



FAQs

Framing on Your Feet: Answering Frequently-Asked Questions

The vast majority of questions and comments that communicators hear from the public and policymakers can be predicted by the research-based “swamp” [[Link to the swamp here](#)] of cultural models on that issue.

If you can predict, you can prepare.

A strategic framer prepares by anticipating the questions that will emerge from the swamp, considers the ‘traps’ that are lurking in a possible response; and then chooses a well-framed response with the potential to build a more productive way of thinking about the issue.

The sample question-and-answer sequences here show this tactical thought process in action. The exemplars come from questions and issues raised by stakeholder groups, but the models aren’t intended to simply script “the right answers” to questions you might be asked. Rather, this is a teaching tool, offering illustrations of how to more effectively talk about child mental health and systems of care by applying the research-based insights of the Core Story of Early Childhood Development. While communicators are welcome to use the recommended responses, we encourage you to use the analysis of ‘false start’ and ‘well-framed’ answers to build your capacity to apply these principles fluidly throughout your communications practice.

QUESTION

Aren't most children in Tennessee doing just fine?

THE FALSE START ANSWER:

Most kids are doing just fine, but many are not. One in 4 children in Tennessee struggle with mental health issues. Twenty-six percent of Tennessee's youth live in poverty, In a recent year, over 15,000 of our youth were in state custody, and 921 babies were born substance-exposed. Tennessee has the second highest rate in the country overall for prescription drug abuse. We need to invest in children in order to make progress. If we fail to make these new investments, we'll have trouble caring for an aging population, and we will have failed the generations behind us. We have to do better.

THE REFRAMED ANSWER:

Tennessee's future depends on ensuring that all of our children grow, thrive and are able to achieve their full potential, which contributes to our collective well-being. If we are to achieve this as a society, we must address the very real problems facing our children today. Science tells us that the architecture of children's brains is being actively shaped by their experiences through an ongoing process that begins before birth and continues into adulthood. Early experiences literally shape how the brain gets built; as with any structure, a strong foundation in the early years increases the probability of positive outcomes. A weak foundation increases the odds of later difficulties. That's why we want these early experiences to be optimal for all children. Severe, chronic stressors – such as poverty, abuse, or maternal depression – can set the body's stress systems on permanent high alert, releasing hormones that disrupt the development of a young child's brain. As a state, we have solutions that we know work well to provide environments for children that both reduce exposure to the situations that can cause toxic stress, and which create buffers of support for their developing brains. For Tennessee to be the state we know it can be, we must ensure that all of our children have the opportunity to learn and develop.

THE FALSE START ANALYSIS:

- Relies on statistics to make the case, rather than addressing the cultural models that structure the way people think about child wellbeing.
- In using unframed data to tell a story, data is difficult to understand and seems overwhelming, and it doesn't reframe responsibility by highlighting community supports and influences.
- Doesn't explain how these

THE REFRAMED ANSWER ANALYSIS:

- Begins with a value of *Human Potential*, and ends with the value of *Civic Potential* to collectivize the issue of children's healthy development and establishing its import to the future of the entire state, not just children who might be struggling.
- Uses the Explanatory Metaphor *Brain Architecture* to establish that children's brains are developing and the Explanatory Metaphor *Toxic Stress* to explain the important impact of environments on

