

EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Getting Our Message Across Effectively

Overview

To be effective, messages must be framed to:

- Define the *community's* responsibility and explain the role for *public policy*.
- Include the *brain architecture* "simplifying model," which helps people understand child development.
- Incorporate the idea of *brain plasticity* so damage does not sound irrevocable.
- Define the economic consideration as *prosperity* and *workforce development*.
- Refer to *organizing values* such as "future prosperity," "ingenuity," or "responsible manager," all of which allow people to respond both *morally* and *rationally*.

Structuring Our Discussions: Order Matters!

#1: START WITH ONE OF THE FOLLOWING "ORGANIZING" VALUES:

- **Prosperity:** "As we look for ways to keep our country prosperous, we need to think of the connection between child development and economic development."
- **Ingenuity:** "When we invent and replicate high-quality programs for young children, we can solve the problems in early childhood development and shown significant long-term improvements for children."
- **Responsible Manager:** "Addressing problems before they get worse is the responsible way to manage our society's future. Taking advantage of opportunities that arise as we understand science better allows us to innovate."

#2: MOVE TO SCIENCE AND A "SIMPLIFYING MODEL"

"The early years of life matter because early experiences affect the architecture of the maturing brain. As it emerges, the quality of that architecture establishes either a sturdy or a fragile foundation for all of the development and behavior that follow. Getting things right the first time is easier than trying to fix them later. When interpersonal experiences are disruptive, neglectful, abusive, unstable, or otherwise stressful, they increase the probability of poor outcomes. When a young child experiences excessive stress, chemicals are released in the brain that damage its developing architecture."

#3: BRIEFLY STATE THE PROBLEM

Examples:

- “Many young children in Vermont do not have access to affordable, high-quality child development services. This compromises future learning and the quality of the future workforce.”
- “Low wages make it hard for early childhood educators to earn a livable wage and result in high turnover. This undermines young children’s healthy development because they rely so heavily on consistent relationships with parents and other caregivers.”

#4: MOVE QUICKLY TO SOLUTIONS

Examples:

- “When communities make family mental health services available so that early interventions can take place, they put in place a preventive system that catches children before they fall.”
- “Science shows that training, knowledge and skills of consistent caregivers are critical to a sturdy foundation for all future growth and learning.”

DO:

- Prime the discussion with values like future prosperity, ingenuity or responsible manager.
- Use the language of ordinary people: heads, hearts, minds.
- Use examples that are not specifically cognitive and observable but might pay attention to social and emotional development as well.
- Use an exchange or future model: Give to children now who give back later.
- Talk about the shared pleasures of raising children for everyone.
- Position pre-school (or early care/early education) as an opportunity for stimulation that all should have access to regardless of income.
- Make community actors visible in children’s development.
- Wherever possible, connect the child to the larger environment

DON’T:

- Begin the conversation with “school readiness,” “brain,” “daycare” or “development.”
- Use the language of experts, e.g., “multi-track,” “age-appropriate developmental contexts,” or “evidence-based best practice.”
- Focus only on observable learning.
- Use an extortion model: e.g., “If you don’t get early education investments, youth crime will go up down the road.”
- Talk about parents as incompetent or super-competent.
- Make child rearing something you must have resources or education to do well.
- Reinforce the family, safety or individualism frames verbally or visually (defensive child rearing).

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This overview was prepared by the Kids Are Priority One Coalition based on materials provided by the FrameWorks Institute.