. "It doesn't matter how much money or how little money," a Manchester woman explained. "You can live in the lower incomes in New York City, and you can have some of the nicest kids with happy, loving, either single parent families or multiparent families…you can have any kind of combination but if your kids are loved and they feel safe they're bound to foster."

All that good parents really need is to love their children. "You have to love the event and enjoy the idea that you are going to be a parent," a Chicago man noted. "The rest will follow because I'm going to tell you there are a lot of people that don't want to be parents and when they find out they are parents, they go through a real problem adjusting to the idea." "I'd say do the best you can," a Manchester man recommended, "and, you're going to make mistakes. Don't be too hard on yourself, as long as you love your child, spend time with the child, be there for them."

However, several focus group participants suggest that parents are scrutinized constantly, putting pressure on parents' decisions and abilities. "They judge you every aspect of the way," a New Hampshire woman complained. "'What do you feed your kids? Oh, you don't feed all natural? Oh, you don't feed all soy? Oh, you give them milk. Oh, you didn't breast feed.' You know…there's just one judgment after the next."

Indeed, focus group participants describe a variety of different kinds of bad parents, with the upper-class, dual-income family the most frequent example of parents who are not doing what is best for their children. "They have over a million dollar home," a Chicago man stated, "but the kids -- what good is it for the kids? They are always like you said in a day care or they have a nanny or whatever. Parents today that have a lot of money don't bring up their kids. Somebody else brings up their kids."

Due to the Family Bubble mindset, people see no role for others unless it is to give parents a break. "I think that having those other people in those children's life is relieving some of the stress off the parents," an Atlanta woman explained. "It doesn't necessarily mean that those kids need to listen to other people, those other influences before they listen to the parent. I just think the more caregivers you have in a child's life, the better that child is. Yeah, the parents should teach the child and they should be the first priority that that child is going to listen to. But I come from a very large family, and I don't think there is anything wrong with the aunties or the uncles taking time out with those kids or spending the weekend. It gives the parents a break; it gives the kids a break."

In this way of thinking, if "the community" does get involved, it is due to a failure of the family. After reading a series of policies for families, a Manchester man remarked: "Just

the general feeling I had as I was reading it. It's almost as if society is trying to take over the role of the parent because the parent doesn't have time to do it." "Are they trying to make them feel better?" an Atlanta woman asked in response to reading policies for families. "Like all the burden and responsibility is not on them, and there should be help for them but it really is their ultimate responsibility. You decided to have kids." Government involvement in family is a particularly offensive intrusion. "I don't think the government does anything that is positive in that sort of situation," stated an Atlanta woman. "Because you are bringing government into people's morality issues in raising their children and that's just too much."

Framing Effects

The Parenting Frame tested in the focus groups begins to reframe the strongly held belief that parenting should come naturally. A Manchester woman confessed her personal struggles after the birth of her first child: "I cried for a week every day because I felt like I had no control and we made the biggest mistake of our life. But then after five days, life was fine again but I don't think initially you're prepared." "When I left the hospital, I got home, and just sat down and said, 'Wow, I'm a father' and that was kind of an exciting feeling," stated a Manchester man, "but it was also terrifying in a way, cause now we have a third mouth to feed, and this little thing that I can hold in one hand is going to hopefully grow up to be a productive individual, so do you feel well prepared? No, absolutely not."

However, unless carefully crafted, this message can also reinforce that it is not *possible* to prepare for parenthood, further reinforcing the belief that the natural condition is for parents to be alone and without help. "You can be around people who have children," an Atlanta woman shared, "but until you actually give birth and you bring that baby home, it's not real to you. And you are grossly unprepared for it. I mean it is overwhelming."

Positioning parenting as "a tough job" reminds people that parenting is difficult and all parents would benefit from assistance rather than being left alone to learn on the job. "What is needed besides preparing someone to be a parent is the support once they are a parent," a Chicago woman stated. "When that kid is crying for four days straight and you don't know what to do anymore, you've got to have somebody that you can call or some place that you can go. "You have prenatal classes," a Manchester woman explained. "You go with a coach, you go with your partner, you go through it, but then when they hand you that baby and you take it home, I don't know what programs are out there."

The parenting frame is particularly effective in building support for work-family policies. "The last paragraph where it talks about the stress with more flexible work places," an Atlanta woman described, "it's very difficult to have a child and be a full time working mommy outside of the home. It's very difficult and when you do fight for flexible work hours, you get the biggest, in my experience, I had the biggest fights with not only the men but even the women who couldn't do their job outside the office."

Finally, positioning parenting as a "tough job" allows people to have some empathy for a parent who commits an abusive act, seeing them as in need of training rather than jail time. "If you are struggling financially or your relationship isn't going well and your job isn't going well, you lash out at the person you can control," an Atlanta woman stated. "You can control this little person, and I think parents do that and it is not intended. It doesn't mean they don't love their children. It's just that they have no outlet and there is no accommodation for them in their lives."

The Child Development Frame

People are interested in the Child Development Frame and are open to hearing new information about it – this is an important opportunity. It offers a non-threatening way for parents to feel OK about seeking advice and training about infancy through the teen years. Currently, people see every child as unique and reject the notion that a child can be limited by their early experiences. Furthermore, people's thinking about child development currently defaults to parent-child interactions and disciplinary issues.

