



Building Resources for Effective
Public Awareness Campaigns:
A Toolkit for Practice



FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention
A Service of the Children's Bureau

Purpose of the Toolkit

The purpose of this toolkit is to assist Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) State Lead Agencies (SLAs) and their partners in developing effective public awareness campaigns. This is done by introducing common approaches such as storytelling and promoting social norms to strengthen prevention initiatives to prevent child abuse and neglect. This toolkit does not include specific promotional materials, case studies, or sample letters that you may find in other public awareness campaign toolkits. This toolkit is about the process of developing an effective public awareness campaign. Each section includes information on elements related to effective campaigns, specific process examples from CBCAP state leads, and links to resources. We hope you find this toolkit helpful in your work and look forward to your feedback, including suggestions, examples to be added, and information to make the toolkit more useful. If you have any questions or feedback, please contact admin@friendsnrc.org

This toolkit includes the following five key elements found to improve the effectiveness of public awareness campaigns:

Identify partnerships

Determine your target audience

Tailor the message to your target audience

Use multiple communication methods including storytelling and promoting social norms

Invest time and resources in evaluation

Are Public Awareness Campaigns Effective?

Research conducted in the areas of health prevention and promotion has found public awareness campaigns to be effective, but effectiveness depends...on a lot of factors. For public awareness campaigns to be effective it is important to dedicate time and resources to planning. A comprehensive plan will assist all organizations and agencies involved. A well-developed plan includes information about evaluation and planning around unanticipated barriers or challenges¹.

It is also important to decide on the purpose of your message to determine the content. For example,

Do you want your message to:

- raise public awareness,
- promote a specific value,
- garner support for policy changes, or
- increase specific actions or behaviors on the part of your audience?

As a communicator, you need to know what you want to impart to your audience, such as:

- What do you want them to think?
- How do you want them to feel?
- What action do you want them to take?
- What is the goal of the public awareness campaign?
- What do you hope to accomplish through the campaign?

Generally, communication campaigns are more successful if the messages are tailored to the local audience's context, values, and resources. Another important aspect is ensuring your audience understands the message. The message or campaign should speak/use the language and voice of the target audience.

Throughout this toolkit we highlight five key points that have been found to improve the effectiveness of a public awareness campaign². The five key points in the public awareness campaign process are:

- Partnerships,
- Target audience,
- Tailor the message,
- Multiple communication methods, and
- Evaluate your efforts.

¹ "Making Health Communication Programs Work, A Planner's Guide," National Cancer Institute, <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/health-communication/pink-book.pdf>

² "Public Awareness Campaigns," Military REACH, a project of the Department of Defense USDA Partnership for Military Families (July 2015) accessed October 11, 2022 [Detail Result - Military REACH Library \(auburn.edu\)](#)

Identify Partnerships

Examine the landscape to determine if your public awareness campaign relates to other active initiatives at the local, regional, state, or national level. This may include partnering with other agencies including child welfare, healthcare, advocacy groups, and family serving agencies that have related campaigns or initiatives to reach a broader audience. These partnerships may maximize resources. FRIENDS also strongly encourages involving parents in developing and reviewing your campaign messages.

The New Hampshire Children's Trust (NHCT) partnered with other family serving agencies such as the Parent Information Center (PIC) and NH Family Voices (NHFV) to create the [YOUR VOICE Campaign](#), an effort dedicated to celebrating the critical role family voice plays in human service systems such healthcare, education, and family resources. The NH Children's Trust, PIC, and NHFV launched a series of short films, podcasts, a Family Voice Toolkit, and a robust social media campaign featuring real families and service providers. This campaign is one step toward working for systematic change throughout NH institutions, so family voice/parent engagement can inform decisions at every level of human services. For additional family engagement tools and frameworks, please see <https://picnh.org/family-engagement-resources/>

The public health sector has been at the forefront of many public engagement and education campaigns focused on changing social norms and positively impacting health behavior (e.g., prevention of drinking and driving, smoking cessation, and promoting healthy nutrition). Public health may be a good partner as it is well suited to take on a similar leadership role in changing social norms in support of parents and positive parenting that prevent child abuse and neglect.

