

Making the Case for Early Care and Education:

A Message
Development
Guide for
Advocates

Berkeley
Media
Studies
Group



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We thought, if it worked for tobacco control, why not child care? Granted, the two issues vary greatly, but there are similarities too. Both issues require policy solutions that need clear explanations and vocal support. We borrowed and expanded on the methods the Advocacy Institute used to develop its guide to prepare the one you are holding now. We owe the Advocacy Institute and the tobacco control movement a giant debt for teaching us that, indeed, over time and with hard work, media advocacy can foster a sea-change in how our nation views an issue. We hope this “Yellow Book” will aid and accelerate the sea-change early care and education advocates are fostering today.

In addition to those tobacco control advocates, we would like to thank everyone who made the development of this book a wonderful, collaborative process.

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Preface

The research is clear: the early years matter. Quality care makes a difference for young children. The evidence is robust. When it's done right, early care and education benefits families, communities, and the children themselves.

But if that's true — and I know that it is — then why do we always seem to be talking to ourselves? Why haven't these truths been recognized — and supported — at the highest levels of government?

It seemed to me, and many others, that our problem was communications. Early childhood advocates were not communicating a consistent message. If we all learned to sing the same tune, wouldn't our message be heard then? Did the field simply need a clear, concise message that resonated with the largest possible audience, and the discipline to stick to it?

Not necessarily, said the Berkeley Media Studies Group. The starting point for BMSG was not the message, but the policy. You can't have a message before you know what it is you want, they said, and you'd better have that figured out carefully. But the field at large, and even local advocates, could not always agree on a policy goal. Compelling arguments were made for various priorities, leaving a fragmented movement with a huge number of goals. Policymakers expressed willingness to support child care if they only could understand what advocates wanted.

In response to this level of inconsistency, BMSG suggested developing message strategies that will be useful regardless of the policy change being sought. BMSG's model was tobacco control, a field that, like child care, still has many disagreements over strategy, but has nonetheless changed the country's attitudes and behavior

about smoking. Whether or not tobacco control advocates agreed on the policy they wanted to pursue, they had a range of messages they could use that all framed the issue as a societal, rather than an individual, problem. As they pursued their various policy goals, they could reinforce each other on the basic message: government has a role in fixing this problem. Using the same model, BMSG sought a set of messages that would point early childhood advocates in the same direction, even if they weren't promoting precisely the same policy at exactly the same time.

In this book, they have met that goal.

BMSG challenged me to think differently about message strategies for early care and education. I've learned that while advocates might not always be singing the same lyrics, there can be recurring themes that emphasize why we care about children's early years and why we have a responsibility to do what we can to make those years a political priority. The advice in this book will help us do just that.

Marie Young
Los Altos, California
November, 2003

Introduction

*The challenge is to make
things as simple as possible
and not one bit simpler.*

Albert Einstein

The Berkeley Media Studies Group (BMSG) came late to the early childhood issue. For decades, advocates have been working locally and nationally to improve and expand early childhood education and indeed, progress has been made. By 1999, the year we were introduced to the field, more than \$14 billion in federal funding had been allocated to early childhood education.

But it wasn't enough. Millions of children still weren't getting the education and care they needed, and advocates were frustrated. The opposition seemed to be getting more vocal and stronger politically. It was getting harder and harder to make gains for early childhood funding — by 2001, simply keeping spending levels constant was becoming a big fight. Despite solid evidence that showed how quality early childhood education improved children's chances to succeed and saved society money, many early care and education advocates felt like they were losing the argument.

We heard one particular frustration whenever advocates lamented the situation: "If we could all speak with one voice," advocates would say, "then politicians would listen." We received numerous requests — and still do — to help develop concise and consistent

messages that make the case for early childhood education. Advocates everywhere wanted to know what they could say to win the day.

Message strategies are certainly important; what you say, and how you say it, can bolster or undermine support for an issue. But we wondered: Is it absolutely necessary that every advocate always echo the others exactly? What about situations in which the policy goals are different, or when advocates legitimately disagree? For other public health issues (yes, we believe early childhood education is a public health issue), there have been many voices and messages, sometimes arguing loudly among themselves, and still, progress has been made. We thought about tobacco control, a great example of success in public health for which strategic communications have been crucial. Yet there were great debates in tobacco control about how to express the message — indeed, intense argument about what the exact policy goals should be — but despite vehement disagreement, over the years there has also been great progress.

What could we learn from media advocacy in tobacco control that might translate to early childhood education? Would it help children’s advocates who would like the field to speak in one voice? What should they say?

This book is our attempt to answer those questions. We set out to identify the language that advocates are using to make the case for early childhood education policies, analyze and refine that language, and assemble it in an accessible format so that no matter which policy advocates might be working on at the moment, they can find help in making their case.

In trying to make a case for early childhood education, advocates are stuck between a rock and a hard place. The complexities of the public child care system mean that too often, advocates get caught up in describing intricate policy details that few outside the field can comprehend. Other advocates, trying to avoid this, sometimes go too far the other direction, sidestepping specifics and vaguely making pleas “for the good of the children.” Occasionally both happen at once. In one news event, we may hear both “The legislature must increase federally funded subsidies for Stage 3 reimbursable licensed providers” and “Children are our future.”

We hope that this book will help advocates find the middle ground. We believe that advocates can talk about the values and benefits of early childhood education in ways that will increase public support for investing in early childhood education without resorting either to platitudes or to minutiae.

The Thinking Behind This Book

Our goal was to develop a tool that would help advocates around the country — at the local, state, and national level — talk about early childhood education more effectively, regardless of the specific policy they are working on at the moment. From the onset of our work in child care, we noticed a great deal of discord and disagreement among advocates about what the focus should be. This book does not set out to resolve differences among advocates on policy priorities. Instead, we offer advocates arguments to make, and value statements to support those arguments, for a variety of early care and education policy goals. We believe that young children, their families, and the community at large will benefit if all early childhood education advocates get better at making their case, whether it's for improving teachers' salaries, establishing paid family leave, creating standards for quality, increasing tax credits, shifting monies in state budgets, changing local zoning laws, or any number of policies to increase public expenditures for early childhood education programs.

This book is filled with substantive things to say about various early childhood education policies, expressed in ways designed to evoke the values that illustrate interconnections in our society. This style contrasts with the emphasis on personal responsibility and individualism that permeates much of our nation's current political discussion. We believe that personal responsibility is extremely important — a pillar of our society — but it is not our only common value. The values that connect children and their families to their neighborhoods and society at large seem to get lost in the rhetorical shuffle. In the context of our arguments in support of early childhood education, we have made an effort to articulate the values of interconnectedness.

As important as this message is, however, it is only one part of an overall strategy, and not even the most important part. Community organizing and policy advocacy are the cornerstones of social change. Effective messages that are part of media advocacy strategies can amplify and accelerate community organizing and policy advocacy, but they can't substitute for them. Message strategies can enhance community organizing and policy advocacy by helping advocates articulate their values and goals so that they can become more vocal participants in the policy process.

The values that connect children and their families to their neighborhoods and society at large seem to get lost in the rhetorical shuffle.

Our assumption is that the messengers who will be delivering the messages articulated in this book are advocates for early care and education. They may be professionals, caregivers, academics, parents, neighborhood residents, elected officials, business leaders, police officers, bureaucrats, grandparents — anyone who cares about our society and wants to improve the lives of children.

We assume that those who are using this book will be targeting policymakers and those who can influence them. This book is not about informing parents and other caregivers about the importance of early childhood education or how to choose a good child care program. Although those audiences and topics are certainly important, they are outside the scope of this advocacy guide and are thus not addressed here. Finally, we assume that advocates will be working to mobilize their supporters with strong arguments, not trying to convince the opposition.

How We Wrote This Book

We are not experts in early childhood education or related policies. We are experts in developing media advocacy strategies for public policy battles to improve the public's health. We have applied our expertise in media advocacy to the information that the experts in early childhood have given us in order to create the strategies explored in this book.

We gathered our data about early childhood education in three ways. First, we invited local and national early childhood education policy experts to a series of meetings in which we created structured situations that let us listen to the arguments and justifications that advocates make for public support of early childhood education. We transcribed the discussions from these meetings and used the language of these experienced advocates as our starting point.

Second, from the trainings we had done with advocacy groups across the nation, such as the Local Investment in Child Care group in California and the California Child Development Administrators Association, we gathered the questions that they told us were the most difficult to answer. We also gathered sample policies, data, and examples from reports generated during the last few years by researchers and advocacy groups in the field.

Third, we commissioned EDK Associates, a public opinion research firm based in New York, to assess public opinion on early childhood education. The first part of this work was a review of public opinion about public support for early childhood education from the early 1970s to the present. A summary of that research is presented in the public opinion timeline available on our web site (www.bmsg.org). The purpose of the public opinion timeline is to organize and display the information in such a way that someone new to the field would have an easy summary of the status of public opinion and its corresponding political context. Meanwhile, someone with experience could see the field's history and remember the changing political contexts. The second part of EDK Associates' work was a poll to test the strength of various arguments in support of early childhood education against opposition arguments. We wanted to know which arguments fared best when challenged, and which of the advocates' arguments led to increased support for political candidates or public expenditures on child care. The results of that research helped us make judgments about the messages we recommend throughout this book.

We thank the many participants who attended our meetings — as well as those who reviewed this book and gave us excellent feedback — for their willingness to participate in creating this tool. These individuals are listed in the acknowledgements. Any errors, of course, are ours.

How to Use This Book

Our hope is that advocates will use this book as resource, a place to go for ideas about the best ways to talk about early childhood education policies. Some might read the book start to finish; however, we expect that advocates will more likely browse the book's contents, and then return to specific sections for ideas when fashioning media advocacy strategies. With that in mind, we've designed the book so that advocates can:

- Focus on one policy goal at a time. Early childhood education solutions will require huge investments and a buildup of political support that can take a very long time. This book should aid those who are working on a variety of smaller, incremental policies as well as the larger pie.
- Find messages that help frame the issue of early childhood education as a social good, regardless of a particular policy goal.
- Focus on policymakers — those who have the power to create the change that advocates want to see.

The bulk of the advice gathered here is in the middle. For example, Chapter 3, the chapter on message, explains the hierarchy of value-based messages supporting early childhood education and why we believe some types of messages are more important and effective than others.

But messages exist in contexts and for specific purposes, so we attend to that need as well.

Chapter 1 describes the overall strategy, the policy context in which your message appears. We start there, because before you can have an effective message, you need to know your overall goal and have a plan for achieving it.

Chapter 2 explains how media strategies can enhance your overall strategy. This chapter explains how the news media currently depict early childhood education issues, why it's important to pay attention to those portrayals, what "framing" is, and why it matters.

Chapter 3 addresses message strategies, offering concrete advice on framing early education, constructing core messages, and answering challengers.

Chapter 4 turns toward journalists. How can we get their attention on early childhood education? Our well-crafted messages won't help unless we can embed them in compelling stories that get journalists' — and therefore policymakers' — attention.

Chapter 5 brings the puzzle pieces together, applying the frames, or core messages, to key policy areas with suggestions for story elements — policy issue by policy issue.

As always, take what you find here and use it as your own, but never go against your own best judgment.

We wrote this guide because strategic news attention to early childhood education will help advocates pressure reporters to do right by children and families, and ultimately society. But reporters tell stories, not issues. If they are to be engaged on this issue, the stories that advocates use to make their case will have to be less general, more compelling. We hope the ideas we've collected from the field, refined, tested, and expanded here will make it easier for early childhood education advocates, and as a consequence journalists, to tell this important story.

Chapter 1

Overall Strategy: Laying the Groundwork for Media Advocacy

You can't divorce your communications strategy from your political strategy.¹

Richard Brandon,
Human Services Policy Center

In early childhood education advocacy, as in any issue area, you can't have a media strategy without an overall strategy. The news media are just one tool to help you attain your goals, so don't let them seduce you; their power demands that you do advance work to be sure you are engaging them in the most effective way.

Media advocacy is the strategic use of mass media, usually the news, to support community organizing and advance healthy public policy. Thinking strategically is one of the most important lessons in media advocacy, and often the most difficult to accomplish. Having a clear overall strategy in place can increase your effectiveness and efficiency by helping you allocate time, money, and effort only where they will truly help advance your goals.