The intention of the child development frame was to provide readers with a new way of thinking about what children need to thrive, and to connect those needs to what communities should provide. The child development frame begins to connect children to community, but is less overt in the role for community than some of the other frames tested. As will be demonstrated in later sections, focus group participants frequently use child development to reason about child and family policies. It is an important element of effective communications to advance children's issues.

Issue Context

The topic of child development sounds new – people are interested in the topic and are drawn to reading about it. "Development is one of the few areas where people always want to know more," an Atlanta man remarked. "They're always curious about that….because there is an immediate applicability in their life, betterment of their own kids, better understanding of the world around them." "I always wish I knew more," noted an Atlanta woman. "No matter how much you read, or how much you ask, or how much you talk. It's always the fear of the unknown."

Child development applies to older children as well as younger children, and several parents in the focus groups confess that by the time their children enter the teen years, they feel desperate for information and advice. "The teenage years are a little bit tenuous," an Atlanta man worried. "I haven't gone through that but I think everybody is terrified when their kids get to the age of 13, puberty, and push the parents back and dating. It's pretty scary." "I could use some [information]," a Chicago woman stated. "I was fine until last year. And then a year and a half ago, if you would have said when she turns 13, things will change and I would have thought 'not mine.' But now I'm there."

At the same time, as people consider children's development, they stress that each child is unique, which implies that there are no universal principles for raising children. "There is no right answer," an Atlanta woman cautioned. "Every child is different. What I did with my first child was completely different from what I would do with my second." Another added, "They are all different. That's the miracle, that they are unique."

While people recognize that early experiences influence later development, they reject the assertion that a child's future can be written by their experiences in infancy. According to these focus group participants, anyone can overcome early adversity and achieve great success. This is a variant of the self-made man, bootstrap frame so dominant in American thinking about adult fate. Note the following conversation among Chicago men:

> *I was reading an article; I think it was a year ago. They had assessed that children at that time who were two years old, they projected they would be inmates in a public facility or some jail. They predicted this at two years old.*
>
> *How did they do that?*
>
> *They projected environmental influences on the child?*
>
> *[talkover]*
>
> *They would come up with an assumption and with a percentage that this kid will be an inmate and nine times out of 10 times or would have kids like that. It was in the paper. It's been documented in [talkover]*
>
> *How did they -- did they do that racially or…*
>
> *They had made a study to come up with the findings. They didn't really go in-depth but I could surmise what they. . .*
>
> *It has to be socio-economic.*
>
> *Yeah.*
>
> *It couldn't be physiological.*
>
> *Right.*
>
> *Moderator: You couldn't tell based on the development of the child at age two?*
>
> *As everyone knows in the world of sports you get a guy like LaBron James who [is in] professional basketball. He's a $90 millionaire all of a sudden. This is mind boggling to me and he's never played a minute of sports. This is crazy.*

A discussion of what should be included in a book on child development reveals that focus group participants focus on parent-child interactions, not what is happening internal to the child or outside the family. "Spending time with the kids," a Manchester man recommended. "I think a lot of parents today don't spend enough time, kind of shove 'em off to daycare, and you know, they have their own agenda and kids seem to come second." "It's very important to listen to a kid," a Chicago woman remarked. "I told mine whatever it is -- I don't want them to go next door or down the street to learn something. Come to me." "Love should be the key to any relationship with your child, the number one thing," stated a Chicago man.

Furthermore, focus group participants' recommendations for a book on child development stress disciplinary issues, not positive growth and development. "You've got to learn how to say no," a Chicago man recommended. "There's got to be tough love. You've got to give tough love. You've got to be tough." "Effective discipline for each age," an Atlanta woman stated. Another added, "I think boundaries, too. The kids want structure and discipline and I think there have been generations that have not had that."

A few suggest that a better understanding of child development would have influenced their choices in physical discipline. "Knowing what to expect at each age of the child," an Atlanta woman noted, "which now that I'm reading up on that -- like they say terrible two's -- there are things that they go through at two years old and had I known, my kids probably wouldn't have got spanked so much."

Child development reminds focus group participants that parenting requires learning and skill. "You can't drive a car without learning," a Manchester man remarked, "and I think raising children is a little bit tougher than driving a car. It's practically ignored, you know, they show you how to balance a checkbook, but they don't teach you how to raise kids and most people will experience that at some time in their life, one way or another."

Finally, due to the Family Bubble mindset and a lack of understanding about child development, people see child care as warehousing children rather than a beneficial activity. Not only does this undermine support for child care policies, it also reinforces that parents are doing a bad job of raising children if they work and leave their children in the care of others. "I have a granddaughter who has a brand new baby and cries every day taking him to day care," a Manchester woman shared. "Now I'm sure the baby is fine at day care but it's killing her, it's just killing her." "It's awful," an Atlanta woman complained. "I don't see how they are raising these children. I don't think mothers are raising their children. They're at work."

Framing Effects

The child development message helps focus group participants to connect children to the broader community. "I think it's important to have a library, where the children can learn to take out books and, now of course, there's audio, video, and everything else you can take out as well, but just being exposed to it sometimes," a Manchester man suggested. "They need more…activities for either the whole family or for the kids like the Girls and

Boys Club," a Manchester woman stated. "They have stuff going on all the time, all year round. But they do I think need more summer activities."

At the same time, most do not see this article as being "about" community, since the connection to community is subtle. Instead, several believe the article is emphasizing the role of parents, which they see as a good thing. "This is emphasizing the parent as opposed to the community, the previous one with the community," an Atlanta man observed. Another added, "Yeah. The parents and the caregivers are primary. Everything else is secondary or further down the line and that is where community will come in."