Building on increased public awareness using a social marketing approach, the Breaking the Cycle campaign promoted the benefits of not abusing children and helping parents understand the cycle of abuse (i.e., children learn from their parents). The campaign was effective in changing parents' emotional abuse of their children and children's exposure to parental conflict¹. A post-campaign survey showed that up to 44% of parents had contemplated changing their behavior and up to 16% had tried to stop yelling at, swearing at or putting their child down, and fighting or arguing in front of their children. A pre- and post-comparison of another campaign, Accentuate the Positive, focusing on positive parenting showed a 10% decrease in the stigma associated with parents needing help in parenting².

¹ Sue Stannard, Susie Hall, & Joan Young. "Social marketing as a tool to stop child abuse." *Social Marketing Quarterly*, Volume 4, Issue 4, (1998): 64- 68.

² Nadine Henley, Robert J Donovan, & Helen Morehead. (1998). "Appealing to positive motivations and emotions in social marketing: Example of a positive parenting campaign." *Social Marketing Quarterly*, Volume 4, Issue 4, (1998): 49-53.

Additional resource: Mary Kathryn Poole, David W. Seale, & Catherine A. Taylor. "A systematic review of universal campaigns targeting child physical abuse." *Health Education Research*, 29, #3 (2014): 388-432.

Determine Your Target Audience

Who do you hope to reach with the campaign? It is important to consider your target audience as that will help determine how to tailor the public awareness campaign to the target audience's views, needs, and opinions. What data are you using to determine the target audience?

Social marketing is a process/strategy that uses marketing principles and techniques to influence primary audience behaviors that will benefit society as well as the individual. It aims to change behavior, not just raise awareness using distinct features: consumer orientation, behavior goals, audience segmentation, and integrated strategic planning¹. There is no such thing as “the general public”, if you make one message to reach everyone, you probably won't effectively reach anyone.

So how do you narrow the audience? Use segmentation that involves:

- identification (who is affected? Who can influence those affected?),
- prioritization (who is most at risk? Can we reach them? Can we persuade them? What resources are required to reach them? Is it feasible?),
- actively involve parents in prioritizing the audience, and
- consider if you have only one audience or a primary and secondary audience.

For example, Prevent Child Abuse (PCA) Iowa, in partnership with local marketing firm Flynn Wright, developed a messaging campaign titled “Imperfect Parent Club.” The 30-second video was directed at parents and caregivers with the message that it was OK to be an imperfect parent, parenting is hard for everyone, and encouragement to reach out for resources. The campaign directed parents to a resource page on the [PCA Iowa website](#). This site was developed with the protective factors in mind, providing parent education resources, tips for self-care, links to concrete supports, and handouts of “things to do” to strengthen the bond with children of all ages.

¹ “Understanding Social Marketing,” Community Toolbox, <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/sustain/social-marketing/overview/main>

Assessment of Readiness

Assessing the target audience's readiness to receive your message and change their thinking/behavior may be helpful. Include parents in measuring the readiness of the community or state in receiving the public awareness campaign message by asking parents to review the community readiness survey for word changes and to assist in advocating community members complete the survey.

The Readiness Assessment for the Prevention of Child Maltreatment (RAP-CM) can be used to assess how ready a country, state, or community is to implement evidence-based child maltreatment prevention programs and/or a public awareness campaign on a large scale. For example, if you find many responses are “don't know”, a strong community awareness campaign might be needed. To utilize the RAP-CM below, insert in the parentheses the name of the targeted area/community that is being assessed.

Questions	Possible Responses			
In (community), compared to other health and social problems, how much of a priority is child maltreatment/ abuse prevention?	High Priority	Moderate Priority	Low Priority	Don't Know
Do you think that measures taken so far to prevent child abuse and neglect in (community) have been adequate?	Adequate	Neither Adequate nor Inadequate	Inadequate	
Are there any government or non-government agencies officially mandated with child abuse and neglect prevention in (community)?	Yes	No	Don't Know	
Is there any official policy – or are there official policies – specifically addressing child abuse and neglect prevention in (community)?	Yes	No	Don't Know	
In (community), are there political leaders who express strong commitment to the issue of child abuse and neglect prevention and are taking effective measures to address the problem?	Yes	Not Clear	No	Don't Know
Does the (state/county) Department of Child and Family Services (whatever the child welfare agency is called) have a dedicated budget for child abuse and neglect prevention?	Yes	No	Don't Know	
Are there dedicated budgets in other parts of the (state, county) for child abuse and neglect prevention?	Yes	No	Don't Know	
Overall in (community), do you think the number of professionals specializing in child abuse and neglect prevention is adequate for the large scale implementation of child abuse and neglect prevention programs?	Adequate	Neither Adequate nor Inadequate	Inadequate	There are none/ Don't Know
What level of citizens' participation is there typically in efforts to address various health and social problems in (community)?	High	Moderate	Low	Don't Know