In order to achieve change, you must know what you want to have happen. If you are going to sound the alarm about lack of funds for child care subsidies, for example, you need to put forth a policy approach to address the problem. It doesn't have to be a complete solution; it could be a partial answer (such as extra support for a specific population to offset the consequences of a policy change), but it does need to be a concrete contribution toward a more desirable situation.

Steps for Developing Strategy

In your planning, you should address four questions that form the basis for constructing an overall strategy. From this process, your specific media objectives, messages, and targets will flow. With your organizing partners, take the time to carefully consider and develop answers to each of these questions.

Checklist: Questions for Overall Strategy Development

1. What is the problem?
2. What is the solution?
3. Who has the power to make the necessary change?
4. Who must be mobilized to apply pressure for change?

What is the problem?

Advocates are generally very knowledgeable about problems. Indeed, early childhood education advocates can talk at great length about various aspects of the problem: the high cost of care, too much turnover among staff, inadequate subsidies, long waiting lists, poor-quality care, parents patching together solutions, etc. However, advocates are often not as adept as they should be in breaking the problem into solvable pieces.

In fact, because advocates understand that the problem of early childhood education is multifaceted, and that availability, facilities, cost, and quality are all interrelated, they often get frustrated by the scope of the problems they are trying to solve. They may feel that it's no use working on just one part of the problem — say, developing new facilities for early childhood education — if they cannot also solve the problem of how to staff those new facilities with well-trained teachers.

We can tell you from years of working with advocates on a range of complex public health and social issues that it is critical to break the overall issue of early education into manageable policy problems. Change is incremental, and advocates must be able to articulate and focus political will on the pieces of the problem that over time will lead to greater systemic change.

As you assess the problem, bear in mind that how you define a problem has significant impact on what solutions are considered feasible and who has domain over and responsibility for those solutions. For instance, if lack of affordable early childhood education is understood as a problem mainly for parents who need some place to put their kids while they work, as discussed during the welfare reform debates, this problem definition may point to babysitting or “warehousing”-type solutions, without the necessary quality elements.

It is critical to break the overall issue of early education into manageable policy problems.

What is the solution?

Sometimes advocates put all their energy into getting people to pay attention to the problem, with the assumption that if they could just raise awareness about it, the right answers would emerge from the discussion and be enacted. This is rarely how change happens. It is much more effective to name specific solutions. Change is about channeling *awareness* into *action*, and that means mobilizing people around a solution.

It is as important to be specific about the policy solution as it is to describe the problem succinctly. Your “solution” need not be the comprehensive set of actions that would eradicate the problem forever; it is just the next concrete step you and your group are advocating for today. Not only will a concrete next step help keep you focused, but it will help get you news coverage. Calling for specific actions is more interesting and newsworthy to journalists than talking about the need for general or vague changes.

Most people who work in early childhood education will have many areas of concern and many potential policies they are pursuing. Sometimes the priorities will be determined by the political opportunity of the moment. The key to being strategic is to *be clear about which policy is your priority today and why*. For instance, if you are concerned about improving the quality of state-funded early childhood education programs, be ready to name policies that will help, such as reducing the child-to-teacher ratio, increasing subsidies to providers, and raising the training requirements for early childhood education teachers.

Your “solution” need not be the comprehensive set of actions that would eradicate the problem forever; it is just the next concrete step you and your group are advocating for today.

Who has the power to make the necessary change?

Once you have clearly articulated the problem and the solution, assess who has the power to make the specific change that you identified. This helps make your work more efficient. Rather than educating or persuading the entire public about the high cost of early childhood education, the goal may be to persuade a few key decision makers to adopt policies that reduce the cost for those who need it most.

You should be as specific as you can about naming your target. In some cases, the person with the power to make the necessary change might be a single individual on a legislative subcommittee who holds the deciding vote. Even though you are targeting only one person, the news media can help “turn up the volume” on your conversation, take the conversation public, and make you more effective in advancing your policy goal by increasing public pressure on the target.

Checklist: Key Questions in Choosing a Target²

1. Who or what institution has the power to solve the problem and pass your desired policy? Identify who is the most important target for achieving your policy goal.
 2. Who has the power to influence your target?
 3. Which targets are appointed? Elected? Private?
 4. How do you have power or influence with them (as voters, consumers, stockholders, taxpayers, shaming, public recognition, etc.)?
 5. What is their self-interest? For instance, if they are elected, how many voting parents are in their constituency?
 6. Who would have jurisdiction if you redefined the issue (e.g., turned a family child care licensing issue into a small business support issue)? Would this help you?
-

Who must be mobilized to apply the pressure for change?

Pollster Ethel Klein tells us, “Solving the child care crisis is more of a community organizing problem than a persuasion problem.”³ Creating change often requires long-term, consistent pressure on the person, body, or organization that holds the power. Community groups and other interested parties must be mobilized to apply pressure. For example, getting parents to speak up for continuing child care subsidies for those transitioning off welfare led California Governor Gray Davis to maintain program funding in the 2002 budget.

In developing strategy, consider that there are a variety of roles for different groups and individuals. Not everyone has to be in front of the camera or writing op-eds. In addition to community activists and organizations, there are researchers, child care providers, K-12 educators, social and health service agency professionals, and business people. Because policy change can be controversial, some groups cannot be publicly involved. However, these groups can provide background assistance that could be key to the success of your initiatives. For instance:

- Health and social welfare departments can
 - : Supply data on the number of children who qualify for child care subsidies, or the percentage of working parents in a region, to help advocates make their case about the unmet need for child care.
 - : Provide advance notice of early childhood education reports, or reports on related social or financial issues, so advocates can seize and expand these news opportunities.
 - : Offer logistical support or resources for community forums or trainings.
 - : Arrange a public comment period on all child care regulatory changes.

Solving the child care crisis is more of a community organizing problem than a persuasion problem.

- Academic or government researchers can
 - : Analyze and help interpret child care-related data, such as the cost of opening new centers, the future societal costs of not investing in quality early childhood education now, and the economic contribution made by the child care industry.
 - : Serve as experts on specific issues, such as the developmental needs of children, the core training needed to prepare early childhood education teachers, and the financing options and zoning changes that would encourage the opening of new child care facilities.
- Child care providers can
 - : Introduce advocates and reporters to families who can discuss how subsidized child care has made a significant economic difference.
 - : Allow their teachers to be interviewed during the workday by reporters investigating the effect of low wages on teacher turnover rates.
 - : Provide a visual backdrop for child care news stories.

In sum, identify a wide range of roles that fit the strengths and limitations of the various groups you want to mobilize to advance your issue. Then, help them help you.

Conclusion

To develop an overall strategy, focus on an issue that you are concerned about, choose specific policies to address that issue, and identify who has the power to implement those policies. Since creating change is a long-term process that often meets much resistance, it is critical to develop relationships with committed activists and supporters who can serve as allies and be mobilized to apply pressure at key moments over the long run.

Not until you have done all this advance work should you consider whether getting news attention is an appropriate way to support your goals. Laying the strategic groundwork will dictate the rest of your approach. For instance, if the policy target you've selected agrees to meet with your group, listens, and responds as you had hoped, you don't need to attract news attention to put pressure on that target. Instead, you might consider writing an op-ed piece to congratulate the policymaker for doing the right thing for your community. In another case, the strategic planning process might reveal that one specific corporate executive is your key target, and you discover that she reads the *Chicago Tribune*, not the *Sun-Times*. This gives you important information for focusing your work on the news outlet most likely to reach your target; you can conserve resources and increase efficiency.

The following table presents a sample of policies that advocates have pursued to make the cost of child care manageable, improve its quality, and increase its availability. The list is not exhaustive, but provides examples of the range of policies that advocates might support with media advocacy at the local, state, and national levels.

To develop an overall strategy, focus on an issue that you are concerned about, choose specific policies to address that issue, and identify who has the power to implement those policies.

Sample Child Care Policy Goals⁴

	Availability	Quality	Facilities
Local	<p>Encourage businesses to advocate for increasing public and private child care subsidies for employees.</p> <p>Assess developer fees to fund child care programs.</p>	<p>Facilitate partnerships that enable families to access health and social services within child care programs.</p> <p>Increase child care teacher salaries to that of public school teachers.</p> <p>Develop multilingual training programs for caregivers.</p>	<p>Create grants and training programs to increase the business skills of child care providers.</p> <p>Create child care facility development funds.</p> <p>Reduce zoning and permit barriers for building child care centers and operating family day care homes.</p> <p>Include child care goals in the city and county general development plans.</p>
State	<p>Increase provider reimbursement rates to cover the actual cost of child care.</p> <p>“Regionalize” state child care reimbursement rates to reflect higher market costs in some counties.</p> <p>Create universal access to publicly-funded preschool.</p> <p>Implement a tiered subsidy system that provides greater reimbursements for higher quality and difficult-to-find care, such as for disabled children and overnight hours.</p> <p>Increase funding for child care subsidy programs to reduce the number of eligible families who are waiting for financial assistance.</p>	<p>Develop state early childhood education curriculum standards.</p> <p>Establish a state fund for quality enhancement grants.</p> <p>Create a tiered reimbursement system for programs receiving state funds based on quality standards.</p> <p>Lower the child-to-teacher ratio in state funded programs.</p> <p>Implement scholarships as well as quality- and wage-enhancing programs to increase teacher education, training, and salaries.</p> <p>Require higher education and early childhood education training for supervisors in child care settings.</p> <p>Allow child care teachers to qualify for state government health insurance.</p> <p>Assess the quality of higher education and encourage the use of Higher Education Accreditation Standards.</p>	<p>Develop land trusts devoted to building new child care facilities.</p> <p>Fund a low-interest loan program for capital investment in child care.</p> <p>Require that local housing, transportation, and other public works project grants include consideration of child care needs, including the placement of and zoning for child care programs.</p> <p>Reduce barriers for opening child care centers in public schools.</p>
Federal	<p>Reauthorize and increase funding for Head Start and the Child Care Development Block Grant so that all eligible children can benefit.</p> <p>Expand eligibility criteria so that more low-income children can have access to child care programs.</p>	<p>Create a federal student loan forgiveness program for early childhood educators.</p> <p>Establish quality enhancement grants that enable child care programs to offer training to teachers, purchase new curriculum and materials, etc.</p>	<p>Establish incentives for transit projects that incorporate child care.</p> <p>Allocate Housing and Urban Development funds to support the development of child care centers/homes in affordable housing projects.</p> <p>Create a task force of federal health, education, social service, transportation, and economic development agencies to invest in the expansion and improvement of integrated child care programs.</p>

¹ Brandon, Richard, Human Services Policy Center. Statement made at Berkeley Media Studies Group roundtable meeting, June 11, 2002, Berkeley, CA.

² Themba, M.N., *Making Policy, Making Change: How Communities Are Taking Law Into Their Own Hands*. Oakland, CA: Chardon Press, 1999, p95.

³ Klein, Ethel, EDK Associates. Statement made at Berkeley Media Studies Group roundtable meeting, June 11, 2002, Berkeley, CA.

⁴ The following publications were very helpful in researching sample child care policy approaches:

Schulman, K., Blank, H., and Ewen, D., *Seeds of Success: State PreKindergarten Initiatives 1998–1999*. Washington, DC: Children’s Defense Fund, 1999.

Edwards, V.B. (Ed.), “Building Blocks for Success: State Efforts in Early-Childhood Education,” *Education Week*, Vol. XXI (17), January 10, 2002.

Mitchell, A., Stoney, L., and Dichter, H., *Financing Child Care In The United States: An Expanded Catalog Of Current Strategies*. Kansas City, MO: Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, 2001.

Chapter 2

Media Strategy: Using Media Advocacy to Influence Policy

*You can't have a media strategy
without an overall strategy.¹*

Rule #1,
News for a Change

Once your policy goals are set, your media tactics can be developed. This chapter briefly outlines the key points of a media advocacy strategy designed to support community organizing and policy advocacy to improve early childhood education. The bottom line: Focus on the news, pay attention to framing, and build relationships with reporters.

