



Key Framing Guides

FAQ: Framing on Your Feet

Answering Frequently Asked Questions

Communicators can predict the vast majority of questions and comments that they hear from the public and policymakers with an understanding of the [swamp](#) of public thinking on early childhood development.

If you know what's in the swamp, you can get through it.

A strategic framer prepares by anticipating the questions that will emerge from the swamp, considering the “traps” that lurk in a possible response, and choosing a well-framed response that has 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. These models aren't intended to simply script the “right” answers. Instead, they show 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*. Communicators are welcome to use the recommended responses in real-world situations. We also encourage you to use the analysis behind the “false start” and “well-framed” answers to build your capacity to apply these principles in your communications practice.

Q: Jacksonville already does a lot for our kids. Shouldn't we be seeing more progress in childhood development?

THE FALSE-START ANSWER

Jacksonville has made progress; as of [date], we have [number] of quality child care facilities in communities throughout Jacksonville. Studies show that children who have been in these kinds of high-quality child care settings do better in school. Across the country, studies show that every \$1 invested in high-quality pre-k saves taxpayers up to \$7 down the road. In Jacksonville, pre-k can result in savings by reducing the need for remedial and special education, welfare, and criminal justice services. Because we know that these kinds of supports work, we need to increase our investments. Many kids are still not getting the high quality of care they need. By expanding services, we have the opportunity to make an investment in our children and to invest in the future of our city.

THE REFRAMED ANSWER

Jacksonville has already taken important steps in reaching its full potential. We have, for example, made investments in quality child care centers throughout the city. We know that these centers lay a strong cognitive foundation in children's early years and increase the probability of positive outcomes later in life. But we also know that child care is only one piece of what kids need for healthy development. Kids also need access to recreation facilities and safe community centers and quality health care, including mental health and other wellness supports. Because our city is so spread out, services and centers are hard to reach. That's why Jacksonville has launched the System of Care Initiative. It aims to build a coordinated system of resources and supports that is accessible to all families across the city. We can work together to support and expand this initiative, ensuring that all children grow up in healthy environments, regardless of where they live.

THE FALSE-START ANSWER ANALYSIS

- Reinforces the narrow *notion that child care facilities and schools* are the only settings that promote positive childhood development.
- Overlooks the importance of other environmental factors in childhood development.
- Doesn't explain how the process of child development works; it remains a "black box" in public thinking.
- Uses statistics and numbers to make a convincing argument, rather than explaining how development can be supported.
- Calls for additional investments but doesn't explain why they are needed; asks the reader to trust that "we know it works."
- Makes a "quantity" not "quality" argument.

THE REFRAMED ANSWER ANALYSIS

- Opens with the value of *Civic Potential* to activate the audience's sense of agency and responsibility.
- Explains the process of childhood development with the *Brain Architecture* metaphor.
- Broadens thinking about the environmental factors that affect childhood development, such as quality schools, access to health care services, and safe and accessible recreation areas.
- Uses a *Cost and Coordination* explanatory chain to explain the need for investment in larger systems of care.
- Closes with the value of *Fairness Across Places* value to justify the expansion of existing child care centers.

Q: What can the community really do to help children with mental health problems?

THE FALSE-START ANSWER

Good mental health helps children achieve their full potential. Myriad factors affect a child’s mental health status, both positive and negative. Parents who show love, compassion, trust, and understanding will help children grow up to be productive adults.

However, many children do not receive that type of early support. Some children have to deal with angst, resentment, hatred, distrust, and constant negativity. They have a difficult time coping with their emotions and overcoming adversity. These children make excellent candidates for mental health programs. It is a difficult process for any person—let alone a child—to overcome adversity, but being proactive will help improve kids’ mental health.

THE REFRAMED ANSWER

Jacksonville’s residents and leaders recognize that we share a responsibility to ensure that all of our children have the opportunity to learn and thrive. As a community, there is a lot we can do because we understand the problem and the solutions to child mental health.

Children’s mental health is like the levelness of a piece of furniture. The degree of levelness depends on the furniture itself, the floor it’s on, or both. There are things we can do to fix a wobbly table, and, similarly, there are effective ways to stabilize children’s mental health. Many programs in Jacksonville do just that. Our task is to figure out how to coordinate and replicate these programs so that all children and families who need them can access them. Ensuring that all children can access quality mental health services will help us become the city we know we can be.

THE FALSE-START ANSWER ANALYSIS

- Reinforces dominant thinking about the *Family Bubble*—the assumption that children’s outcomes are the sole responsibility of parents and home environments.
- Encourages the idea that individuals control mental health by “coping with their emotions” and “overcoming adversity.”
- Mentions “mental health programs” but does not describe how they work, leaving the process in the “black box” of public understanding.

THE REFRAMED ANSWER ANALYSIS

- Establishes a sense of *Shared Responsibility* from the outset: this is something that matters to all of us, and something we can solve if we work together.
- Anticipates the public’s sense of fatalism toward mental health issues by confirming that solutions are possible.
- Uses the *Levelness* metaphor to illustrate the causes of children’s mental illness and show how they can be addressed.
- Closes with the values of *Fairness Across Places* and *Civic Potential*, invoking the possibility of a better future instead of present-day challenges.

Q: Isn't it parents' responsibility to take care of their own kids? Why are we asking the city's taxpayers to pick up the slack for poor parenting?

THE FALSE-START ANSWER

Do you think any parent, no matter how poor, alienated, or disenfranchised, wants to be a bad parent? The answer is, of course, no—and the truth is that taxpayer investments in child development programs are very cost effective. According to national studies, investing \$1 in a child's success early on saves \$7 down the road, with tangible results in lower crime rates, fewer single parents, and higher individual earnings and education levels. Other longitudinal studies show that investing in early learning means less spending on special education, welfare, and juvenile and criminal justice. We can help parents support their kids—and this investment will have big returns for Jacksonville in the future.

THE REFRAMED ANSWER

If Jacksonville wants a prosperous future, we share a responsibility to connect all kids with opportunities to lean, grow, and thrive—and that means investing resources in young children and the programs that support them. We know that there's a grid of resources—like hospitals, schools, parks, and community centers—that runs through Jacksonville and supports children and families. For many communities, this grid is reliable; when people plug into it, they get what they need. But it's patchy in some places, and some people can't get what they need—or can't plug in at all. We can work together as a city to repair our resource grid. When all Jacksonville families can plug in and get the resources they need, no matter where they live, our city will reach its full potential.

THE FALSE-START ANSWER ANALYSIS

- By focusing attention on parents, reinforces unproductive thinking about the *Family Bubble*.
- Attempts to justify "taxpayer expense" of childhood development programs but offers no explanation of how childhood development works.
- Ends with a limited appeal to larger, shared civic benefit of childhood development programs, but focuses on society's role in supporting parents.

THE REFRAMED ANSWER ANALYSIS

- Opens with the value of *Civic Responsibility* to activate audience's shared sense of agency.
- Inoculates against zero-sum, fatalistic thinking about "other people's" poor children by explaining how childhood development can be supported.
- Uses the *Resource Grid* metaphor to talk about built environments and resulting inequality, shifting focus from individuals to systems.
- Plays to people's sense that they can fix the grid and appeals to the value of *Shared Responsibility* in helping the city achieve *Fairness Across Places* and reach its full *Civic Potential*.