One statement tested in the article "how young children feel is as important as how they think, and how they are treated is as important as what they are taught" is confusing for focus group participants. Though in other points in the group discussion, several demonstrate that they intuitively understand the importance of emotional development, several could not define this statement. Others missed its meaning. "It means modeling with the behavior that you want to instill in them," a Chicago woman explained. "It means you've got to give them love and discipline," a Chicago man noted. Another added, "It's a feeling of security. A child needs to feel that they are safe whether they are in their parents arms or in its home or wherever." "I guess you have to love your child," a Chicago man surmised.

Finally, later sections of this report describe how focus group participants rely upon their limited understanding of child development to reason about issues and actions that concern them, including physical discipline, child care, family leave, and community activities. When they have a firm grasp of how children develop, they are better able to effectively advocate for policies. While child development is not the only frame that needs to be communicated, it is a critical element of effective communications.

The Community Frame

As noted earlier, people find it difficult to connect children and families to a broader community. When thinking about the perfect community for kids, many think of elements that reinforce the family, such as a community with two parent families or strong relationships between individuals. "The perfect community would have two parent households," stated a Manchester man. "To be able to have a society like that where women do not have to work," a Chicago woman reminisced. "Neighbors that talk to each other, communication," a Chicago man suggested. Fewer think of community supports beyond recreational activities.

The Community Frame was designed to remind people of their positive connections to community and the role of those connections in supporting families. While it is effective in developing those connections, it needs to be carefully constructed to lead to a beneficial image of community, rather than one that undermines children's issues. There are three understandings of community that emerge in the focus group conversations, two

that undermine policies for families and children, and one that will help advance those policies.

The 1950s Community

Three images of community come to mind for focus group participants. The first is a nostalgic view of a 1950s community in which everyone knows everyone else. Discipline is strongly associated with this image, i.e. the benefit of this style of community, according to focus group participants, is that other adults help to discipline unruly children. "When I was coming up the village did raise the child," a Chicago man remembered. "I mean if I went somewhere and did something wrong, he could whip my butt and my dad would get on me and he would whoop me too."

This image is not useful in building support for community-level policies, since it puts discipline and personal interactions center stage, rather than broader connections to a nurturing community. Furthermore, it reminds focus group participants that people can no longer trust their neighbors. "People don't want their kids to go out because the pedophile or whatever," remarked an Atlanta woman, "so they keep them in front of the TV or computers. But you know we used to go through the woods and pick apples and black berries. You can't do that. You wouldn't send your child like that now." Due to a lack of close relationships with neighbors, most people feel they cannot engage with other people's children. "I think if you were to tell a lot of parents that their child was misbehaving, they would jump down your back," an Atlanta woman warned.

A Community Safety Net for Failing Parents

The second image of "community" is a safety net for children meaning that others, including governmental entities, are forced to become involved with kids due to the failures of parents. "As I was growing up I saw parents get involved with their kids," a Chicago man explained. "Normally the mother would stay home and raise the child while the father went to work. Now it just seems like there are a lot of throw away kids. The parents are too concerned about their careers and the money, and they put the kids in day care…Teachers today have to become parents." "If we had perfect parents we wouldn't need any community solutions to these problems," a Manchester man suggested. "Are we going towards the government going to help us with all these programs, or are we going to take control of our lives and our own families?" a Chicago woman challenged.

There is a caution for communications in focus group participant's conflicting views of community. If community is stressed too overtly, it can create a backlash among some readers and reinforce the Family Bubble. "So again, we can abdicate responsibility," an Atlanta woman complained. "So no one wants to take responsibility and nobody wants to say that 'I am in control. I'm making this choice and I'm in control and this is what I'm doing.' I'm just saying that this particular article to me doesn't reinforce that. I think it makes excellent points but to me I think it is very easy for somebody to buy into this and say, 'okay yeah, I don't have to do anything.'"

Community Connections

Finally, the third image of community is the relationships and connections between people and community institutions such as libraries, recreational organizations, schools, etc. This is the definition of community that the article tested in the focus groups seeks to develop. This image reflects people's personal experiences, and reminds them of the value of relationships and the danger of isolation. "Kids are a great way to meet your neighbors," an Atlanta woman suggested, "but if you have other things: centers, libraries and that type of thing, not exactly in your neighborhood but more of a community center type of environment, I think you would get to know each other a lot better even with kids or without. You could certainly play a role in other families to help as a support to other families whether you have kids or not."

It reminds them of the positive influences others can have on children. "We all have a contribution to make," a Manchester man suggested. "I think if the child growing up is exposed to the care, the teaching, the coaching, that they're going to mature into a well-rounded adult that will give back to the community."

This image of community crosses class. In fact, focus group participants believe that members of the working classes are more likely to experience these beneficial community connections than wealthier citizens. "I was a tenement kid," a Manchester woman explained. "We lived in three deckers, everybody lived in three deckers all close together.…There was always someone we could go to, and then I married my husband and he was in the Air Force for twenty years, there again every base was a community and you looked after each other…Then you move to the suburbs and what happens?"

For the community frame to be effective in leading to policy support, it is important to establish *existing* connections to community, not a nostalgic view of a 1950s community that reminds them that they are not connected to others in the way they were in the past. Furthermore, it is important to create the connections to conditions and to institutional relationships (schools, libraries, recreation centers, etc.) that will benefit children, rather than emphasize an individual's responsibility to create connections with other individuals, or to simply see relationships as needed to relieve adult stress.