Focus on the News

It's tempting to think that with the media's enormous reach, if advocates could just get the right message to the right person in the right way at the right time, political action on early childhood education couldn't be refused. Unfortunately, messages alone rarely stimulate action from those in power. Rather, messages are most successful when they amplify community voices and constituents' concerns. The "right person" is more likely to act if they know that a message comes from their political base, which is why community organizing is key to making change on any public health issue, including child care. A politician in Washington needs to know that the message "Protect and fully fund Head Start" doesn't just come from one or two children's advocates, but from a host of parents, researchers, business people, and concerned voting citizens.

Even with great organization and impressive grassroots support, however, the media is saturated with message "noise" from all sorts of commercial and political sources. Without vast resources, it is almost impossible to break through. Yet new perspectives, opinions, and messages do come to the fore, as we have seen with the research on children's brain development. The question is: What is the best way for early childhood education policy solutions to break through the environmental clutter? Our answer: Strategically, through the news.

The news media confer credibility and legitimacy on the topics they report. The public, and most policymakers, pay attention to what is selected to be news. The communications research is clear: On many issues, the news agenda directs the policy agenda. When a debate is elevated by news attention, more policymakers will pay attention to the issue.

It's not enough for early childhood education to get into the news; it must also be portrayed in a way that lets policymakers know what they must do to improve the situation. How early childhood education is covered, or framed, will have a huge impact on how the public — and policymakers — perceive and address it.

Pay Attention to Framing

News is organized, or framed, in order to make sense out of infinitely sided and shaded issues. Frames are the persistent patterns by which the news media organize and present the news.² The frame sets the boundaries of the discussion. Inevitably, some elements of a story are left out while others are included. Some arguments, metaphors, or story lines are featured prominently, while others are relegated to the margins of the story. News frames are important because the facts, values, and images included in news coverage are accorded legitimacy, while those not emphasized or excluded are marginalized and, hence, left out of public discussion. News coverage contributes to how the issue is perceived and talked about by the public. For example, our colleagues at the Rockridge Institute have pointed out that policy debates about “tax relief,” a phrase that effectively establishes a “pain relief” metaphor, leave no room for a conversation about the benefits of taxes — how society couldn’t function without pooling resources for the common good.³

Traditions in journalism result in consistent frames, almost like story lines or scripts that reporters gravitate toward, such as heroes and villains, overcoming adversity, the unexpected or ironic twist, and the protector causing harm. Stories have characters, characters have roles, and characters carry out their actions in recognizable circumstances toward predictable outcomes.⁴ Television in particular, with its two-minute storytelling, uses compact symbols to tell a familiar story. By studying the patterns of news storytelling, advocates can determine the implications for public health and social issues.

For example, in debates about enacting paid family leave in California,⁵ some advocates argued that California should enact the policy because the state should support families and nurture children; this sentiment framed the issue as one of nurturing communities and providing relief from burdens. Caregivers were depicted as the glue holding families together. Opponents countered with frames contending that the policy would impose an unfair burden on small businesses and would break the backbone of the economy. These opponents appealed to principles of hard work reaping rewards. Frames are powerful because they promote certain interpretations and hinder others — usually without the reader’s awareness. Frames create tracks for a train of thought.

News coverage contributes to how the issue is perceived and talked about by the public.

Portraits versus Landscapes

Most news, especially television news, tries to “put a face on the issue.” The impact of an issue on an individual’s life is often more interesting to news reporters than the policy implications, in part because they believe that readers and viewers are more likely to identify emotionally with a person’s plight. News stories tend to focus on specific, concrete events, using good pictures to tell a short, simple story. A parent who loses her job because she can’t find affordable child care will be a more interesting story than a complicated dissection of the financial policies related to child care subsidies. Unfortunately, stories about isolated episodes do not help audiences understand how to solve social problems beyond demanding that individuals take more responsibility for themselves.

A simple way to distinguish story types is to think of the difference between a *portrait* and a *landscape*. In a news story framed as a portrait, one may learn a great deal about an individual or an event, with great drama and emotion. But it is hard to see what surrounds that individual or what brought her to that moment in time. A landscape story pulls back the lens to take a broader view. It may include people and events, but must connect them to the larger social and economic forces. Problems framed in such a manner are more likely to evoke solutions that don’t focus exclusively on individuals, but also the policies and institutions that surround and affect them. The challenge for media advocates is to make stories about the early childhood education landscape as compelling and interesting as the portrait about individual families or children.

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Understanding How the News Media Frames Child Care

News coverage can have a strong influence on how policymakers interpret and respond to children's issues. If child care is framed as a private family matter, advocates will have a more difficult time explaining why public resources are needed. However, if early childhood education is framed as a public issue that requires a collective response, advocates' efforts are more likely to be well received.

Before diving into the framing battle, however, advocates must understand the current public conversation on early childhood education policy issues in the news. Advocates should know which parts of the issue are being emphasized and which, if any, are being neglected. To that end, we've taken a close look at how early childhood education and other children's issues are framed in newspapers. These analyses help us bring the child care framing battle into focus. That focus, in turn, allows advocates to have more intelligent conversations with journalists, to craft sharper messages, and to push the public debate in the right direction.

The Message:

Past and current depictions of child care in the news

Our first study of child care examined coverage in the nation's largest newspapers from 1994 through 1998.⁶ The substantive coverage during those years showed that advocates had been successful in framing government support for child care as a necessity. In that sense, advocates had succeeded in making child care a policy issue. However, the coverage focused on child care as a work support issue rather than as a child development issue. Working parents, rather than children, were portrayed as the key benefactors of child care. Further, the argument that child care helps create strong communities for everyone, whether they have children or not, was virtually absent from the debate. Newspaper coverage during the bulk of the 1990s reflected a tendency to position child care as a necessary evil rather than as a social good.

Late in the decade, that changed. In our second study of child care in the news, covering major national newspapers and regional papers in California during 1999 and 2000,⁷ we found that news coverage emphasized child care as a social benefit, particularly for poor children. We also analyzed how child care was portrayed on the business pages compared to the rest of the paper. The good news was that when child care appeared in the business pages, it was framed as a broad economic benefit: to parents by allowing them to work or study; to business by expanding the talent available

to employers; and to society by enlarging the tax base and raising community wealth. That frame spilled over to the coverage in the rest of the paper, where it was augmented by other frames articulating other aspects of the child care debate: that demand for quality is outstripping supply, that government ought to play a role in increasing the availability of quality care, and that child care benefits parents, children, and society. All but one frame portrayed child care as socially valuable. The exception — about the safety of child care centers — was mixed, with the frequency of the child-care-centers-are-safe frame slightly outnumbering the occurrence of the centers-are-unsafe frame.

This would all be good news except for one thing. Early childhood education was virtually invisible on the business pages and barely noticeable elsewhere in the paper. California newspapers averaged just two business stories per year on child care. Stories on child care appeared elsewhere in the paper with more frequency, but still at very low levels, representing a fraction of 1% of the stories. By contrast, in an earlier study, we found that stories about K-12 education comprise between 5% to 6% of the stories in the news sections.

The Messengers: Spokespeople in news coverage about child care

Advocates were the primary spokespeople in child care news coverage from 1994 to 1998. Most of the time, advocates were quoted making demands to improve child care. However, the solutions that advocates promoted most often were vague calls for cooperation rather than specific policy recommendations. Specific calls to action were rare. Parents were the other group most often represented in news stories. The parents described their struggles with child care in a way that readers could relate to, but they rarely took an advocacy position to ask for help in coping with these struggles. In a finding that surprised us, elementary school teachers were rarely quoted in child care stories. Health professionals, police, lawyers, and judges were somewhat more frequent sources, but still scarce. Another missing voice was elected officials. While child care was frequently framed from a policy perspective as an issue that government should do something about, the relative lack of politicians as quoted sources highlights the fact that no prominent politicians other than the Clintons have carried the banner of child care in a visible way. We found the same dearth of elected officials and elementary school teachers as spokespeople in the second study.

One change in what spokespeople were saying between the two studies happened on the business pages. In the earlier analysis, when business people spoke, they usually chronicled how individual employees or companies were coping with child care, rather than focusing on the larger issue of family-friendly work policies. In our later study, business people discussed the social benefits of child care but also talked about the role of child care in society. As one business leader, William C. Ford Jr., chairman of Ford Motor Company, told the *New York Times*, “Enlightened corporations are beginning to understand that social issues are business issues. Ultimately, businesses can only be as successful as the communities and the world that they exist in.”⁸

Lessons from analyzing the news on child care

There are several lessons to take away from our studies of child care in the news.

- Framing can be done successfully — child care advocates can control the terms of debate. The bigger challenge is getting news attention in the first place. But, when child care can be made newsworthy, advocates can successfully frame child care as a social benefit for children, families, and communities.
- Elementary school teachers need to become spokespeople for child care. They can describe in vivid terms why quality makes a difference to children’s ability to learn and participate effectively in their classrooms, schools, and communities. Kindergarten and first grade teachers would likely be the most effective in this regard. We can’t determine from our studies whether they don’t appear as spokespeople because they haven’t been sought out or because of conflicts of interest with their unions or other K-12 school issues. What we can say is that their important perspective is missing from the conversation.
- Elected officials may be famous for kissing babies, but they are not taking visible leadership on child care. Their voices need to be cultivated and present in the news, the state house, and in the federal government. If a future study of child care in the news shows more elected officials speaking out on behalf of child care, it will be evidence that this policy issue is being taken more seriously.

Monitor the Media

If you want the news media to pay attention to your issue, you need to pay attention to them. Advocates need to understand how reporters define and report their issues. This does not mean that every child care advocacy group must conduct in-depth studies of the news. It does mean that you should carefully and routinely watch television news, read newspapers, and listen to the radio for local and national stories related to early childhood education.

Monitoring will reveal how often each media outlet covers early childhood education. You should review op-eds, both to keep tabs on how an issue is being argued and to identify the style each news outlet prefers to guide you when you are ready to submit an op-ed. Most importantly, notice what any coverage says about the issue and ask yourself:

- Does the article include everything it should given the topic it covers?
- Are there important aspects missing?
- Is there a child development angle to this story that should have been included?
- If the child care crisis is discussed, is a policy solution presented?

These questions can help you evaluate the comprehensiveness of a news story and shape your own media strategies to fill gaps and extend common arguments.

Monitoring the news also helps advocates identify who is reporting on child care and what aspect of the topic interests them the most. Compile a list of local media contacts who have reported on early childhood education. Each entry should include:

- The name of the reporter and the media outlet they work for.
- The articles they have published on child care.
- Telephone and fax numbers, and e-mail and mailing addresses.
- The best time to contact them (you may find this out only after making contact with the reporter).
- The sections, or “beats,” in which the reporter writes or reports, such as business, news, lifestyle, health, family, columnist, etc.
- Any notes on your interactions to date.

By monitoring the news, you will start to see how reporters use different symbols and journalistic conventions to tell the story. Understanding these conventions will help you suggest reasonable ways to include aspects of the story that are not receiving attention. When you have suggestions, make contact with reporters who have covered child care — and with those whose stories did not include an early childhood angle but could — and cultivate relationships with them. For instance, a story on employee benefits on the business pages may provide an opportunity for you to contact the reporter to explain more about employer-sponsored child care benefits or about local businesses investing in early education.

By providing timely, accurate, pertinent information to reporters, advocates can become trusted sources that reporters will depend on for story ideas and as sources when early childhood education news breaks. Advocates will have greater success attracting journalists to a story if they have built a relationship with them.

Advocates needn't develop relationships with every reporter. Relationships are essential, but they take time to maintain. Be selective about which reporters and editors you take the time to get to know. It's okay to call reporters — just ask if it's a good time to talk. Introduce yourself and mention the issue you hope to discuss. Try to get to know a few key reporters on a first-name basis. Respond to their calls quickly and give them your home phone number so they can be sure to get reach you.

It's also important to update your media list regularly, given the high rate of turnover in the news business. Keep track of contacts as they move on to other news outlets. A relationship at a local television station today may be a relationship at a national news program tomorrow.

Advocates will have greater success attracting journalists to a story if they have built a relationship with them.