<p>conditions actually affect children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Doesn't have a "can-do" attitude about solving problems, but rather focuses on the dire consequences of not doing the right thing. 	<p>children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invokes the value of <i>Ingenuity</i> to remind the public that we have ideas for ways to reduce and buffer toxic stress exposure and support development.
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QUESTION	
Can kids really develop mental illnesses?	
<p>THE FALSE START ANSWER:</p> <p>Yes, kids can develop mental illnesses. Some kinds of mental illnesses are more common in kids, while other kinds, such as schizophrenia, are more common in adults. But there is no absolute dividing line. Mental illnesses do not discriminate.</p>	<p>THE REFRAMED ANSWER:</p> <p>Children's brain architecture is being built from infancy on, in a process similar to building a house. Just like in building a house, that process can run into difficulties along the way, perhaps from a shaky foundation or from unexpected or undue stress to the structure that affects its functioning. Just like a table needs to be level in order to function well, requiring a level floor and four stable legs, children's mental health also depends on a solid environment and the ability to function well. So, yes, children do sometimes experience psychological problems, including mental illness. That's why it is so important that we provide access to the professionals who can screen and assess for problems early on, when effective interventions are available to prevent more serious problems from developing later.</p>
<p>FALSE START ANALYSIS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Triggers the dominant cultural model of "children are small adults" — children can have mental illness but it is not as complicated as adult mental illness. Leaves the reader thinking that mental illness is genetic because no alternate model is provided. 	<p>REFRAMED ANSWER ANALYSIS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses the Explanatory Metaphor <i>Brain Architecture</i> to place mental health in the context of overall development, and to establish how children differ from adults. Uses the Explanatory Metaphor <i>Levelness</i> to frame children's mental health as a matter of the ability to function, and to explain the role of the environment in mental health. Avoids extreme or distracting examples of specific conditions. Includes a solution to overcome the sense that mental illness is inherited and,

	therefore, unchangeable.
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QUESTION	
<p>What can be done to help children with mental health problems?</p>	
<p>THE FALSE START ANSWER:</p> <p>If parents or other caregivers notice repeated symptoms of mental health problems in their child or teen, they should make a list of the behaviors that concern them, speak to the child about their concerns and let the child know they will help them work out their problems. It is important to talk with the child’s health care provider, and look for a mental health professional trained in working with children and adolescents. People who are not satisfied with the mental health care they receive should discuss their concerns with the provider, ask for information, and/or seek help from other sources.</p>	<p>THE REFRAMED ANSWER:</p> <p>There is a lot we can do, because we understand what the problem is and what the solutions are. Children’s mental health is like the levelness of a piece of furniture — and that levelness can depend on the furniture itself, the floor it’s on, or both. Many places in Tennessee have instituted effective programs informed by a System of Care philosophy that provides the attention they need from experts who understand levelness and stability. The coordinated, collaborative approach of the System of Care provides a strong foundation for quality services which have solved a range of problems in early childhood and showed significant long-term improvements for children. Our task is to bring such innovations to scale for all children and families in need. Realizing our potential in this way, and becoming the state that we know we can be, should be our top priority.</p>
<p>THE FALSE START ANALYSIS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforces dominant thinking about the “family bubble,” or the assumption that child outcomes are the sole responsibility of parents. • Encourages the idea that mental health problems are controllable by the individual and consist of “working out” problems. 	<p>THE REFRAMED ANSWER ANALYSIS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipates the public’s sense of fatalism toward mental health issues— by establishing from the outset that solutions are possible. • Uses the Explanatory Metaphor <i>Levelness</i> to illustrate the causes of children’s mental illness and show that interventions can address that “levelness.” • Invokes the Value of <i>Ingenuity</i>; with effort and innovation, we can make a difference. • Ends with the Value of <i>Civic Potential</i>, tested

	<p>as part of our research in Jacksonville Florida. In this research, aspirational frames – invoking the possibility of a better future – were more effective than pragmatic frames focusing on the here-and-now</p>
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<p>QUESTION</p>	
<p>What caused the [recent publicized incident involving a child perpetrator of violence] and how could we prevent this from happening again?</p>	
<p>THE FALSE START ANSWER:</p> <p>Certainly, what happened was horrible. I think it really exemplifies what happens when you have a child in pain who has been isolated and alone and has a lot of rage. I think our society is moving faster and faster; kids are bombarded with more pressures from all sides to look perfect and to be perfect, and so many kids are simply overscheduled today. What I’m trying to get at is there are a lot of kids who, despite all the activity of their lives, feel very isolated, and as much as there has been an emphasis on kids getting into college and being more competitive in the world, we haven’t taught the basic skills of emotional health, which is learning how to identify and solve problems, and how to soothe yourself in a healthy way.</p>	<p>THE REFRAMED ANSWER:</p> <p>Tragedies like these are an opportunity for us to put our heads together and figure out how we, as a society, can invent and replicate those policies and programs that will support children’s mental health. It is important to remember that as children’s brains develop, they are developing in different environments; some develop with support from families in communities with easy access to resources. Much like a table needs a level floor to function well, children need this kind of level environment. But some children develop in an unbalanced and uneven environment, where their development is not well supported, and as a consequence they experience mental health problems. Toxic stressors in their environments literally undermine their stability. What we need are the kinds of interventions that can “smooth the floors” and “level the table” for these kids.</p>