Focus group participants react positively to the phrase "children do well when their families do well"; however, some seem to attach an economic meaning to the phrase "do well." "They have to be in the family unit to do well," a Chicago man suggested, "and they have to have a certain level of economics, otherwise there is a lot of pressure just for that alone."

While the community frame as a whole helps people understand the value of relationships in helping children grow and develop, the specific "environment of relationships" language is difficult for focus group participants. They struggle to explain its meaning. "To me that meant young kids don't have anything else to tie it to," a Chicago woman explained. "They don't have the vocabulary. They don't have the knowledge base to say 'I'm doing this because of this' or 'I'm doing this because of that.' When they

participate in an activity or when they go some place with their parents, it is always… 'How do they relate to me?'" Another added, "When a child looks around in their environment, they have a title: parents or man and a woman married to each other, or a teacher. That everyone has a title, the mailman, whatever. That's how I took it."

Frames in Action

As the four frames unfolded in the focus group discussions, participants began to use the frames to reason on specific issues and policies. The dominant frame would then direct the reasoning in the conversation. This section explores the effect of the tested frames on policy support, messenger effectiveness and on two major topics of discussion in the groups – hitting and sports.

Hitting

All four frames are apparent in focus group participants' discussions of hitting. Problematically, people can use each frame to justify physical discipline, though some frames are more robust than others. Most importantly, the close association between hitting and the Child Abuse Frame has caused people to stake out a position "for" or "against" physical discipline, even if they do not rely upon hitting personally. Further efforts directed at hitting may entrench these positions, or at least result in few additional gains in the short-term. As will be explored in the next section, an indirect route may prove more effective.

Physical discipline is very clearly associated with the Child Abuse Frame – as a backlash to the frame. People recognize that there is not a clear definition of abuse and worry that the definition of abuse and government intervention in families is being taken too far. "I had a friend of mine was raising her sister's four boys," a Chicago man described. "One was kind of fair skinned. She spanked him and when he went to school and they saw some red mark, the next thing she knows the police is at her door. She said the boy stole from the babysitter. Do you think I'm not going to whoop his butt? They said no, I'll tell you what you do. Pack him up and take him back…You cannot discipline your own kids without going to jail." "Then the kids are educated," stated a Chicago woman. "It's like 'you hit me. I'll call.' And you go to school and the kids got a welt on them, the school will call."

When in the Child Abuse Frame, people stake out a position as being either "for" or "against" physical discipline, even though they may not personally rely upon physical discipline. Whether for or against, focus group participants look to their own childhood for confirmation that their view of physical discipline is justified. "My mother, we laughed the other day," a Chicago man shared. "I told her, 'You know I could have sent you to jail for what you beat us.' We both laughed and she said, 'Well look at you now though. Are you all right?' I said, 'Yeah.' So I don't necessarily agree with that. I don't think you should beat a child half to death, no, I don't. However, spare the rod and then what's left?"

Similarly, those who were raised without hitting tend to oppose physical discipline. "I come from a family of ten," a Manchester man stated. "I've never been hit, and everybody seems to be doing fine. I see my brothers and sisters they don't hit their children. I think a lot of it is how you been brought up. If you been decked, maybe if that worked, that worked. My family it was, you knew when you did something wrong."

Some have not yet decided about hitting and are looking for alternatives. "I don't know," struggled an Atlanta woman. "I do use spanking but every time I do it, I'm like, 'I shouldn't be doing this. I'm telling them not to hit and I'm hitting them.' So I don't know. I want somebody to teach me. I don't know."

When in the parenting frame, focus group participants defer to the right of parents to determine appropriate discipline for their own children. "The parent is still responsible for the upbringing of the child," a Manchester man stated, "because we have such a wide variety of what is good to discipline a child, there are no community standards."

As indicated in the Community Frame section, hitting also resides in the community frame, where people associate their nostalgic view of community with a neighbor's ability to physically discipline a child, and lament the loss of such community relationships.

When considering child development, people struggle with their views of physical discipline, and use development as a reason both for and against hitting. When in this frame, many are uncomfortable with *relying* upon hitting, but believe it is an effective tool for discipline, when used "correctly," meaning when it is used with the intention of furthering child development. "Not all the time," an Atlanta man cautioned, "because my son, he got spanked a few times but always with an explanation as to what you did and this is why you're getting a spanking. 'Don't do those things. Don't do it again.' I think with an explanation and not doing it all the time, not just hitting a child for hitting sake. Make sure they understand why it is happening."

Some also use child development reasoning to reinforce that hitting is needed as an option, because all children are unique and respond to different methods of discipline. "It doesn't work with all kids," an Atlanta woman suggested, "because my head strong little angel, I'll say, 'do you want to go 10 minutes [for timeout] or do you want a spanking?' She's just put her little hiney up and I'm like God. She wants to go back out and play." "At 12 months, two years old or whatever, they can't comprehend it," an Atlanta man explained. "That is part of the child development. They don't understand that piece. But at 13, she understands it very well."

Sports

Throughout the discussions, participants would repeatedly refer to verbally abusive situations in youth sports by coaches and parents. Focus group participants are universal in their criticism of the yelling and belittling they have witnessed – recognizing that it is harmful to the child, even if they cannot adequately verbalize why it is harmful.