Conclusion

If focusing on the news, decoding the frames, and building relationships with reporters seem energy consuming, you're right. These initial steps take time, resources, strategic thinking, and patience, but don't let that scare you off. You are building a foundation for future media advocacy successes. Once you understand the current media conversation on early childhood education and have connected with key reporters, you will be more effective at both shaping your message and gaining news attention in a manner that supports your policy goals.

In the first chapter, we stressed the importance of developing your overall policy goal. Here, we focused on developing your media strategy — that is, how you want your issue framed when you engage the news media at a specific point in time. Once you know these two strategic goals, you will be ready to develop the specific message, as well as decide who should say it and which story elements best support it.

¹ Wallack, L., Woodruff, K., Dorfman, L., and Diaz, I., *News for a Change: An Advocate's Guide to Working with the Media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999.

² Gitlin, T., *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980, p7.

³ For more information, contact the Rockridge Institute, Berkeley, CA. www.rockridge-institute.org.

⁴ Lule, J., *Daily News, Eternal Stories: The Mythological Role of Journalism*. New York: The Guilford Press, 2001.

⁵ Dorfman, L., Lingas, E., "Making the Case for Paid Family Leave: How California's Landmark Law was Framed in the News," Issue 14. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Media Studies Group, November 2003.

⁶ Dorfman, L., Woodruff, K., "Child Care Coverage in U.S. Newspapers," Issue 7. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Media Studies Group, May 1999.

⁷ McManus, J., Dorfman, L. "Silent Revolution: How U.S. Newspapers Portray Child Care," Issue 11. Berkeley, CA: Berkeley Media Studies Group, January 2002.

⁸ Greenhouse, Steven. "Ford to Offer Social Services for Workers and Retirees," *The New York Times*, November 22, 2000, p8C.

Chapter 3

Message Strategy: Connecting the Problem, Solution, and Values

*How can we frame the child care crisis so that we're talking about our collective moral obligation to children?*¹

Joan Lombardi,
The Children's Project

At the core of every communications strategy is your message. How do you frame the problem and your solution, convey the values that matter, and convince your target to act?

This chapter covers message strategy on child care in two ways. In the first section, we present our recommendations for five key frames that, according to our recent public opinion research, can help advance public support for child care policies. In the second part of the chapter, we focus on how to build on these frames to develop strong core messages for your own policy goals, and how to use your messages in a variety of challenging communications situations.

Framing Early Childhood Education

We aim to help advocates articulate the values underlying convincing arguments for collective investment in child care. We know that for society to address the early childhood education needs of children in a meaningful, equitable way, advocates must build a case that describes why child care is good for *everyone*. In other words, why does the availability and quality of child care matter to people who don't have young children?

Advocates know that what happens to children matters because everyone in society is connected. But can advocates explain why it matters and articulate the values behind this worldview? Some peo-

The Role of a Poll

Why We Polled

In working on this book, we gathered excellent ideas for how to talk effectively about child care policy from the many advocates who attended our trainings, participated in our meetings, and otherwise shared their thoughts with us. But those ideas also raised questions. Would the public understand the terms that advocates use? Would it make a difference in public support, for example, if they said “child care” or “early childhood education”? Which of the opponents’ arguments get the most support? Most importantly, would the language resonate and connect to people’s willingness to support candidates or approve the hefty sums it would take to get families the help they need in caring for their children?

Another even larger question loomed. If, as our review of previous polls on the issue shows, there has been increasing public support for government expenditures for child care, why? Why does the public support it? Some would rightly ask, if they do support child care expenditures, why don’t policies exist to get those resources to the families who need them?

What We Polled

The answer to this last question is not one that a simple poll can answer effectively. So we fielded a complex poll, one that helped us compare the reasons people give for supporting or opposing government expenditures for child care. After examining the history of public opinion on this issue and listening carefully to and learning from advocates for local, statewide, and national child care policy, the following question was our starting point: Why does the public support child care?

ple feel uncomfortable talking about values, preferring to focus on the nitty-gritty details of policy debates. But values are the heart behind policies, the motivating spark that turns communication into action.

We know that values matter, but we also know that people interpret values statements differently. It's important not to assume that advocates' understanding of the problem will translate into the same motivations in their target audiences. To learn how key segments of the public interpret and respond to various values statements, we turned to public opinion research. We conducted an in-depth poll to test several arguments that advocates might use to activate public and policymaker support for investments in early childhood education. (See below.)

We wanted to hear how people think about early childhood education issues, not in a vacuum but in the context of debate. We know that people can hold conflicting ideas about social policies and that opinions may shift when people hear competing opinions. People rarely hear an argument in isolation. Instead, they usually hear one point of view and a counter-argument, sometimes supplied by an opponent and sometimes supplied by the listener. We all carry competing views of complicated issues in our heads, weighing the evidence as we see it, tempered with the values we hold. For example, while we might believe that quality early childhood education helps prepare children for school, we might also contend that if parents don't do their job, an early learning program won't make much difference. In this context, are some arguments for government support for child care more persuasive than others? The poll we designed with EDK Associates was structured to examine arguments for and against public support for early childhood education within that context. We presented people with contrasting arguments about child care and asked them which one matched their opinion. We asked not just "Do you believe it?" but "Do you believe it if I challenge it with a competing argument?" The question for us as we created this book was: How do the best arguments for public support of child care hold up when they are juxtaposed with the opposition's best arguments?

The second feature of this poll was that we connected people's opinions to their expressions of political action. We didn't simply ask people about which arguments were persuasive; we also probed how they felt about supporting candidates who make early childhood a priority and about supporting government early childhood education expenditures of \$5 billion and \$10 billion. This way, we were able to test not only which arguments resonate, but also which arguments resonate with those most likely to support child care politically.

The poll confirmed earlier public opinion findings: People want government to support child care, as summarized in the public opinion timeline on our website (www.bmsg.org). A majority of our respondents supported legislation for a \$5 billion or \$10 billion commitment to child care; a quarter of them supported such a policy strongly, even in the face of competing societal needs. About half replied that if they were told that a gubernatorial or congressional candidate were in favor of helping all families meet child care expenses and improving the quality of existing child care, they would be more likely to support the candidate. Importantly, only 19% said they would be less likely to support the candidate, indicating that candidates who take action for child care are more likely to garner supporters than rouse opposition.

This poll gave us new insight into how support for government expenditures or candidates is connected to the various arguments that advocates make in support of child care. Although many people may agree with certain statements, they aren't necessarily politically motivated by them. The poll told us that the strongest supporters of child care — people who are most likely to take action to support policy on behalf of children and families — are motivated more by arguments saying that we must support our youngest citizens than by arguments about early brain development.

Candidates who take action for child care are more likely to garner supporters than rouse opposition.

Five Core Messages on Early Childhood Education

Support for early childhood education is linked to five key value frames:

- Support Our Youngest Citizens
- Our Can-Do Spirit Will Get Us There
- With So Many Kids in Care, Let's Do It Right
- Child Care Is Early Learning
- Take Advantage of Early Brain Development

Support Our Youngest Citizens

This is the “public good” frame, which says government should invest in early childhood education because it supports our youngest citizens and therefore benefits all of society. Our responsibility as adults is to protect and nurture children so they can grow up to be, as Ben Franklin would have put it, healthy, wealthy, and wise. What happens to children matters not only to them as individuals and their immediate family, but to the neighborhoods they live in, the schools they attend, the community they will eventually work in, and the body politic itself. This argument connects early childhood education today and democracy tomorrow.

Our Can-Do Spirit Will Get Us There

This frame says that Americans can do what they put their minds to; together we can solve our toughest problems. If we pool our resources, commit ourselves to success, and apply American ingenuity, we can realize accomplishments beyond the reach of any one individual. In rural 18th century America, this meant a barn-raising. Today, it means walking on the moon, building the Golden Gate Bridge, or rebuilding the World Trade Center. The military's system of early childhood education is the perfect example: If the U.S. military can repair its early childhood education system, which was in a horrible state of disarray, and make it a model for the nation, then our government — we — can apply that same ingenuity and create a system that works for all families. Often in public opinion polls, people say that government *should* do something to solve a given problem, but they also say that they don't believe government is *capable* of doing what it takes to solve the problem. The military child care success story confirms how we can change early childhood education for the better. It is living proof of our can-do spirit.

With So Many Kids in Care, Let's Do It Right

This is the pragmatic frame, reflecting the fact that most people are realistic about the role of child care in our society. They understand that most kids are in care outside the home and believe that we should make sure that care is of high quality. Women are in the workforce to stay. Therefore, our society has to find solutions for caring for children in their earliest years. Ultimately, the public realizes that early childhood education supports the workforce and therefore the economy.

Child Care Is Early Learning

This frame says that when done right, child care is much more than babysitting. Quality child care enhances children's development and social skills, such as sharing and working in groups. Early childhood education reduces behavioral problems and prepares children for school, giving them a better chance of succeeding in school and in life.

Take Advantage of Early Brain Development

The stakes are high for infants and toddlers; children's brains develop at fantastic rates. This frame says that we should take advantage of this rich time to connect children with well-trained teachers and high-quality programs to stimulate their learning. The pathways and connections made in the brain during the early years affect the brain's capacity in the future.

A Note on the Word “Citizen”

We’ve entitled our first frame “Support Our Youngest Citizens” because that’s how the idea was expressed during one of the meetings we held to develop the language for this book, and it’s the term we tested in the poll. We like the term, because it calls up one of the highest values we hold in this country: that everyone who lives here has a civic, and long-lasting, connection to everyone else. This value encompasses the responsibility that we have to be engaged in what happens around us, in making rules, in working to create a fair, just, and healthy society. It is about citizenship in its most civic-minded sense.

Some may object to using the word “citizen,” because it is often used in its legal sense, to divide members of a community into two groups: those who were born here or who entered with the approval of authorities, and those who did not. Divisive ballot measures in California, for example, have tried to limit health care and education by keeping it from residents who don’t have documentation. Rather than call us to our highest value of community, nurturance, and interconnection, the word has been used to divide communities and foster fear and hatred. For these reasons, in some places, early childhood education advocates may not be eager to use the term “youngest citizen” as they make the case for policy.

If you are working in that political context, avoid the term “citizen,” but continue to express the idea. One possibility is to use your state’s name: say “Youngest Californian,” or “Youngest Virginian,” etc. Whatever substitute you choose, talk about the duty we have to create a safe, nurturing place for children. Talk about how the world we are creating is shaped not just by whether children learn their letters, shapes, numbers, and colors, but by whether they learn about their connection to the world and how they can contribute. Talk about the fact that what children learn today — from their families, teachers, and peers — will determine how they behave as members of their future neighborhoods. You can evoke the idea of a connected community and social consciousness without using the word “citizen.”

What about “School Readiness”?

One common frame we heard while doing the research for this book was “school readiness.” Advocates used this term to emphasize that quality early childhood programs would help children prepare cognitively, emotionally, and socially for elementary school. But Susan Bales of the FrameWorks Institute warns that “school readiness” is not well understood by the general public. Because they don’t understand the term, the public applies superficial meanings, like “getting kids ready for school” (e.g., buying them school clothes). Even worse, FrameWorks research found that the public doesn’t understand child development and so doesn’t have a context for understanding the larger implications of what advocates mean by school readiness. The term advocates use as shorthand for a vast array of practices that encompass social and emotional development gets interpreted narrowly and incorrectly by the very people advocates hope to reach — parents and the general public. (For more on FrameWorks’ research see www.frameworksinstitute.org.)

On the other hand, we heard from advocates who work with legislators that “school readiness” was a very useful, even powerful, term. The lawmakers readily understood the connection that advocates were making between quality early learning programs and success later in elementary school, and, ultimately, as part of the workforce. For them, “school readiness” was effective shorthand that evoked a key justification that legislators make for supporting early childhood education policy. Still other advocates are concerned that in some policy circles “school readiness” would illicit images of young kids sitting at desks, reducing the debate to issues of literacy while ignoring other important aspects of child development.