Questions	Possible Responses			
How good at getting things done through their joint efforts are the people living in (community)?	Good	Moderate	Poor	Don't Know

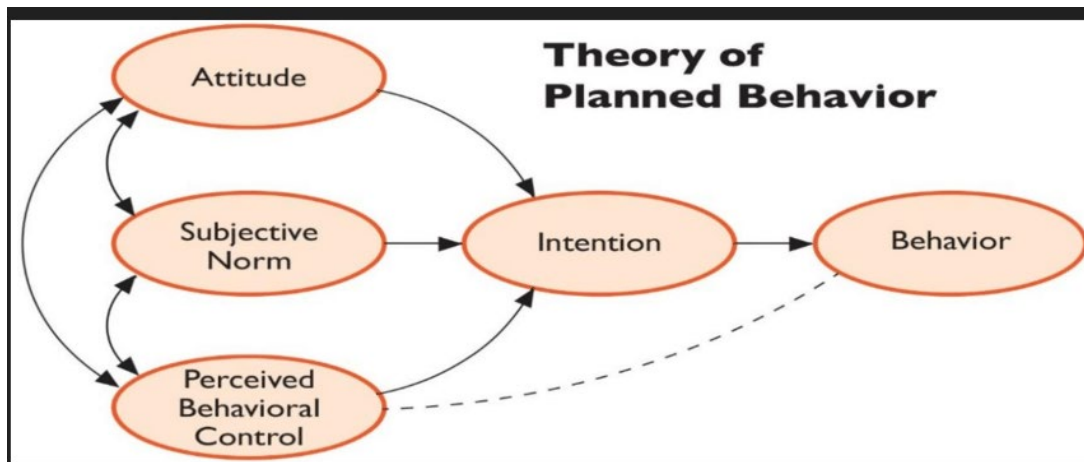
Resource: Marie Helene Gagne, Sylvie Drapeau, & Marie-Eve Clement, "Community Readiness for Child Maltreatment Prevention: The Challenge of a Brief Assessment," *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 41, (2020): 299-316.

Theoretical Models

You can use theoretical models or frameworks to inform the development of successful public awareness campaigns as you consider the target audience and what you want the target audience to change¹. These models contribute to the effectiveness of the public awareness campaign by explaining the process that the target audience uses to make behavioral changes.

The theoretical models commonly used in child abuse prevention messaging are:

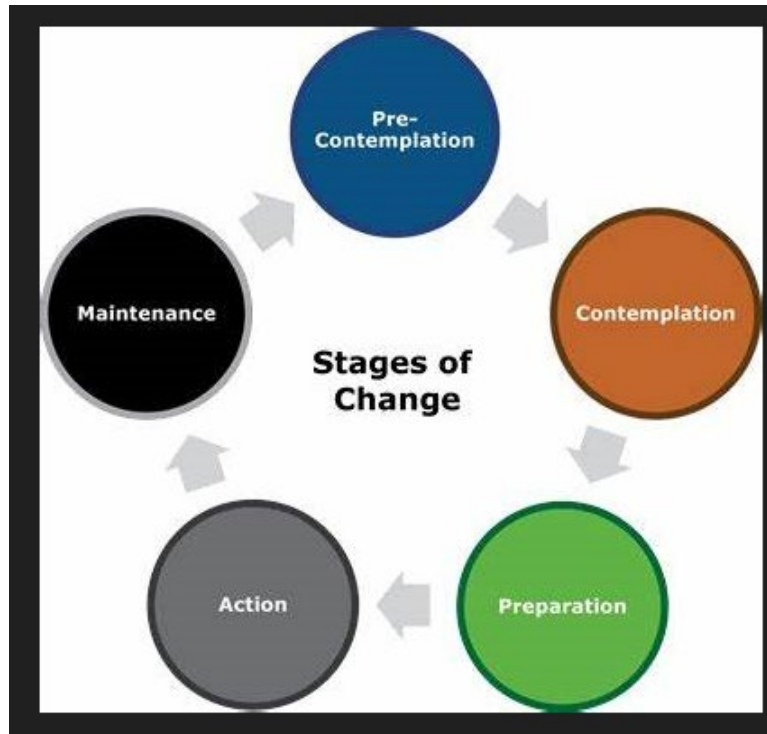
Theory of Planned Behavior in that behaviors are immediately determined by behavioral intentions involving three factors: attitudes toward behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Using this theory, effective public awareness campaigns may promote the idea that behavior change is positive along with people believing that actual behavior change is possible (attitude and subjective norms) by building confidence and offering specific steps (perceived behavioral control).