<p>THE FALSE START ANALYSIS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• By not asserting a counter narrative, it effectively blames parents for the mental health problems children experience.• Focuses on external behaviors and mental health as “feelings.”• Doesn’t present solutions; offers a fatalistic explanation.	<p>THE REFRAMED ANSWER ANALYSIS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Redirects the conversation from what’s wrong, to what’s possible to solve by using the value of <i>Ingenuity</i>.• The phrases “put our heads together” and “we as a society” infuses the response with tested Value <i>Civic Responsibility</i> and cues community-level thinking about solutions.• The Explanatory Metaphor Levelness shows 1) how mental health problems can develop and 2) that positive mental health can be achieved by interventions that address these causes.• The Toxic Stress Explanatory Metaphor reinforces how outside environments negatively impact children.
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<p style="text-align: center;">QUESTION</p> <p>What is a System of Care?</p>
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<p>THE FALSE START ANSWER:</p> <p>The term System of Care is used often and can mean many things. For us, a System of Care is an overarching philosophy and approach that is embraced by everyone working on behalf of children and families. This includes ensuring there is a coordinated network of services and supports for children and youth with behavioral health challenges and their families and that this network aligns with a core set of values (being: child-focused, family-driven, and culturally and linguistically competent). The concept has shaped the work of nearly all communities, with at least some elements of the System of Care philosophy and approach found nearly everywhere that serves children and youth with significant mental health challenges. The System of Care concept is a vision with continued potential to transform children’s mental health. During the past two decades, the concept and philosophy have laid the foundation for such transformation. The System of Care approach has already demonstrated significant benefits as evidenced by improvements in systems and in the social and emotional functioning of children, youth, and families.</p>	<p>THE REFRAMED ANSWER:</p> <p>Tennessee is coming together to invest in supports for our children and families, recognizing that when we ensure that children have the opportunity to learn and develop, they can better realize their full potential, and so can our state. A system-of-care (SoC) philosophy involves integration of mental health services for children and youth with early symptoms of mental health disorders within schools, child welfare, and juvenile justice settings. For example, the SoC team at Frontier Behavioral Health at Mountain View Elementary uses weekly participation in an Arts Club (along with case management and therapy services), to give children outlets for creativity. Being creative reduces student anxiety and gives parents and caretakers support in community. Additionally, because this program is school-based, staff can check on the students every day and work with educators to ensure all relevant persons are engaged in care. This coordination is designed to provide increased opportunities for early intervention and prevention. Together, we — all of Tennessee’s residents and leaders — can invest resources in strengthening such systems providing support for our children. If we fail to make this investment, our children will not be able to fully contribute to our state when they become adults. Assuring that all children are given their best chance in life is our shared responsibility and is the best way to build a strong community.</p>
<p>THE FALSE START ANALYSIS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communication begins by saying that there are many meanings of this term, which is unhelpful for someone who is already confused. • There is a missed opportunity here for talking about what’s at stake. Hard to evaluate the importance of something like the System of Care without being able to appreciate why it matters. 	<p>THE REFRAMED ANSWER ANALYSIS:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This example begins with the Value of <i>Human Potential</i>, and ends with <i>Civic Responsibility</i> which in FrameWorks research in Jacksonville, built measurable support for key elements of the System of Care approach. • The story focuses not just on one individual, but on programs working with groups together in systems, within and among communities.

- The author mentions “significant benefits” and gives evidence in the form of “improvements in systems” and in functioning without explaining how it works, how the System of Care helps – there is an invisible process at work here.