We see merit in all of these positions — and a reminder that audience matters: messages understood by a well-informed legislative staffer may not have the same meaning for the general public. We suggest that advocates avoid shorthand and jargon whenever they can, even in the term “school readiness,” and always explain what they mean, using the most vivid language possible. More importantly, we believe that connecting the deeper values in the framing hierarchy will help express the intentions behind “school readiness.”

Instead of using that jargon, say:

“Stimulating early care settings prepare children to succeed in school.”

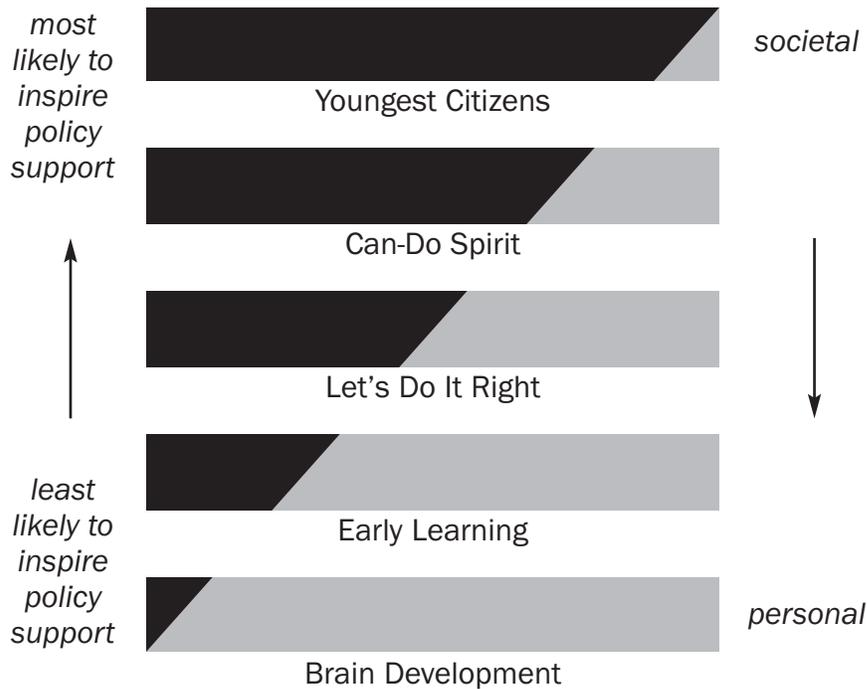
Or, better yet, say:

“Children need to be prepared for school because school prepares children to participate in life: as engaged citizens in a democracy, and as contributing members of their neighborhoods, workplaces, and society.”

These statements avoid jargon and explain why kids need to be ready for school. The first statement evokes the frame at the lower end of the hierarchy: “Child Care Is Early Learning.” The second statement evokes the upper end of the hierarchy: “Support Our Youngest Citizens.”

The Hierarchy of Values in the Five Frames

Our five frames form a hierarchy of values in support of early childhood education. They traverse the distance from the individual child to society. Taken together, the five frames give us a continuum of potential messages about the benefits of quality early childhood education. The five levels have different logical consequences, one of which is the moral justification they imply, from a well-run society to a well-developed child. The different frames also imply different targets for communications campaigns. The frames at the upper end of the hierarchy – “Support Our Youngest Citizens,” “Our Can-Do Spirit Will Get Us There,” and “With So Many Kids in Care, Let’s Do It Right” – point to public policy and government targets for action as well as media advocacy. The frames on the bottom of the hierarchy, about the social, emotional, and cognitive development of children – “Child Care Is Early Learning” and “Take Advantage of Early Brain Development” – have been used primarily to communicate to parents and caregivers the importance of care. Their connection with policy must be made more explicit.



At the bottom of the hierarchy is the “Take Advantage of Early Brain Development” frame. This development begins inside the body, with the physiological and cognitive workings of the brain itself.

The “Child Care Is Early Learning” frame expands out from the individual child, placing the child in a group context with other children. The picture it brings to mind reveals the sharing, caring, arguing, bargaining, and other forms of learning and socialization that occur when children are together in groups. This frame is a vehicle for explaining why quality early learning environments help the individual child navigate in his or her world, both in the present and in the future.

The “With So Many Kids in Care, Let’s Do It Right” frame shows the larger society through the lens of family and workplace. Child care is seen as a way to support individual parents as workers, and the working economy overall. Be careful not to use this frame alone; focusing on the role of child care in facilitating parents’ work may concede too many of the broader benefits of child care. However, this frame can be a useful bridge for audiences who accept the reality of children in care and, given that reality, may be motivated to do all they can to improve the quality of that care.

The final two frames sit squarely at the societal level. The “Our Can-Do Spirit Will Get Us There” frame is about society at large. The fact is, we “can-do” only if we do it together. This frame recognizes the power that comes from our interconnections.

The highest frame, “Support Our Youngest Citizens,” places the child — and support for early childhood education — in the context of the community at large. Youngest Citizen connects what happens to children now to the society we are creating for our future. Some might even say it’s a new way to say, “Children are our future.” It is, but with an important dose of civic responsibility thrown in. The “Support Our Youngest Citizens” frame appeals to our highest sense of a democratic society in which the health of all our future citizens is connected to the health of our schools, communities, and culture.

The Role of the Five Frames in Political Support

In our poll, proponents for these frames expressed different levels of support for candidates or expenditures of public dollars. Once again, think of the frames as a hierarchy, this time a hierarchy of potential political action. Supporters on the upper end of the hierarchy — the part of the public that opted for the “Support Our Youngest Citizens” argument every time they were given the option — were also the most likely to support \$5 billion or \$10 billion in expenditures for early childhood education as well as candidates who worked to improve early childhood education. That is, when people who are inclined to support early childhood education hear a “public good” argument, it moves them to strong support for legislation and candidates. There are fewer of these supporters in the population overall, but they will be the easiest group to activate. In our poll, the “Support Our Youngest Citizens” argument was associated with the strongest political support.

At the opposite end of the hierarchy, a larger percentage of the population will agree with the fifth frame, that childhood is an important time for brain development, but fewer of them will be motivated to take political or civic action because of it. They may take individual action, such as reading to their young children more often. That’s good, but it doesn’t let policymakers know that supporting early childhood education is politically important. Advocates need to link the “Take Advantage of Early Brain Development” frame to public policy supporting the availability of quality child care.

Overall, there are two key points to keep in mind when you are using these frames to develop messages on early childhood education. First, remember that your goal is to activate your base of supporters, not to convince your opposition. Make sure that you always talk about early childhood education as a public good (using the “Support Our Youngest Citizens” frame). Your supporters need to hear the “public good” message to actively support early childhood education policies and candidates.

When people who are inclined to support early childhood education hear a “public good” argument, it moves them to strong support for legislation and candidates.

Second, when talking about the role of child care in early learning, talk not just about the effects on kids but about the consequences of policies. Work hard to connect people’s understanding of the early learning message on society to policy choices. People understand the importance of early learning in personal terms — it is advocates’ job to connect that personal understanding to policies.

In Chapter 2, we described how the news coverage on child care — and news coverage in general — tends to emphasize personal responsibility and minimize institutional accountability. The five frame hierarchy could be laid out across this same continuum, from the individual to the social and political. The values behind “Support Our Youngest Citizens” link logically to interconnection at the institutional accountability end of the continuum, because it’s our social and political institutions that are responsible for ensuring that democracy functions well. Citizenship, in the broadest sense of the word, is dependent upon civic duty, civic participation, and interactions with fellow citizens. Articulating the “Support Our Youngest Citizens” frame in conversations with reporters and policymakers will help advocates boost needed news attention to institutional accountability and redress the consistent bias in news coverage toward personal responsibility. Evoking values of institutional and collective responsibility is key, since solving the child care crisis will take collective political action, often in the form of allocating public dollars.

By the same token, advocates should be sure to explicitly express the links to policy when they evoke the frames at the bottom of the hierarchy: “Child Care Is Early Learning” and “Take Advantage of Early Brain Development.” Otherwise, those frames will be interpreted in terms of what individuals can do to rectify the situation

People understand the importance of early learning in personal terms — it is advocates’ job to connect that personal understanding to policies.

and will lead to interpretations that “blame the victim” — or, in this case, put sole responsibility for solving this problem on the parents. Once again, personal responsibility and parental action are extremely important when it comes to rearing young children and preparing them to contribute to the smooth-functioning, productive society we all want. But personal responsibility alone won’t do the trick. We must create systemic change to ensure that all children get the quality early care they need to grow and flourish and become part of a thriving society. That’s why expressing the “Support Our Youngest Citizens” frame as often as appropriate is so important.

We advise advocates to make “Support Our Youngest Citizens” the starting point in any conversation or debate about child care. If you do, the discussion will likely be framed in ways that make policy action the logical outcome. The debate will be about *how* child care ensures a smooth-functioning and productive society, not about *whether* it does. It is always easier to frame than to reframe, so as often as you can, start with the strongest value frame: “Support Our Youngest Citizens.”

Of course, the other frames will still come up. When they do, be conscious about linking them to policy outcomes. Expand the understanding of the importance of early brain development to focus on the environment stimulating that brain, and what we, as a society, need to put in place to see that all children get the stimulation they need to develop to their fullest potential. Then, when you can, move the conversation up the hierarchy, so the benefits of quality child care for the whole society are a logical part of the discussion.

The following matrix is a brief summary of the five values frames identified in our public opinion research.

Make the debate about *how* child care supports a productive society, not about *whether* it does.

Key Values Frames on Early Childhood Education

Value	Frame	Metaphor
Support Our Youngest Citizens	Child care as a “public good”: We should invest in care because it supports our youngest citizens and benefits all of society.	Strong buildings need solid foundations.
Our Can-Do Spirit Will Get Us There	Americans can do what they put their minds to. If we want it badly enough, we can create a child care system that works for all families.	Barn raising: a community together can accomplish what no individual or family can do alone.
With So Many Kids in Care, Let's Do it Right	With most children in care outside the home, we've got to make that care good. Plus, child care supports the workforce and our economy.	Child care infrastructure: Child care, like our roads and highways, allows parents to get to work. Like roads, child care is an investment we should all pay for.
Child Care Is Early Learning	Child care improves children's development in socialization, sharing, working together. It also prepares them for school and lowers behavioral problems. Kids in quality care have a better chance of succeeding in life.	As the twig is bent, so grows the tree.
Take Advantage of Early Brain Development	Children's brains develop at a fantastic rate. We should take advantage of this by providing them with quality care from well-trained staff. Positive brain development now can affect a child throughout their life.	Farmers prepare the fields in fall, so they will be ready to plant in spring and harvest in summer.

Media Bite	Historical Example	Appeal to Principle
<p>We all have a stake in making sure all children get the care and education they need. They will grow up to be our neighbors, our doctors, our firefighters, and our political leaders. Early childhood education provides our youngest citizens with a strong social and educational foundation.</p>	<p>The United States invested in universal public education because it is essential for a strong democracy.</p>	<p>Common good</p>
<p>Our military figured out how to do child care right by investing in quality and universal access. Our government knows how, it just needs to be spread to all Americans.</p>	<p>When we made it a priority to get to the moon, the U.S. government and businesses worked together to make it happen.</p>	<p>American ingenuity Cooperation Optimism</p>
<p>Millions of American parents working means millions of kids needing care. The question is how do we ensure that child care provides children with what they need to learn and thrive.</p>	<p>During World War II, we created a child care system to enable mothers to work.</p> <p>The United States invested in universal public education because it is essential for a strong country, economy and society.</p>	<p>Common sense Economic sense/vitality</p>
<p>Participating in high quality child care programs helps kids be inquisitive, self confident, and capable of working with their peers. This adds up to a good start in school and life.</p>	<p>For years HeadStart and Early HeadStart have successfully prepared low income children to succeed in kindergarten and beyond by working with the whole child, their family and their community.</p>	<p>Value of education Cooperation Joy of learning</p>
<p>Children’s development from birth to five lays the foundation for what follows. It is our responsibility to make those early years ones that start children off in life with a sturdy educational foundation.</p>	<p>When we learned smoking caused cancer, we changed our attitude about tobacco. Now that we know early childhood years are crucial, we are changing the way we care for kids.</p>	<p>Nurturing Scientific knowledge Wise investment pays</p>

Building an Effective Core Message

Our research has provided important insights into how the public understands child care issues and how certain values are connected to political support. How can you put that research into practice in your own communications work? This section is designed to help you create and practice effective core messages that include solutions — the policy change you seek — along with the values supporting them.