Social Cognitive Theory views people as active agents in that they learn by observing others and reproduce that learned behavior to maximize rewards. Individuals' beliefs in their own abilities/self-efficacy influence whether or not they will reproduce an observed behavior. This theory is important in the development of public awareness campaigns, particularly the use of social media, to demonstrate desired behaviors and shape thinking through role models including testimonials.

¹ "Public Awareness Campaigns," Military REACH, a project of the Department of Defense USDA Partnership for Military Families. (July 2015), pages 4-5, accessed October 11, 2022, [Detail Result - Military REACH Library \(auburn.edu\)](https://www.auburn.edu/military-reach/detail-result)

Transtheoretical Model describes the process of change from one behavior to a more beneficial one and involves five different stages when addressing a behavioral change. Public awareness campaigns may be most effective when they target their message with the audience's level of readiness to change.



Tailor the Message to the Target Audience

Messaging presents facts about the key issue to educate the individual, community, or society. Your audience may vary in terms of knowledge of the topic.

- Does your audience already agree with you?
- Are they questioning your value or the understanding you have of their situation?
- What perceptions might your audience have that would affect how they hear your message?

The way and order in which the information is presented can impact the success of the public awareness campaign. Brief pilot testing with different messages or modes of delivery can help identify what is most effective and culturally relevant with the target population¹. Be sure to actively involve parents in the development and pilot testing of the messages.

It is important to make your message “catchy” or use other strategies to make the message more likely to be remembered. Advertising professionals and communication firms can be great partners with you, as the content expert, to develop ideas and concepts for campaigns. Whether you seek the assistance of communications professionals or not, there are some principles to consider when developing the message: simplicity, unexpectedness, concreteness, credibility, emotions, and stories. Simple, clear concepts paired with concrete messages that appeal to the audience’s emotions with easily remembered stories are more likely to impact your audience. See the next section to learn more about storytelling as a strategy.

Just remember prevention is hard to understand as the concept can be abstract and requires us to believe something did not happen because something else occurred. “When we use language that activates shared values, we remind people that they have a reason to engage in the issue.”²

Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina developed a statewide public awareness campaign for the local Division of Social Service (DSS) agencies to prioritize, reframe, and align efforts for child maltreatment prevention. The toolkit provides an overview of research-based public education messages from the Frameworks Institute. Using data from two virtual focus groups with the North Carolina DSS staff in its development, the toolkit is intended to help professionals communicate about childhood adversity by developing a shared vision and shared understanding and messaging about effective child maltreatment prevention strategies.

https://www.preventchildabusenc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/prioritizingprevention_DSSCampaign_Toolkit_FINAL.pdf

¹ “Making Health Communication Programs Work, A Planner’s Guide,” National Cancer Institute, <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/health-communication/pink-book.pdf>

² Julie Sweetland, “Reframing Childhood Adversity: Promoting Upstream Approaches” (Washington, DC: FrameWorks Institute, 2021), page 10. https://preventchildabuse.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Reframing_Childhood-Adversity-Promoting-Upstream-Approaches-031621.pdf

Provide actionable solutions that match the problem. Generally, messages that focus on risk are not effective. However, if your campaign message is about reducing risk, you will want your message to be precise about what the audience can do to reduce that risk. Often, when people hear risk and fear messages, they may tend to discount the potential harm or possible danger. People tend to blame the person/people responsible, ignore or alter parts of the message that do not follow evidence or their experience, or adopt a sense of hopelessness/helplessness that there is nothing that they can do to prevent the harm³. For more guidance on shaping your message, see the document, [Reframing Childhood Adversity: Promoting Upstream Approaches](#) by FrameWorks Institute.

Below are some ideas to consider in a public awareness campaign on preventing child abuse and neglect and who the suggested target audience may be:

- ◆ Foster a fuller understanding of the prevention of child abuse and neglect in communities where prevention of child abuse and neglect is not prioritized as high as other health and social issues/concerns (see the Readiness Assessment in the earlier section);
- ◆ Illustrate why collaborations with prevention providers and child welfare staff are valuable in communities where prevention of child abuse and neglect may not have an adequate number of professionals/providers to implement prevention programs;
- ◆ Motivate audience(s) to support prevention of child abuse and neglect by explaining the prevention work and its impact on children and families in communities where resources focused on the prevention of child abuse and neglect are limited.