Participants see coaches as well as parents who act abusively. "There are coaches that talk to kids that should never talk to kids like that," a Manchester woman complained. "You know people don't realize that…I mean I've seen people paying a coach to coach their child and I'm thinking I wouldn't pay him to walk my dog because of the way you're talking and treating these kids." "The kids that are on the soccer field and they're just a tad bit aggressive because dad is telling them that you've got to beat them," an Atlanta woman reported. "I think that is emotional abuse. I think that's terrible."

Unlike the typical "private" child maltreatment that a person might witness, people are more willing to get involved in a situation on their child's team. These situations happen in a public venue, where all parties have a clear stake in the interpersonal interactions of the team or team parents. People are willing to act when they see this behavior. "I had a kid get pulled off a hockey team because the parent came in the locker room and yelled at the kid," an Atlanta man stated. "I grabbed the parent by the arm and drug her outside and I said, 'you don't do this in my locker room.'"

There is an enormous opportunity to use youth sports to promote a conversation about child development, positive parenting (or positive coaching), and the importance of community. It should not be associated with the child abuse frame, as that will cause parents to worry about accusing another person of "abuse" and therefore refrain from getting involved. Instead, guidelines for goals for youth sports, tips on how to coach positively, how to be a supportive parent, etc., can help people learn new ways to interact with youth and learn about development. Since people will be learning positive skills, it may also indirectly cause people to question the value of physical discipline. By peering over the shoulder of a coach, parents may receive the important permission and information necessary to reconsider their own practices. And, it pushes child development into the public square.

Policies

Focus group participants support a wide range of policies for families and children. The purpose of discussing support for policies in the focus groups was to see if participants begin to reason from the frames that were introduced during the course of the focus groups, or if they continue to rely upon their existing frames. Existing frames as well as the newly introduced frames emerged in the policy discussion, but the mix of frames depended upon the specific policy. The most controversial policies elicited the richest examples of how focus group participants could utilize the four frames tested in the groups.

Focus group participants want to prioritize children and funding for children's issues, but struggle to communicate why funding matters. Due to the Family Bubble, some resent funding for government and would rather put those resources into families. "I'm not for the government getting more and more pay," a Chicago woman argued. "I think the parents have to watch their children more. They've got to be involved. They've got to do it, not

always the government." "I'd rather put the money in for the parent to stay home and educate the parent instead of paying all these other people to babysit," a Chicago man remarked.

Focus group participants' dominant frame in support of funding is prevention – pay now or pay later. This does not mean that prevention is necessarily the most powerful frame – note how rarely it was volunteered in these discussions – but the tested frames serve to advance prevention policies to greater and lesser degrees. "If there were additional resources available so that children got proper treatment and care and they could grow up to be proper functioning members of society," an Atlanta woman explained, "we would see a decrease in crime. We would see a decrease in other areas. So you could say yeah, we might be spending more money over here but in the long run we are going to save money over there." "Because if we don't fund it, then we don't do the prevention, then we'll wind up paying for it in the end," stated an Atlanta man. "We'll be building more prisons and more jails." "You either pay for it on the front end, or you pay for it on the back end," a Chicago man stated. It is important to distinguish between prevention as a frame and as a policy. Prevention as a policy is helped and hindered by various frames, but prevention as a frame did not appear implicit or intuitive to focus group participants, despite its inherent connection to the frames tested.

Importantly, as people discuss each specific policy, other frames (beyond prevention) emerge in the discussion. The most controversial policies demonstrate the ability of different frames to hold up, or fold, under debate.

Paid Leave

The policy that elicited the most debate was "increasing the number of months of paid leave that employers are required to offer working parents after the birth of a child." Those who most strongly support this policy rely upon a child development frame to make their case. "I think that's essential for mom and baby to be together for the first couple months of life. That's for breastfeeding or bonding, I mean everything. Everything you've ever read -- any kind of psychological studies towards that, it's just a slam dunk. That should be the way it is," an Atlanta man argued. "I think the child to a certain degree is more impressionable, can learn better," a Chicago man remarked. "They say babies can learn foreign languages at three months. Again you could better help develop and influence the child when it is very young, maybe get its health needs in line and just able to connect the child with who the family is."

Without a child development frame from which to reason, focus group participants turn to the mother's stress and convenience as the main concerns. "You're not even sleeping the first month," stated a Manchester woman, "so imagine going back and forth…I was home for twelve weeks and that was great, by the time I went back the baby was more on a schedule and I was okay." This means that experienced parents do not need the same time with a newborn that new, inexperienced parents would require. "I could see if it is a first time," a Chicago woman suggested. "Yeah, you want more bonding. You've got a normal baby and

stuff, but if it is like your third or your fourth, I could see where abuse [of the policy] came in."

In the following exchange among women in Atlanta, note how one participant struggles to describe how paid leave might affect a child's start in life, while other participants default to a discussion of parental choice and individual responsibility:

> Participant 1: *What I'm hearing from that is that we're saying that because this group of people can afford to take off six months, then that is good. But for the people who choose to have children and they work for a company who can't give them six months, then they don't have that option. I'm saying that all the children are valuable and everybody needs to get the best start that we can give them. That to me is what America should be about.*

> Participant 2: *But that's not the most valuable. I just think you can't require a small employer to do that and expect to come back and get your job, that they can afford to pay you and someone else to do your job while you're gone. Or to have other people take up the slack. I just don't think that is the way it is and I think it is the choice of do you have to have two cars? Do you have to have the big house? And I think a lot of people think we have to have two incomes but it is because we all have to have cell phones and all this other stuff.*