Determining your message forces you to say why you support certain policies. Your aim may be to expand access to quality child care, increase teachers' wages, or increase funding in the federal child care development block grants; these are *goals* from which messages evolve. The *message* is how you articulate your goal to a variety of audiences in a meaningful and compelling way.

Deciding on your message is a developmental process; it happens in stages. First, different messages must be created to appeal to different audiences. Your message to help mobilize other advocacy groups, for example, may be different from a message designed to get the attention of a specific policymaker or legislative body.

Second, messages change over time, because strategies change over time. In the initial stages of a policy campaign, your message might have to focus on increasing awareness of the problem or a specific way to view the problem, such as presenting child care as an economic infrastructure issue. However, later you will want to refocus on the particular policy solutions that you are putting forth. Your message needs to be dynamic because the political environment of your problem and solution may be in flux. Advocates must be able to adapt their message accordingly.

Third, consider who your spokespeople will be, because the messenger strongly influences the interpretation of the message. The credibility and legitimacy of those giving the message are critical. You may need different spokespeople for different types of messages or policy targets. Parents can be very effective spokespeople at convincing policymakers that the existing system isn't working. Kindergarten teachers may help make the case for the educational benefits of quality child care programs. Business people can make the case for extending subsidized loans to child care centers as small businesses. Law enforcement officers are the best spokespeople to link quality child care to public safety.

Elements of a Good Message

The most important thing about developing your message is to keep it simple. A good message uses concise, direct language to answer three basic questions:

1. What's wrong?
2. Why does it matter?
3. What should be done about it?

The first element is the clear statement of concern: What's wrong? How you define the problem has important implications for who or what will solve the problem. Too often, advocates try to tell journalists everything they know about the issue, because they feel this may be their only opportunity to convey the enormity and importance of the problem. Resist that urge. It is impossible to be comprehensive and strategic at the same time. To increase the odds that your perspective on the problem will be communicated, focus on just one aspect of the problem and be able to describe it succinctly. Once that portion of the problem is being addressed, you will be able to shift your policy goal and message to focus on another aspect of the problem.

A second element of the message represents the value dimension: Why does the problem matter? What's at stake? Our studies of children's issues in the news show that the value component is often absent from the coverage. Values should be specific, clear, and describe why you and your target should care. Call on your target's sense of fairness, duty, or fiscal responsibility. Also, you may need to articulate different values for different audiences. Business people may respond to different motivations than parents. Be aware of the values of your key audiences — both your main target audience and the secondary audiences that can be mobilized to put pressure on the primary target — and be able to link your problem and solution to their unique values. The values you evoke may also change over time, even for the same audience. Policymakers, for example, will give different values priority during an extreme budget crisis than they will when there is a surplus. (Of course, roles and values overlap; business leaders may also be parents, for instance, so your target may respond to a variety of values.)

The third element of your core message articulates the policy objective: What should be done? After asking about the problem, journalists will usually ask what you think the solution is. A common pitfall is that people expend so much energy communicating about the problem that when the inevitable question about the solution is asked, they are ill-prepared to answer it. Typical responses might be, “Well, it is a very complex problem with many facets, so the solution is complicated,” or “The community needs to all come together,” or “Parents need to get involved to help solve this issue.” Certainly these responses are truthful, but they are all vague; they don’t advance the issue toward a specific solution. More effective by far is to answer with a specific, feasible solution, even if it is only an incremental step toward the larger goal.

For instance, advocates working to garner support for child care as part of the local economic infrastructure have worked on three different solutions: expanding financing for new facilities, improving the business skills of child care providers, and streamlining land-use permit processes. All three policy goals will improve the child care situation; they are complementary, not competitive, goals. The key is that when advocates addressed a target that had control over one solution rather than another, they adapted their message by redefining their problem and solution statements. In each message below, the values statement is directed to a clear audience: business leaders, city planners, and those who care about the smooth functioning of the region’s economic infrastructure. Each message is a statement of the “With So Many Kids in Care, Let’s Do It Right” frame on child care, articulating child care’s role in building the infrastructure that supports the economy.

Use your overall strategic goal as a touchstone to stay focused.

Message 1: Goal = Expand Financing

- *What's wrong?* Child care providers can't find the financing to renovate or expand their facilities to stay competitive.
- *Why does it matter?* Child care businesses are beginning to close, which undermines the health of this billion-dollar industry.
- *What should be done?* Banks and credit unions need to offer customized loan products for child care providers.

Message 2: Goal = Improve Providers' Business Skills

- *What's wrong?* Many child care providers don't have the business savvy they need to run solvent businesses.
- *Why does it matter?* Without such skills, the stability of the billion-dollar child care industry and the economy of the region are at risk.
- *What should be done?* Local business development experts should help train child care providers.

Message 3: Goal = Streamline Land-Use Permitting Process

- *What's wrong?* Child care businesses can't expand to meet growing demand due to burdensome land-use policies and a bureaucratic permitting process.
- *Why does it matter?* The economic contribution of our state's multi-billion-dollar child care industry is stagnating.
- *What should be done?* Counties and cities need to allow child care centers in residential zones and reduce permitting fees and red tape.

In developing and articulating your message, use your overall strategic goal as a touchstone to stay focused. As the example above shows, your message will need to be adapted over time and for different policy contexts, but in any specific moment, your goal should be clear and connected with the values. Whether you are issuing a news release or directly responding to a reporter's questions, you should be able to articulate your message simply and consistently.

Using the Core Message in Interviews

Staying on message is challenging in an interview, because you have to find a way to get from the question you are being asked to the message and policy goal you want to highlight. It is helpful to remember that an interview is not a conversation; it is a series of strategic opportunities to communicate your key policy goal. In a conversation, you can casually answer questions, but in an interview, the answer you give can highlight your policy goal, or lead the reporter in that direction.

This section provides two examples that show how to answer interview questions strategically. The first example illustrates how your responses can affect the direction of an interview, encouraging a reporter to focus on policy solutions rather than individual responsibility for a problem. The second example shows how you can answer a single question in a variety of ways, each answer highlighting a different policy solution. Both examples illustrate what advocates should remember during an interview: the reporter controls the questions, but you control the answers.

Your responses can encourage a reporter to focus on policy solutions rather than on individual responsibility for a problem.

Example 1: Staying on track in interviews

Even when you are focused on a specific message, it's easy to get distracted by a reporter's questions. Let's assume, for example, that your goal is to have state legislators allocate money for a child care facilities development loan fund. It's a complicated issue that requires some explanation. You want to get media attention so that legislators will know that their constituency is paying attention to how they respond. You are delighted when a reporter calls to do a story on child care. You see it as an opportunity to focus on the loan fund. Your interview goes something like this:

Reporter: *Why are you concerned about child care, if we don't hear an outcry from parents?*

You: Parents are busy struggling to patch together child care solutions. But often these arrangements are unreliable or of low quality, which takes a toll on their ability to work and their children's ability to learn.

Reporter: *Why don't parents shop around for better child care?*

You: Parents work hard to find the best solutions they can afford. Unfortunately, quality child care is scarce in our community. Our survey shows that there is only one child care slot for every four children who need care.

So far, so good!

Reporter: *If so many parents have a child care problem, shouldn't the market be able to solve it?*

You: Child care is a unique business in which it is difficult to reduce costs without drastic consequences. If you manufacture widgets, you can lower the price by producing more widgets. Child care can't operate on an economy of scale, because if you add more children, you have to add more teachers. And that costs money. Parents can't afford to pay the full cost of what all children deserve.

Reporter: *If parents can't pay for it, where will the money come from?*

You: There are several federal and state subsidy plans right now that, if expanded just a bit, will enable parents to access affordable care for their children.

Now, that's a reasonable response, but by now you are way off track. You wanted to focus on a specific policy goal — establishing a loan fund to expand facilities. Instead, you find yourself talking about increasing subsidies to parents.

Let's try the interview again.

Reporter: *Why are you concerned about child care, if we don't hear an outcry from parents?*

You: Parents are busy struggling to patch together child care solutions. But often these arrangements are unreliable or of low quality, which takes a toll on their ability to work and their children's ability to learn.

Reporter: *Why don't parents shop around for better child care?*

You: Parents work hard to find the best solutions they can afford. Unfortunately, quality child care is scarce in our community. Our survey shows that there is only one child care slot for every four children who need care.

Reporter: *If so many parents have a child care problem, shouldn't the market be able to solve it?*

You: There simply isn't enough quality, affordable child care available, partly because it's expensive to build and expand child care facilities, and margins are tight in this business. Providers need help in order to make more care available.

Reporter: *What kind of support would make a difference?*

You: One thing we could do right now is make it easier for people to create new child care centers or expand existing facilities. A state loan fund would ease the way, helping to create more places where children can grow and thrive while their parents work.

Now you're on the right track. The reporter can follow up with questions about the details of the loan plan, which legislators support it, and its chances for success. Now you are having the discussion you want to have, focused on your priority policy goal.

Example 2: Same question, different answers

There is more than one “right” answer to a question. In the example above, the first answer wasn’t wrong; it simply was off target for your goals. In any interview, the same reporter’s question could be answered differently, depending on your ultimate goals.

To illustrate, consider the question, “What are the important elements of quality in child care?” This is a typical reporter’s question, and one that many advocates struggle to answer, because “quality” is a vast concept with many facets. Rather than trying to tell a reporter everything you know about quality, think about how to use the question as a strategic opportunity to emphasize your priority policy goal. Remember, your goal is not to educate the reporter — or the parents reading the reporter’s story — about how to identify and choose higher quality child care. Here, your goal is to advocate for a specific policy, so the way you answer the quality question should highlight the aspect of quality that links most easily to your overall policy goal.

Here are some possible ways to answer this question, focusing on a variety of different policy goals.

Question: “What do you mean by quality in child care?”

If your goal is:

Increase affordability

Your answer might be: Quality early childhood education is when a parent knows their child is getting loving, attentive, developmentally appropriate care — without having to pay half their take home pay or more for it. Unfortunately, the high cost of quality care means too many parents have to compromise on quality. That’s why we need to....

If your goal is:

Foster appropriate learning environments for early childhood education; resist testing models

Your answer might be: Quality child care fosters appropriate social and emotional development in young children, which is far more important than academics in the early years. In fact, social development — learning to share, work in groups, and get along with others — is the foundation for all the skills children will need in school, which is why we should...

If your goal is:

Raise the salary of child care teachers

Your answer might be: The best quality child care is delivered by teachers who are well trained and well compensated, so they can afford to stay in the field. Adequate compensation reduces turnover and gives children consistent, skilled caregivers who can provide a nurturing and stimulating learning environment for children.

If your goal is:

Develop the business skills of child care providers

Your answer might be: Among other factors, a quality child care facility is a stable, thriving business operation. Too many providers are unable to improve or keep open their programs because they lack business skills. Helping providers run better businesses can help them attract and retain teachers, improve their materials and facilities, and provide the highly stimulating and nurturing learning environment for children that is the hallmark of quality.

If your goal is:

Increase employer support for child care

Your answer might be: One of the key indicators of quality is consistency of care. Employers have a stake in child care quality because their employees who are parents can be more focused and productive if they are confident about the consistency and quality of their children's care.

Whatever your goal, remember: It is impossible to be strategic and comprehensive at the same time. Resist the urge to describe every detail about what quality looks like. Instead, focus your thoughts by saying, "There are many important factors that make up a high-quality child care setting. One of the most critical is...."

It is impossible to be comprehensive and strategic at the same time.

“Child Care” or “Early Childhood Education”:
Which Term to Use?

Because of the ongoing debate about using the language “child care” vs. “early childhood education,” we wanted to know whether using one term or the other changed people’s support for the values or policies described. In our public opinion research, we found that neither term was better at increasing the public’s support for policies and programs. In the long run, advocates want the public to understand child care as having an important educational component, so there are strategic reasons to use the “early childhood education” terminology as often as appropriate. But don’t tie yourself in a knot trying to avoid the term “child care,” because people understand it and support it, and it’s okay to use it.