Here is an example on motivating an audience from PHRASES: Public Health Reaching Across Sectors, <https://www.phrases.org/tools/>

Example: What is the problem that prevention of child abuse and neglect is trying to solve? In the US, we spend so much time and money on child welfare (and create trauma for families involved in child welfare) but have limited resources to prevent child abuse and neglect (and reduce the amount of trauma for families). That is because we wait to provide resources to families and children once they are involved in the child welfare system. It is the mission of child abuse prevention to make sure that families, children, and communities have what they need to thrive.

Child abuse and neglect prevention providers bring together everyone who has a role to play in helping families and communities thrive including schools, businesses, government agencies, and people like you to prevent child abuse and neglect before it starts.

If you would like additional information on creating communication messages, be sure to review the following resources:

The W.K. Kellogg Foundation's [Strategic Communication Planning Hub](#) - an innovative and free online resource – allows visitors to create communication strategies tailored to their organization's needs and engage in a range of online learning around content writing, digital strategies and tactics, and message development.

³ Lacey Meyer, "Are Public Awareness Campaigns Effective?" *Cure*, Vol 7, issue 1, (Spring 2008) <https://www.curetoday.com/view/are-public-awareness-campaigns-effective>

In April 2024, the Children's Trust Fund Alliance through the Birth Parent National Network hosted a webinar, [Creating Strengths-Based Messaging for Families and Communities](#), about the process in developing strategic messaging for different audiences.

Additionally, from the [July 2023 Peer Learning Call](#), Banyan Communications offered a template for [creating your own](#) child abuse prevention campaign that applies evidence-based communication best practices.

Use Multiple Communication Methods

The approach shown to be most effective for child abuse prevention and education campaigns is the multifaceted approach. The multifaceted approach allows for the use of more than one communication method or strategy in your public awareness campaign, offering many opportunities for the audience to see/hear the campaign message. The multifaceted approach is believed to more effectively address actions that prevent child maltreatment and increase the use of existing resources, if information on accessing resources is provided in conjunction with the campaign that would be beneficial to the target audience.¹

It is important to think about what you are saying in your campaign and how the message may be received across diverse communities. Involving parents in the initial development of the public awareness campaign can help to identify how well the message may resonate with different audiences. Additionally, reframing your child maltreatment awareness education campaign on actions the listener/viewer can take to prevent child abuse and neglect will be helpful as an unintended consequence of child abuse and neglect prevention campaigns may be an increase in calls to the state or county's mandated reporting hotline. For example, remove the focus on reporting child abuse and neglect to make your public awareness campaign more effective in the prevention of child abuse and neglect as research suggests that parents may use a resource number (not a hotline number) to call for help and assistance following media messages paired with a support program for parents².

So, what methods should you use in your campaign? Public engagement and community education campaigns use a range of methods to reframe the way people think and talk about child abuse and neglect and who is responsible for preventing it. Examples of these methods can include the following:

- communication channels (e.g., mass or social media),
- communication strategies (e.g., framing and messaging, positive social norms, or social marketing), and
- community-level efforts (e.g., town hall meetings, neighborhood screenings and discussions).³

Moreover, effective frames highlight a problem and point the audience toward solutions.⁴

Let's focus on the communication channels. Mass media may be good for short, persuasive messages that can be communicated well in 30 second ads, but if your message is more complicated such as contacting another agency for resources, screening for risk, vulnerability of the target audience, and action on the part of your audience, then consider other channels

¹ Mary Kathryn Poole, David W. Seale, & Catherine A. Taylor. "A systematic review of universal campaigns targeting child physical abuse." *Health Education Research*, 29, #3 (2014): 388-432.

² Marie-Helene Gagne, Ariane Belanger-Gravel, Marie-Eve Clement, and Julie Poissant, "Recall and Understanding of a Communication Campaign Designed to Promote Positive Parenting and Prevent Child Maltreatment." *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 12, (2018): 191-197.

³ Beverly L. Fortson, Joanne Klevens, Melissa T. Merrick, Leah K. Gilbert, & Sandra P. Alexander, "Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: A Technical Package for Policy, Norm, and Programmatic Activities." (Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2016).