> Participant 1: *And I guess my thought on that is I'd much rather pay for Betty who works for McDonald's to be at home with her child for six months and give that child the love and attention that he needs for six months before throwing him into a day care center, than paying for her child when he is 16 and he is a juvenile delinquent.*

> Participant 3: *And he's in jail.*

> Participant 4: *I'd much rather pay for Betty's birth control.*

Living Wages

Several focus group participants support "creating living wage criteria, meaning adjusting the minimum wage for the cost of living in an area to lift more families out of poverty." However, few reason on the basis of the frames explored in the focus groups. "I think if someone's working full-time, they ought to at least be able to make a wage that they can live on, otherwise you're talking about the working poor, and what's the sense of working if you can't make ends meet?" a Manchester man argued. Many understand the influence of economics on families, but they do not reason on the basis of what is best for children and families unless pushed to explain the connection. "I don't think you're going to find a better family and a better environment for the kids unless you provide [a better] economic situation," stated a Manchester man. Focus group participants do not reason about wages based on the importance of economic security for families and

children, unless forced to explain the connection. Other frames (fairness) are more available to them.

Early Childcare Credentials and Salaries

People struggle over raising credentials and salaries for early care and education providers. Most participants who support this policy base their support on concern for child education and development: "The best time to invest in kids is younger than older." (Atlanta man) Those who oppose this policy change are not convinced that money will make a difference: "Throwing money at problems is not necessarily going to solve it." (Chicago man) "I think it sounds wonderful," a Chicago woman stated, "but can we really guarantee that by increasing salaries, we're increasing our quality? Or are we really just giving more money to somebody that is still not doing a good job?" Furthermore, several worry that costs are already too high. "Have you seen what child care costs are?" a Chicago man asked. "In some places now it costs $400 a week for these people to have someone else watch their child. How much more money can you give?"

Home Visits

Focus group participants like the idea of "providing voluntary home visits by nurses or trained personnel to help new parents." Many express their support for this policy based on existing frames: "stress reliever." (Atlanta woman) However, elements of the introduced frames are mentioned as well. A Manchester man suggested that parenting doesn't come naturally and parents could use training: "If it's a young parent they may not know how to deal with something that may be going on. If it's a newborn, they may not know what the problem is." A Chicago woman referred to isolation: "Not everybody has family nearby." Finally, some referred to the prevention of abuse: "Educate, do not incarcerate" and "It costs less in the long run to educate." (Chicago men)

Community Organizations

"Enlisting libraries, health care and child care providers, churches, and community organizations in efforts to build community support for families," is also popular, but people believe these efforts already exist. One Atlanta woman expressed her support by referring to the community as a safety net, a deficit model that is not a preferable way to think about communities: "At least there is a community where there are other people that are going to have an influence on them to give them some of the advantages of life."

Health Professional Training in Abuse

Similarly, focus group participants overwhelmingly support "increasing the ability of pediatricians, doctors, and school nurses who interact with children and families to recognize and intervene in instances of child maltreatment," but they believe this already occurs. "I thought by law a pediatrician has to report," an Atlanta woman stated.

Mental Health Counseling

"Counseling for parents and early interventions for both children and adults in situations where the mental health of the family is troubled" cues the Family Bubble and privacy concerns. "I have a real issue with someone walking into somebody's home and saying, 'well, I don't like the way, you are not doing this right.'" Another added, "I agree, who is sending them out and then it is the privacy issues and all of that. Is a record kept?" "Who's going to point out to the parents that they need counseling?" a Manchester man asked. "Or is the parent just going to say, 'I'm doing a bad job.'"

Life Education

At the end of the focus groups, when people consider the value of "making life education a part of every school's curriculum, including information on child health and development, child abuse and neglect prevention, parenting skills, etc." many still base their support on their original goal of encouraging teens to delay parenthood. "Maybe they would wait a little while before they hurry up and get pregnant," a Chicago woman stated. "Like not have it the freshman year or sophomore." Others, however, value this policy recommendation as a way to begin to give future parents some necessary training. "Awareness," an Atlanta woman remarked. "When they ever get out there in life and start having children this may impact them at least a little bit. Even like child shaking a baby, baby shaking."

Messengers

Focus group participants suggest that any of the four messengers (PCA America, Healthy Families America, a pediatrician, and a Reverend/Director of a boys and girls club) could speak credibly on the four "issues" tested, but each messenger brings different advantages and disadvantages to the topic.

Pediatricians see children regularly and bring a wealth of expertise, particularly on physical health and abuse. Furthermore, several recognize that pediatricians are increasingly addressing a range of issues with parents, beyond just physical health. "They are at the grassroots level," an Atlanta man explained. "They would see the physical abuse. They would see the mental abuse on the child and they see the frustration from the parent, the parent coming in and telling them. A lot of parents do that…They are first line and they get a lot of the abuse cases and they can report that." At the same time, focus group participants are wary of "expert" advice on these issues, and would feel more confident in the advice of a pediatrician who is also a parent. "We're inundated with experts," a Chicago man complained. "Everybody is an expert. We don't believe it."

Similarly, focus group participants respect the advice of a director of a regional boys and girls club due to frontline experience. "I believe that he's had a lot of hands on experience," a Manchester woman suggested. "He's dealt with a lot of teens; a lot of teens end up there. I just would think that they've had to utilize coping skills." "I'm

making the assumption that he's the hands-on director and that he would be a person that would be in contact with the kids and what their issues are and from that perspective would be able to speak to them effectively," a Manchester man stated. Importantly, most say the religious association is less important and may even detract from the spokesperson's effectiveness if readers believe a reverend does not have children. Finally, it reminds some of the sexual abuse cases in the Catholic Church. From this we conclude that direct experience with children and families may be more important in the messenger's credibility than the institutional affiliation.