Making Your Case in Difficult Contexts

Just as you will never be making your case outside a specific policy context, you will need to consider how your arguments should be adapted, given the social context of the present debate. This section discusses how advocates can prepare themselves for three difficult hurdles: understanding and responding to the opposition's arguments, anticipating and answering the most difficult questions reporters may ask, and responding to a breaking crisis or "bad news" story.

Answering the Opposition

The best place to be is on the offense, making the case for child care and early childhood education from your perspective, using the "Support Our Youngest Citizens" frame when you can. But advocates will be challenged — otherwise, they wouldn't need guides like this one. When challenged, advocates' want to rebut the opposition's argument quickly and simply, so they can return to their frame as quickly as possible. The trouble with answering the opposition is that, by definition, you remain in their frame. Being able to anticipate the opposition's argument, and knowing how you will move from that point of view back to your own, can help reframe debate.

The more attention you give to the opposition's frame, the more you reinforce it.

What will the opposition say?

In its 2003 publication “Analysis of the Messages of the Early Childhood Movement,” the Annenberg Public Policy Center identified five themes in the arguments of those who oppose an increased role for public support and spending on child care:

1. Early education programs harm children.
2. There is no evidence of benefits from early education programs.
3. Costs are not high and supply is not low.
4. There is no evidence that government support improves quality.
5. Tax “relief” and traditional families are the best at helping children.

Chances are that if you are using this guide, you will disagree with those arguments most of the time. But opponents will maintain that their statements can be upheld with certain interpretations of the data — interpretations that likely differ from yours. Opponents will say that parents — especially moms — are selfish, putting material needs or their careers ahead of their children’s needs. “Why have kids if you don’t want to care for them?” they might ask. These are difficult arguments to counter, because the world is not as black and white as the statements assume. But getting into the gray zone, unfortunately, is likely to take you far from the facts you know and the policy you think is important.

That’s why you will need to identify what facts you need to have ready to counter those arguments, but don’t dwell on them. The more attention you give to the opposition’s frame, the more you reinforce it, even when you are offering an alternative fact. The setting, and your objectives, will help you determine not only the best response, but also the *manner* in which it is best to respond. Have your responses to those five challenges ready, but make them one-liners, based on your experience. Use the one-liner as a transition to the “Support Our Youngest Citizens” frame, or to another frame that connects logically to your current policy priority.

Where and when will they say it?

There are many venues for debate in our society. Here are our thoughts on how you might approach the different formats where you will confront opposition.

Talk show

You will usually know ahead of time if you will be facing opposition face-to-face on a television or radio talk show. In these situations, leave your manners aside and try to fill up as much space as you can talking about your policy goal and why it matters. Don't ask the opposition questions, or even pose rhetorical questions, because it gives them more time to speak. If you are on a call-in show, be sure to have supporters listening and calling in to reinforce what you are saying. Listen to or watch the program before you go on, to get a sense of the program's host and tone. If it is a highly contentious format, or not targeted at the audience you need to reach, it's wise to decline to be a part of it. Or, if you want to practice making arguments in tough situations, say yes. Just remember the strategic reason you have agreed to do it.

Reporter

A reporter may pose the opposition's point of view simply to get your reaction, not necessarily because he or she agrees with it. Your response should be even, factual, and include the values statement. If the reporter doesn't bring up the opposition's argument, sometimes it is useful to "inoculate" the reporter by countering the opposition before they have had a chance to make their case — that is a tricky call and will depend on your judgment in a particular situation. If a reporter asks you a question you don't know the answer to, say so — never guess. Get back to them if you have to, or steer them to a person who can get them the information they need.

Giving testimony

Be ready for elected officials, who will have challenging questions about the practicality, expense, and fairness of the policies you are advocating. Know your details, but, as with journalists, never guess if you are asked a question you don't know the answer to.

In other settings

Most often, you will see an opposition argument in print — in a news article, an opinion piece, or a report issued from a think tank. In this situation, the best defense is a good offense. Ideally, your proactive media advocacy will have created an information setting in which the “Support Our Youngest Citizens” frame is regularly present, and the opposition must use that as a starting point. Unfortunately, that is not always, or even usually, the case. So the question becomes: What is the best way to respond without reinforcing the opposition's frame? This again will be an individualized, strategic decision, based on whether responding will further your current objectives. If you decide that it is important to respond and reframe, do it quickly. Send letters to the editor the same day that the piece you are responding to appears. Have op-eds prepared and ready to be tweaked to match current events. Get ready to piggyback on breaking news. By keeping your proactive strategy strong, you'll be on the defensive less and less.

Even when you have good rebuttals, strategically, the best move is to stop talking about your opposition's concern and get back to the case you want to make. Although you may be in the context of a debate, or even answering a reporter who wants your response to an opponent's view, your objective is not to convince the opposition — your objective is to bolster your supporters. You want to move quickly back to your main points. The fact is, you are advocating for a particular policy despite what may be legitimate concerns about its shortcomings. Use pivot phrases to transition away from your opponent's comment and move the conversation back on target. (For more information, see “Pivot Phrases” on page 76.)

Use the “With So Many Kids in Care, Let’s Do It Right” frame to counter the opposition.

Remember, *facts aren’t frames*; while it will be tempting to counter their facts with your facts, as professor George Lakoff says, “*frames will beat facts every time.*” This is because audiences simply reinterpret the facts in the context of the frame they are using to understand the issue. That is why a point-counterpoint argument may do you more harm than good, even when the facts are on your side. Instead, you have to reframe the debate, which is no easy task.

Reframing the debate is more nuanced than simply changing the subject. You have to get from the opposing frame to your point of view by drawing a logical connection between them. Then, you “pivot” away from your opponent’s line of reasoning and elaborate your own. Finding the common ground between you and your opponent — the connection between your frames — isn’t easy. Using the “With So Many Kids in Care, Let’s Do It Right” frame may be your best bet.

The “With So Many Kids in Care, Let’s Do It Right” frame says that with so many kids in care, we should be doing everything we can to make sure that care is of the highest quality possible. It can often be the starting point of any counter-argument because the first part of the frame — so many kids in care — is acknowledged by the majority of the public. Your opponents probably acknowledge it as well; otherwise, they wouldn’t be engaged in the issue. The disagreement comes with the latter part of the “With So Many Kids in Care, Let’s Do It Right” frame: We should be doing everything we can to make sure that care is of the highest quality possible. The majority of the public is on your side there as well. According to our poll, 68% of the public agrees with that statement. If you stay focused on that point, resisting your opponent’s efforts to drag the conversation in another direction, you can reframe the discussion and perhaps even move the conversation from the “With So Many Kids in Care, Let’s Do It Right” frame to the “Support Our Youngest Citizens” frame — “because when we provide that quality, we’re preparing our youngest citizens for their role as productive members of our democracy.”

Your opponents may be persistent and do their own resisting — that’s why we call them framing battles. Stand firm. Restate your position. Practice before you meet with them. Repeat what you believe will make the biggest difference for growing children and the society we are creating. Say why you care and why it matters not just for these children and their families, but for all of us.

Answering Difficult Questions

As much as possible, try to anticipate and be ready to answer the toughest questions reporters and opponents may ask. Here are a few ideas for how to respond to the most common difficult questions on child care. Use them as a starting point to develop your own responses.

Don't kids do better in school when they were cared for at home in early childhood?

- Not necessarily. Research has shown many benefits for children who participate in high-quality early care and education programs. What is clear is that quality care, whether provided by parents or by child care providers, helps kids learn and grow, and gets them ready to succeed in school. Regardless of how we might feel about parents being home full-time with their kids, the American public understands the reality that most families don't have that choice. That's why we need to do everything we can to make all child care as high quality as possible.

Why should child care matter to people who don't have children?

- When all children are getting the attention, affection, and developmentally appropriate care they need, it's good for all of us. That's because quality child care fosters a love of learning, reduces behavioral problems, prepares children for school and life, and creates a stronger community for everyone.
- The Perry Preschool Project proved that children in quality early childhood programs were still benefiting 30 years later — and so did society. The participants had higher earnings, more property ownership, fewer criminal arrests, and more commitment to marriage.
- Good early experiences set children on a lifelong path of learning, working well with other children and adults, and being safe, productive citizens.

Is it fair to ask taxpayers to subsidize child care, which is fundamentally a family obligation?

- We all benefit when our youngest citizens get the high-quality care they need. We all support the educational system, whether or not we have kids, and the fire department, whether or not our house ever catches fire. In the same way, child care is a critical part of the fabric of a healthy community.

Some people say child care isn't the problem. They say the problem is an economy that forces both parents to work. Isn't this really an economic issue?

- In any economy, we need to have plenty of high-quality child care available. Quality early childhood education programs help children learn and grow; they support parents whether they are working or at home; and the child care industry is a critical part of the infrastructure that supports a healthy economy in all of our communities.

In this economy, how do we justify spending more money on early childhood programs?

- When it comes to children, it's not *whether* we pay; it's *when*. When a third of five-year-olds are not ready for kindergarten and a third of ninth graders are not successfully graduating to high school, it doesn't take a genius to realize that these are the same kids. We have to decide whether we want to invest in success now or pay for failure later.

What do you say to people who accuse child care advocates of trying to build yet another expensive "big government" system?

- We actually don't get the criticism very often. Most of the public and our policymakers realize that improving child care is a compelling need that is intrinsically connected to our goals in education reform, economic development, and public safety.
- The idea that government is the enemy is outdated. The GI Bill, subsidized housing for families, social security, and other programs that our elders need desperately to survive and succeed are all part of government. Likewise, early care and education is good for families, good for educational success, good for business, and good for quality of life — that's why it has such broad-based support.

If the lack of good care is as dire as you say it is, why do most parents report that they are satisfied with their child care arrangements? Where is the outcry?

- Many parents do complain that they don't have better choices. Many parents currently rely on a patchwork system of care, which too often is unreliable and not developmentally appropriate for their children. The best care options typically have long waiting lists — and for many families, the best care is out of reach because it costs too much. We don't have enough high-quality care at a price parents can afford.
- Our society has made parents feel that child care is a personal, private problem and that they don't have a right to expect support from the greater community. But in fact, many parents do report frustrations with the lack of affordable high-quality child care options. And policymakers need to listen.

We've been investing in child care for many years. Why haven't we seen more progress?

- We have made progress. Studies show that children who have been in high-quality child care settings do better in school. We need to increase our investments precisely because we know it does work and many kids are still not getting the high quality of care they need.

Why should we spend more money on a system that's broken and not of highest quality?

- We should fix the system because we know how. We have an example in our own military, which invested in providers, facilities, and a licensing and inspection system. As a result, they have vastly improved child care quality. When you invest in those kinds of improvements, you can turn the system around and get better results for children and for the society as a whole.
- There is compelling evidence of the cost-effectiveness of quality child care. If we invest in improving quality, we dramatically improve the outcomes for children, for our educational system, and for our community at large. We owe it to our youngest citizens to prepare them the best way we can.

What would an educationally oriented child care program look like?

- Education for young children is rooted in emotional health, relationships, and bonding. For young children, learning takes place through play. This play needs to be guided and supported by consistent, well-trained, caring teachers, who can give children the emotional stability and confidence to explore their world in all the ways that support healthy early learning.
- The love of learning can be nurtured throughout the early years. Learning is “work” for children, and that work has to be positive and comfortable for infants and toddlers. Consistent care-giving is essential for children, so they can feel emotionally comfortable in learning. The key ingredient in educationally appropriate care for young children is the qualifications, supervision, and retention of their caregivers.

What is the connection between teachers’ salaries and the quality of child care that children receive?

- Highly qualified, experienced, well-trained teachers are leaving the profession because they cannot afford to stay at their current wages. Teachers who are better paid tend to stay longer in their jobs, and they can form consistent relationships with kids and give them the emotional stability they need to learn and grow.
- There is an extreme shortage of child care teachers due to low wages. Current per-child reimbursement rates from the state are not high enough to cover the costs of daily operation, including paying teachers a living wage.
- Quality, consistent child care is a crucial link in any strong, well-functioning community. It’s not only wise; it’s fiscally responsible. A RAND study showed that for every dollar invested in a high-quality early childhood program, seven dollars are saved in welfare, special education, and criminal justice costs.²

If teachers get paid so little, why does child care cost parents so much?