⁴ Fortson, Klevens, Merrick, Gilbert, and Alexander, "Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect: A Technical Package for Policy, Norm, and Programmatic Activities."

including social media such as YouTube commercials, newspaper ads, letters to the editor of newspaper, billboards, educational flyer/brochures, and celebrity advocacy rather than mass media.

Keep in mind that all of us are exposed to messages and ads throughout our day. In addition to the public awareness campaign itself, be sure to have talking points (for media inquiries), fact sheets, brochures, and training materials if applicable. Also, note that it is important to change how you present your message over time⁵. It is best to use a variety of strategies, messages, and media over time (multifaceted approach)– make sure the campaign is unique and novel. Take a long-term approach by highlighting different ideas over time. And think creatively such as partnering with the local shopping mall to post educational information or host child friendly events (e.g., coloring contests).

Let's examine two popular strategies in communicating messages: Storytelling and Positive Social Norms

Storytelling in Public Awareness Campaigns

Storytelling can be an effective form of communication as stories can demonstrate cause and effect relationships to increase awareness, illustrate patterns in important information to change attitudes, and display empathy to inspire action. But there is more to the strategy. For storytelling to help achieve your goals, the stories should communicate specific ideas and touch emotional chords that actually move people to support your position. Many organizations and movements miss the mark here. While a growing number have caught on to the emotional power of storytelling, many do not have a clear understanding or articulation of the essential ideas their stories need to convey to persuade their audiences and achieve durable attitude change¹.

Like the overall public awareness campaign, it is best to start with who is the target audience for the narrative/story. Although there may be several audiences who will see/hear the story, the primary audience is the audience who can act on the information or use it to make a decision. Additionally, what are the goals for the story or what should the audience take away from the story?

In storytelling, it is important to think about the kind of story and language used. Remember letting people tell their story gives them a feeling of participation and involvement in their own lives. The different types of stories are compliance, improvement, loss, struggle, quest, tragedy, fantasy, etc. Is your audience interested in this type of story? Do you need to create context for listeners/readers to understand the story? What is the setting? What is the tone of the story? Is the language appropriate for the target audience? Check out the [FRIENDS guide to storytelling](#) for ideas and resources to craft a story.

Be sure to identify who is the character in the story. Who is driving the action or is there someone in the story with whom the audience can identify? What are the motivations of the characters?

⁵ “Public Awareness Campaigns,” Military REACH, a project of the Department of Defense USDA Partnership for Military Families. July 2015, accessed October 11, 2022 [Detail Result - Military REACH Library \(auburn.edu\)](#)

¹ Doug Hattaway, “Aspirational Communication,” Stanford Social Innovation Review, Volume 18, #1, (Winter 2020): [Stanford Social Innovation Review](#)

The plot includes the setting such as important circumstances or conditions and context of what the storyteller is trying to address or overcome. If using any visuals with the story, make sure they are appropriate and do not detract from the story.

Based on the story crafted, what is the best medium through which to share it? Video, written narrative, shorter animated visual, a combination, others? In determining communication fit with the targeted audience(s), what usability testing will you employ? An example of usability testing is the A/B testing method where you compare two versions of the story/campaign message to see which one more people pay attention to across multiple platforms (i.e., Facebook, other social media platforms)².

Research by [Topos Partnership](#) cautions using individual stories as people tend to remember the story but forget or disregard the broader factors that the communication is trying to convey. Putting a face to a story can make it difficult to convey the broader, systemic factors resulting in the reader/viewer not appreciating the structural, policy interventions needed. Stories that focus on solutions – successful programs, effective interventions – can be powerful as they convey hope and belief in collective action. Once the big picture of broad, systemic factors is established, then it can be helpful to offer more than one individual story to support the idea with their experiences. We should not eliminate people from our communications, but it is a question of emphasis and timing in effective communication.

My Prevention Moment is [FRIENDS' virtual story collection opportunity](#) for parent leaders, CBCAP State Lead Agency staff, and practitioners to craft and record a detailed, overarching, and go-to, personal story that effectively illustrates the role of prevention in your life, family, program, or community.

Note: A good story is easy to read or hear, introduces a problem, and shares how the problem was solved, highlighting the role of the person or organization in addressing the problem. We need context and a story, because evidence gives stories substance, but stories give evidence meaning.