When it concerns an organization's ability to provide credible information, focus group participants say it does not matter if the organization is local or national. While they are unfamiliar with Healthy Families America and Prevent Child Abuse America, they assume the organizations are national in scope.

Focus group participants say that Prevent Child Abuse America could write credibly on any of the topics. However, several also indicate that the name conveys that anything they would concern themselves with would really be about child abuse. This limits interest in the organization's communications. Note the following conversation among women in Chicago:

> *I think it would fit [for Prevent Child Abuse America to write about parenting] but I think my first thought if I were to see Prevent Child Abuse America is "I don't abuse my kids. I don't plan on abusing my kids so . . ."*
>
> *I can't relate.*
>
> *I'm not going to read it.*
>
> *Or I might read it as a passing interest but I'm not going to think it is about parenting. I'm going to think it is only about child abuse. It's about abuse and not parenting, all aspects of it.*

Furthermore, the close association between abuse and government intervention, causes some to worry that a child abuse organization would be judging them. "They're watching us," a Chicago man worried. "Or are they a watchdog that is going to [want a] camera in everybody's house?" a Chicago man asked. "I don't know."

Finally, focus group participants have positive associations with the name "Healthy Families America," particularly in comparison with Prevent Child Abuse America. "It's a positive name, as opposed to Prevent Child Abuse," a Manchester woman stated. The name says that the organization is about improving families. "I think it is keeping families together not just leaving the kids go here and there but trying to keep a family together, making them healthy," a Chicago woman explained. The name does not have the stigma that is associated with child abuse." "I think that people would walk into Healthy Family America instead of walking into Prevent Child Abuse America," a Manchester woman suggested.

Conclusions

All four frames have a role to play in building support for child and family policies, but the balance of attention to each frame will depend upon the specific policies that PCA America intends to advance.

The Child Abuse Frame can effectively call into question government spending priorities for children and families. However, it is too developed in people's minds to easily transition to a message about positive parenting and policies that are not directly associated with child abuse. The vivid image of the child abuse story (which is a story that people believe they already know well) conjures up associations that prevent people from hearing new information or connecting their own experiences to the issue.

The Parenting Frame matches with people's personal experience and reframes the idea that parenting should come naturally. It introduces the idea of inadvertent abuse, which allows them to question their own behavior in a non-threatening way. This frame is particularly successful in creating a conversation about policies to prepare for parenthood and to help people balance work and family.

The Child Development Frame is a "new" story that interests people, so people are likely to pay attention to new information. It is a non-threatening way for parents to get advice and training about infancy through the teen years. It provides an important foundation that helps people reason about policies, particularly early education, family leave, home visits, and life education.

Connecting people to communities is a critical component of any message to build support for child and family issues. However, it cannot be too overt or people will become defensive about government intrusion into families. To lead to policy support, people need to be reminded of their existing positive connections to community (not a nostalgic view of the past) and the role of those connections in supporting families. The Community Frame is effective in developing those connections.

Appendix – Articles Tested in the Focus Groups

Community Solutions for Kids
By Reverend A. Wear, Director of Regional Boys and Girls Club

A parent is a child's first teacher, but not their only teacher. Daycare providers, teachers, doctors, neighbors, coaches, and grandparents, all influence children as well. Young children experience their world as an environment of relationships and these relationships affect virtually all aspects of their development. Children learn a lot in their early years – they learn respect for others, right from wrong, and how to get along with each other. All the people they come in contact with help to reinforce this learning and influence their long-term development. The quality and stability of a child's human relationships in the early years of life lay the foundation. And we can all play a positive part.

Every community should ask itself: Are we providing the kind of environments that will allow children to grow into citizens who give back to communities? Surround a child with secure relationships and stimulating experiences, and he will incorporate that environment to become a confident, caring adult, ready to be a part of society. But if he is surrounded by violence, or is given little intellectual or emotional stimulation, then it will be much more difficult for him to grow up successfully.

It starts with eliminating the isolation that so many parents feel. Imagine coming home from the hospital, with no family members nearby and no close ties to your neighbors. Add in financial worries and a job in jeopardy and you really turn up the heat. The loneliness and stress would put a strain on the most loving parent and could cause parents to neglect a child due to their own despair. Social isolation is common for new parents, because we leave them alone to figure out how to juggle jobs and parenting, but it doesn't have to be that way.

Some communities are working to prevent problems before they start by developing the neighborhood ties that can bring people together, by creating playgroups for new families held at community centers, local libraries, or schools. Parents meet others who are having the same experiences, and can build relationships that lead to long-term friendships and support. Other communities are working with health professionals to provide at-home visits to new parents – to help them adjust to the new demands of parenthood and provide a link to the community. From financial support to better housing, there are many ways that communities can support families. Children do well when their families do well. And families do better when they live in supportive communities.

What to Expect – Child Development and Successful Parenting
By Dr. R. Braun, Pediatrician

We all know that milk is important for children to grow strong bones, but how many of us know how important it is to feed children's hearts, souls, and minds, right from the start? Children need more than love to develop intellectually, socially and emotionally. And they need different things at different ages – a 2-year-old and a 6-year-old see the world differently, so we need to pay attention to the unique needs children have at different ages, and set our expectations appropriately.

