



Framing Strategies For Effectively Communicating About Toxic Stress: A QuickStart Guide

Framing involves making choices about how to deliver a message: what to emphasize, how to explain critical concepts, and even what to leave unsaid. The strategies described below were designed to equip experts and advocates with tools for communicating more effectively about toxic stress with people who have experienced significant adversity. These strategies build understanding about how stress affects development, but also build people's openness to participate in services for themselves and their families. For people who have experienced significant stress, the recommendations can more effectively communicate the science in ways that acknowledge their dignity, their capacity for resilience, and that ultimately foster community wellbeing.

Instead of ...

Implying or leaving unsaid the importance of community-based solutions.

Using science as a value.

Leaving out explanations of how systems and contexts can make it hard for parents to be responsive caregivers.

Try ...

Lead with the value of **Community Strength** to foreground the importance of community-based solutions and make explicit the understanding that community members are critical partners in this work.

Appealing to the value of **Ingenuity** to emphasize how science can be used to solve problems.

Using the **Overloaded** metaphor to draw attention to the external factors that can make it difficult to parent in the most effective way.



Instead of ...	Try ...
Stating that toxic stress responses do occur, do damage the brain, and do lead to risky behavior and adult disease.	Using language that stresses likelihood—toxic stress responses may occur when children are exposed to significant amounts of adversity, can undermine healthy brain development, and may result in chronic health conditions.
Simply stating that children who experience early adversity will have more health problems later in life.	Explaining that over time and without supports , children who experience early adversity are more likely to have health problems later in life.
Promoting the idea that individuals have agency and control by emphasizing the power of individual choice and importance of individual responsibility.	Promoting the idea of self-efficacy by balancing empowerment with a discussion of the situational and contextual factors that can facilitate or constrain an individual’s choices.
Citing non-specific “experts” to establish authority on a subject.	Being as specific and concrete as possible when referring to research to avoid cueing skepticism and inviting debate.
Only associating knowledge production with scientists and researchers.	Collectivizing scientific progress and including readers by using the pronoun “we,” as in “We know more about how toxic stress affects development than we used to.”

You can read more about these recommendations in FrameWorks’ Strategic Brief, *Strategies for Effectively Communicating about Toxic Stress*, available at: www.frameworksinstitute.org/publication/strategies-for-effectively-communicating-about-toxic-stress/.