Share vivid success stories that link cross-sector collaborations to the concrete benefits they deliver (action oriented). Illustrate how the field of child abuse and neglect prevention is transforming to meet families' needs. Leverage allies and child welfare professionals working in or with other sectors as messengers. Frame collaboration as empowerment. Keep it positive!

Promoting Social Norms

There is a role of public awareness campaigns in **shifting community or social norms** and the ways that people think about child abuse and neglect by shifting away from individual responsibility to engaging the community and draws upon multiple solutions to promote safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for all children. Such a narrative can also

² Fred Fridlinger, "Evaluating Communication Campaigns." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Public Health Matters Blog. (April 2018) <https://blogs.cdc.gov/publichealthmatters/2018/04/evaluating-campaigns/>

normalize protective factors by enhancing connectedness and reducing the stigma around seeking help with parenting or for substance misuse, depression, or suicidal thoughts¹.

As an example, the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services Prevention and Community Support Section created the Help for Georgia Parents campaign to engage all parents and encourage use of the 1-800-CHILDREN Helpline. The 1-800-CHILDREN helpline has trained and caring professionals standing by to support all Georgia parents and caregivers. The helpline is free, bilingual (English and Spanish), safe, and a source of information for specialized services and referrals. Since the launch of the campaign, the 1-800-CHILDREN helpline has been rebranded to Find Help Georgia (findhelpga.org) to connect families to a comprehensive directory of local resources. Help seekers can search by ZIP code or speak directly with a resource specialist by phone or online chat to locate resources near them. Georgia residents can still call the 1-800-CHILDREN hotline and it routes to Find Help Georgia.

Georgia's [Belonging for Hope Campaign](#) builds off shared values and was highlighted in the [July 2023 Peer Learning Call](#) with Banyan Communications. Concrete support for every parent and caregiver is essential for the health and well-being of children. Supports include:

- ◆ Promoting positive help-seeking behaviors,
- ◆ Resources that are readily available and accessible, and
- ◆ Quality services.

Parents need formal systems of support to help children grow up healthy and happy. They also need to feel comfortable with help services. This campaign promotes asking for support when and where parents need it — and getting help to the top of their to do list.

¹ “Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences: Leveraging the Best Available Evidence.” Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019) <https://cantasd.acf.hhs.gov/wp-content/uploads/preventingACES.pdf>

Invest Time and Resources in Evaluation

A strong evaluation can reveal the impacts of the public awareness campaign and improve future campaign efforts. Additionally, evaluating your public awareness campaign provides stakeholders and funding entities with information on the impact of their resources.

- There needs to be a clear justification for why the public awareness campaign would be beneficial in modifying awareness of, beliefs about, and attitudes toward the prevention of child abuse and neglect.

In the past, public education campaigns have yielded varying and inconclusive results with some advocating that community education and mobilization strategies be integrated into other primary prevention programs (e.g., home visiting, family resources centers)¹. Although most community mobilization and media campaigns have not been subject to rigorous evaluation, some research has documented enhanced parental self-efficacy and knowledge of concepts and actions².

Thoughtful and thorough attention to the following questions will be helpful in developing a strong evaluation plan.

- What are the campaign's expected outcomes?
 - How do we know if we have achieved the identified outcomes?
 - Is the campaign intending to change understanding/knowledge, attitudes and social norms, or behaviors?
- For example, clearly defined behavioral goals or desired rates of the behavior in the population help to identify appropriate evaluation measures. See the table below on some general topic areas, possible measures, and question examples.
- How will the message be delivered to your audience, directly or indirectly through other sources?

The campaign pathways include direct exposure to the campaign messages, institutional transmission in that messages are directed to specific social institutions for change, and social diffusion whereby someone hears the message and shares with others.

- Who is the target audience(s) and are we reaching the target audience?
Most campaigns identify their intended audience more specifically and expect campaign effects to vary across subpopulations within the target audience. The universal, one size fits all approach to public awareness campaigns does not work.
- How much exposure is needed before effects can be expected?
If your campaign is relying on specific social institutions like family service agencies to maximize effect, then the evaluation will be complex as there will be multiple measures for the specific social institution and the target audience. If simple information is directly

¹ Marie-Helene Gagne, Ariane Belanger-Gravel, Marie-Eve Clement, and Julie Poissant, "Recall and Understanding of a Communication Campaign Designed to Promote Positive Parenting and Prevent Child Maltreatment." *Preventive Medicine Reports*, 12, (2018): 191-197.