For example, sometimes parents worry that their 12-month-old is selfish, because she won't share toys with playmates. But she isn't being selfish – most 12-month-olds are not developmentally able to understand the concept of sharing. So instead of punishing, parents should use techniques that are appropriate for that age, such as distracting her with another activity. She'll learn to share around the end of her preschool years when she is developmentally ready.

Similarly, hitting a child at any age does not accomplish the main goal of discipline, which is to teach a child to have self-control and self-discipline. Hitting just teaches a child that hitting is an appropriate way to solve a problem.

New research from scientists who study brain development concludes that how young children feel is as important as how they think, and how they are treated is as important as what they are taught. A baby with caregivers who feel pleasure when they hold the baby, and who look the baby in the eyes and rock and sing, help the baby to develop her brain. A child with a depressed caregiver, or one who is under stresses that distract from giving the right attention, will have an underdeveloped ability to attach to people, and be less likely to share, volunteer, or meet her potential in emotional and behavioral areas.

So many of the struggles we all have in raising children would be so much easier to handle if more of us had a better understanding of child development. Children do not come with instruction manuals, but there is a lot that we could all learn about how to better understand what our children are thinking and feeling at different stages of development – from birth through young adulthood.

Many communities are taking steps to help families and caregivers learn more about how children develop at different ages, and what that means for how each of us should interact with them at different ages. Some communities are now holding parent discussion groups at neighborhood schools, with different topics every month. Other communities are making child development classes a pre-requisite for high school graduation. Professional development for caregivers is being funded by community organizations as scholarships. Still others are working with hospitals and pediatricians to provide at-home visits to new parents – to help them adjust to the new demands of parenthood, to identify and address emotional and financial stresses that threaten the home environment, and get families off on the right start.

Public Knowledge

We Must Prevent Child Abuse and Neglect
Sid Johnson, Prevent Child Abuse America

It's happened yet again. Another horrific case of a child literally imprisoned in his home, the victim of the most extreme abuse and neglect imaginable. Similarly tragic stories about severe maltreatment and even death befalling children who have been placed in the protective custody of their states have appeared all over the country.

Reports like these send a shock wave through the public consciousness, first triggering concern and sympathy for the victim, followed quickly by the all-too-familiar blame game. Blame the parents. Blame the social worker. Blame the child protective service system. Blame the governor. And to read theses stories, it would appear that there is plenty of blame to go around. But the assignment of blame will not fix the problems. Our state chapters all over the country are reporting that the budget axe is falling heavily on programs to support children and families. In many states, budget deficits are prompting governors to impose hiring freezes on desperately needed child protective service workers, leaving hundreds of vacancies unfilled. The U.S. Senate passed a spending bill that cut $13 million for programs that help abused and neglected children. We're also seeing drastic cuts in funding for programs that help prevent abuse and neglect from occurring in the first place.

Can every incident of abuse and neglect be prevented? Sadly, no. But, much of it can be prevented, and effective prevention programs are proving their value every day. For example, a public-private partnership between local and state governments and Prevent Child Abuse America has resulted in a new program that intervenes in the lives of troubled mothers-to-be. Through weekly visits, a young mother learns to care properly for her child, and learns techniques to alleviate stress that can lead to abuse.

At its heart, the prevention of child abuse and neglect is really about positive parenting – so there is a role that each of us can play. It's about reaching out to parents, particularly those who might be struggling, and offering a kind word and a helping hand. And when the concern exists, it's about calling the local authorities to report suspected abuse or neglect.

Let's throw away the labels and perceptions that allow us to distance ourselves from child abuse and neglect. Let us acknowledge the problem for what it is and recognize the role that each of us can play in reducing the risk of abuse and neglect to the children in our communities by reaching out to their parents and by increasing our investment in the prevention of child abuse and neglect. It is one of the best investments we can make, guaranteed to save money down the road in family support services, juvenile justice, special education and health care.

The Toughest Job in America
By K. Kirpatrick, Healthy Families America

How many of us felt fully prepared when we had our first child? I know I didn't. After a night of a crying baby with gas pains, I was ready to take him back to the hospital. For some reason we expect that parenting should come naturally, but it doesn't. We all make mistakes along the way.

Parents share a desire to provide the best for their children and see their children have better lives than they have had. But raising confident, happy children is very difficult, and lack of experience and stressful conditions can cause parents to make bad decisions that can lead to neglect or abuse. A frustrated parent who is not prepared for parenthood or is under emotional or financial pressures might lash out in anger or leave a child unattended – putting that child's health and well-being at risk.   Or an inexperienced parent might not understand how belittling, yelling or harsh scolding can result in emotional abuse and undermine a child's sense of self-worth. This doesn't necessarily mean they are a bad parent, or that they do not love their child – they are simply unprepared or in stressful circumstances and need a helping hand.

Parenting is the toughest job in America, and we all have a stake in making sure that parents have access to the tools they need to be successful, rather than rely upon on-the-job training. Because every time you give a parent a sense of success, you're offering it to the baby indirectly. Every time a parent feels good about being a parent and has the time and support to parent, a child bursts with feeling good about himself. With more opportunities for parent education and coaching, parents can get off to a good start. And major causes of stress for families can be alleviated with more flexible workplaces, access to affordable health care, and other assistance to address the problems that can put a significant strain on families. Parents need everyone's support. It is an even exchange. To raise children who will give back to society in the future, we need to give them environments in which families can thrive.