² Brenda Jones Harden, Cassandra Simons, Michelle Johnson-Motoyama, and Richard Barth, "Scanning the Child Maltreatment Landscape." *Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Focus on Poverty*, Volume 37, Number 2, (September 2021): <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Focus-on-Poverty-37-2c.pdf>

shared, then keep in mind assumptions you are making about the target audience in that you think they are ready for information and the message solves a known problem.

- What strategies are we going to use to gather data?
 - How will we use data to inform our campaign?
 - For example, we will use data for deciding when changes to the messages need to be made or stay with the same message.

[Logic models](#) are one way to organize answers to these five questions and should be created at the beginning of a public awareness campaign.

Public awareness campaigns do not yet have research evidence demonstrating impact on rates of child abuse and neglect victimization or perpetration but instead are supported by evidence indicating impacts on risk and protective factors for child abuse and neglect (e.g., parenting stress, parental mental health).

For example, the Wisconsin Five for Families public awareness toolkit was designed to support partners' efforts to include the language and materials of the five essential strengths that keep all families strong in their existing outreach efforts. The statewide public awareness campaign, a universal prevention strategy by the Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board, has the primary goal of increasing knowledge of the Protective Factors Framework. https://fiveforfamilies.org/wp-content/uploads/FFF-Toolkit_May-2019.pdf

In March 2023, FRIENDS hosted a [Peer Learning Call](#) that included presentations from New Hampshire and Missouri on their work to measure and report on social media and public awareness campaigns. The Child Welfare Information Gateway contributed to a FRIENDS Peer Learning Call in [July 2021](#) that offers some methods for measuring exposure such as tracking and website monitoring. Below are some additional metrics you may want to consider.

General metrics:

Areas/topics to measure	Possible measures	Question Examples
<i>Awareness of campaign message</i>	Unaided awareness – general questions about the campaign topic	What have you seen or heard lately about the prevention of child abuse?
	Aided awareness – questions specifically about the campaign	What have you seen or heard lately about the Strengthening Families campaign?
	Proven awareness – questions about where the campaign was seen	Where did you actually read or hear about the Strengthening Families campaign?
<i>Target audience participation</i>	Rates of participation based on estimates of eligible individuals in the target audience	Of those who attended an event, what percentage signed up to identify if they were eligible for public assistance?
<i>Changes in behavior in target audience(s)</i>	Percentage change of eligible individuals who did the behavior	Of those who heard the message, what percentage reported making a call to a parent resource warmline asking for help?

	Percentage increase or decrease	How much did calls or text messages to a parent resource warmline increase during the campaign?
<i>Changes in behavioral intentions</i>	Percentage increase or decrease	How many parents intend to call the warmline if they need resources?
<i>Changes in behavior in secondary audiences, or individuals who were not originally included in the target audience</i>	Behavior changes in doctors, physicians, teachers, social workers, therapists	How many recommend to parents they see or serve to reach out to the parent resource warmline if the parents need resources?
<i>Changes in knowledge</i>	Specific facts	How many children are affected by child abuse each year?
	Awareness of specific recommendations	How many indicate that asking for help is ok?
<i>Changes in belief indicators</i>	Attitudes	How many indicate that getting help for mental health issues can promote resilience?
	Opinions	How many indicated that child neglect is more likely in families experiencing an overload of stress such as financial insecurity, housing instability, and hunger?
	Values	How many indicate that we have a shared obligation to support families to foster children's potential?

Examples of Public Awareness Toolkits

For those seeking specific examples of Public Awareness/Communication Toolkits, here are some examples from CBCAP programs and national organizations.

[Ascend, Aspen Institute New Framing Playbook: How to Talk about Two-Generation Approaches to Supporting Families](#)

[Child Welfare Information Gateway, National Child Abuse Prevention Month](#)

[Comprehensive Prevention Planning Child, Family, and Community Wellbeing Communications Toolkit](#)

[Prevent Child Abuse North Carolina toolkit for Strengthening North Carolina's Children and Families](#)

[Tools for Building Better Childhoods, Prevent Child Abuse America](#)

[Wisconsin Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Board Five for Families Public Awareness Toolkit](#)

Final Thoughts

The ability of CBCAP Leads and their partners to clearly and convincingly communicate the prevention of child abuse and neglect is one of the many activities authorized under CBCAP. This toolkit was designed for those doing and leading this work of preventing child abuse and neglect. The toolkit offers guidance on five key aspects of public awareness campaigns that hopefully will lead to productive campaigns.

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