- Even at the low wages currently paid in the field, the largest portion of child care operating costs is teachers' salaries. This is because young children need a lot of attention. First-graders can be in a classroom of 18 to 20 kids with only one teacher. Three-year-olds require three teachers for 20 kids, and even at very low wages, that adds up to more than parents can pay.
- Child care is the one area of the educational system in which we expect parents to foot the whole bill. If parents had to pay the full cost of public K-12 education, very few would be able to afford it. Even at the college level, with loans, grants, and subsidies available, most parents pay a smaller percentage of college costs than the full amount we expect parents of young children to pay in child care costs.

Why should child care workers get special treatment (with wage supplement programs)?

- We're not talking about special treatment. We're talking about reasonable, appropriate compensation to provide our children with quality care and attention.
- Given the essential role of good child care in our community, we can't afford not to pay child care teachers better. When we have good child care, kids are able to do better in school, and their parents are able to go to work and not worry about their children. It's an investment in the smooth functioning of our whole community.
- This isn't about the teachers. It's about our youngest citizens, who will do much better in school and life if they have consistent, qualified caregivers early on.

What happens to families when they don't have high-quality child care available?

- Families suffer, but more importantly, society suffers. We won't have a productive, pleasant society if we don't properly prepare our youngest citizens.

You should always be ready to answer the following question with a specific policy priority (which may change from day to day depending on the political climate and your group's priorities): *What's the most important thing we could do right now to start improving the child care system?* In your answer, say who should do what and by when.

Pivot Phrases

Advocates often concede too much power to journalists, allowing the reporter's questions to dictate what gets discussed in an interview. A critical interview technique is to be prepared with stock phrases that link from the reporter's question to where you want to end up. Pivot phrases can help you shift the discussion to the policy solution you want to highlight. Here are a few pivot phrases that highlight the key child care values frames.

Support Our Youngest Citizens

Let's talk about what this means for real children, families, and communities. For instance, _____.

Everyone benefits when _____ (insert your policy goal).

Our Can-Do Spirit Will Get Us There

The military taught us that we can solve the child care crisis; we just have to solve it for all children by _____.

In the United States, when something is crucial to the strength of our nation, we find the money and the means to do it. In child care, this means we must _____.

With So Many Kids in Care, Let's Do It Right

The child care crisis is an adult problem. Adults can fix it. It's good for workers and parents to _____.

The reality is, most kids are in care. We can't wait any longer; we must _____.

Child Care Is Early Learning

While we debate this, a generation of children will enter school without the foundation they need to succeed. We must _____ now.

Sure, this is difficult. But the benefits are tremendous: Children who learn how to share early on will share their learning tomorrow. That's why _____.

Take Advantage of Early Brain Development

What is certain is that we have to act while children's brains are developing. That's why we _____.

Responding to Reporters in a Crisis

A troubling child care study. A potential case of abuse. Mismanagement in a child care system. No one wants to get those calls. In news stories about a crisis, you may not be able to shift the frame to your policy goals, but you may be able to make the story more accurate and put it in a broader context.

Advocates tell us that when bad news breaks, they feel pressure to defend the entire field. We understand this reaction. But sometimes bad news is important news. If administrators have been skimming monies that were supposed to support child care nutrition programs — as happened in Los Angeles in 1999 — the public needs to know about it. In this case, the news shed unfavorable light on some child care programs, but the spotlight helped end the corruption and get the resources where they were intended: to hungry children. News attention can direct those who have the power to solve the problem, and apply the pressure so they do. This example illustrates why we avoid the terms “bad news” and “good news.” Even difficult stories can be reported well and result in improvements in child care.

It is frustrating, however, if the news is inaccurate and puts the field in a bad light, especially since early childhood education gets scant news attention as it is. If the difficult story making news is not representative of the field, say so. Give reporters, parents, and policy-makers examples from your own experience, but don't be afraid to ask publicly for answers and action in a problematic case. If someone has made a mistake, say so. If the problem is systemic, describe policies or investments that could improve the situation and name the policymakers you hold responsible for taking action. Your first objective is to do what is best for kids, not to make the difficult news disappear.

Though every situation is different, there are some general things you can consider in advance that will make it easier to cope with difficult news, and even take advantage of the opportunity it provides. Our tips are meant as reminders that even in the crunch of a crisis, it's more important than ever to study the situation and strategically plan your response. Often in these situations, the best you can do is focus on what you know, be clear about your role in the story, and learn from the past so you are ready the next time difficult news breaks.

Sometimes
bad news is
important news.

Focus on what you know

In April 2001, researchers from The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) announced that they would be releasing data suggesting that child care put kids at risk for aggressive behavior.

Child care advocates were inundated with reporters' questions, despite the fact that no one outside the NICHD had been able to review or critique the study. Advocates couldn't say what they thought about a study they hadn't yet seen. All they could do was speak from their own experience watching kids blossom in high-quality child care.

By calling for public investment to ensure high-quality care for all kids, advocates responded to reporters' calls about the story by countering the prevalent, individually focused news frame, which encouraged parents to worry about, or feel guilty for, putting their kids in child care.

As it turned out, advocates accurately predicted that a key factor in aggressive behavior was the quality of child care. Once the study was released, even some of the authors publicly argued that the results concerning children's aggressiveness had been overstated. Since advocates had had to craft their response before reviewing the research, they stayed out of this methodology debate and kept focused on the importance of public investments in quality.

In breaking stories, reporters and advocates alike scramble to learn as much as possible as fast as possible. Reporters expect quick answers that fit their tight deadlines. Prepare for a reporter's call as quickly as you can, but don't make premature comments or guess. Take the time to learn the facts and reflect on strategic questions such as:

- Do we have enough information to respond in this particular case?
- Are there inaccuracies in how the story is being reported?
- Is there a systemic problem that should be addressed through policy change? Which policymaker(s) should make that happen?

Determine your role in the story

When difficult news breaks, or when you know it will break soon, alert your team and child care colleagues. If reporters often call you on child care issues or if your organization is at the center of the story, be ready. Never say “no comment.” Instead, take time to think through your organization’s objectives, have the salient information about the crisis ready, and plan to respond. If your organization isn’t the best positioned to respond, work with those who are.

You may be called by reporters during a crisis because they have a relationship with you or they believe that your position or experience will allow you to give them a useful perspective on the issue at hand. If you aren’t the right person, refer the reporter to a colleague who is (and then let that person know you’ve given his or her name to the reporter). If you are the right person to respond, determine your role in the story. In a crisis, stay focused on what you know. Don’t let the reporter drag you into foreign territory. Ask yourself:

- Do we need to respond? If so, what is our objective in talking to reporters?
- If we are not best positioned to respond, who can we refer reporters to? Have we let those colleagues know that a difficult story is breaking?
- What aspects of the situation can we speak to from our own experience (as child care provider, researcher, parent)?
- What public policies does our society need to implement that could help prevent similar crises in the future?

In a crisis, stay
focused on
what you know.

Learn from the past

The silver lining to history repeating itself is that advocates can prepare for difficult news stories by examining past challenges. Don't wait for the pressure of a crisis to plan your response. Think through the following questions with your colleagues:

- What difficult situations have occurred in the past? How did we respond?
- How might we improve our response?
- What media protocol or staff training could we implement now?
- What information would help us answer likely questions and negative frames?

Finally, the best way to prepare for times of difficult news situations is to make sure that they are not the only times that child care is in the news. The best way to highlight policies that are the most valuable for children is to help generate proactive stories about the benefits of child care. Pitching such stories regularly will help make sure that child care is not only in the news when a crisis hits, but is present more often in stories about caring for our youngest citizens, solving big problems, and helping parents work and the economy thrive, among others.

Reporters should cover the many positive benefits of early childhood education, and the more frequent and systemic problems that they can help solve. How do advocates get stories about the investments needed to improve the child care system into the news and on the public agenda? Our next chapter describes in detail the steps to gaining access to the news media.

¹ Joan Lombardi, The Children's Project, Statement made at Berkeley Media Studies Group roundtable meeting, Washington, D.C., April 18, 2002.

² Karoly, L., et al, "Investing in Our Children: What We Know and Don't Know About the Costs and Benefits of Early Childhood Interventions." Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp., 1998.

Chapter 4

Access Strategy: Thinking Like a Journalist

*To gain the media's attention,
you can't just say something;
you have to do something.¹*

Russell Sciandra,
tobacco control advocate

Once you have established your overall strategy, media strategy, and message strategy, getting access to the news media is a matter of creativity, preparation, perseverance, and luck. Before you can reach your chosen policymaker through the media and influence change, you need to “get in the door.” You will find that journalists are professionals working within a fairly transparent industry, and you can learn to provide what journalists need in order to tell a good story.

Pitch a Story, Not an Issue

Deciding which early childhood education story you want a journalist to tell is easier once you have determined your overall policy objective. Then you aren't calling a reporter to discuss child care in general, but rather the city council's vote on child care zoning regulations, the new report on child care availability, or the graduation of early childhood educators at local community colleges. Suddenly, a complex issue is carved into a specific news story.

Journalists and their editors constantly choose which stories to cover and which to pass up. Whatever the story idea, advocates bolster their chances of being selected for the news by developing personal relationships with reporters and by highlighting what is newsworthy about their story. Three examples of newsworthiness include timeliness, broad interest, and local pegs. Is the story about something new? Yesterday's news is old news and probably won't get coverage. Will the story appeal to a broad audience? The broader the appeal is, the better. Does a local story have relevance to a national issue? News stations like to provide a local perspective on national stories. Other newsworthy elements include injustice, irony, celebrities, and compelling visuals. Your story won't have to include all of the above, and one element isn't necessarily better than another. Just be sure the story has at least one or two newsworthy elements. You can then make your story easier to understand, and the message more effective, by providing a reporter with story elements such as visuals, media bites, authentic voices, and social math.

This chapter explores the tactics and story elements needed to attract news coverage. With newsworthiness in mind, we recommend using four basic tactics for attracting attention: creating news, piggybacking on breaking news, using editorial pages, and placing paid ads.

Whenever you get coverage in news stories, editorial pages, or through a paid ad, reuse the news. Copy it and share it with community activists, policymakers, and those you want to educate about the issue, including other reporters. Take advantage of the increased legitimacy and credibility that news coverage provides. Doing so capitalizes on your success by keeping your issue in the spotlight and by providing a reminder that your solution should be on the political agenda.

First things first, though: Let's get the issue into the news.

For More on Getting into the News

All of the tactics for getting your story in the news — from creating news to cultivating authentic voices — are discussed in detail in our book *News for a Change: An Advocate's Guide to Working with the Media*, available from Sage Publications (see appendix for ordering information). The book is designed to help advocates understand the nuts and bolts behind gaining the media's attention and developing story elements. It provides step-by-step worksheets for skills such as writing a news release, pitching your story to a reporter, and staging a press conference.

Creating News

Early childhood education news can be created in many ways, leading to different types of stories. To attract news attention you have to *do something*: take an action, make a demand, sponsor a public event. One way to attract news attention is to issue a report with new data or analysis. Issuing reports about child care staffing, teacher readiness, the economic impact of child care, facility availability, or other relevant topics can highlight specific policy solutions. To make news, the report must be released publicly by alerting the news media and emphasizing why the story is newsworthy, today, to their audience. Advocates can even make news on a report that someone else is releasing, if they have advance notice. For example, national organizations will often release data about how kids are faring in one state versus another. State-level advocates can then pitch the story to their local reporters, offering local examples and solutions for getting their state caught up with others or maintaining their lead. When releasing any report that highlights the early childhood education problem, make sure that your press materials offer clear policy solutions and indicate which policymakers have responsibility for those solutions.

Hosting a news event can also generate coverage, if reporters are convinced that it is newsworthy and can envision what story they could file. What child advocates, politicians, parents, or business people will they be able to interview? What compelling visuals will they be able to photograph or tape?

For example, in 1999, child advocates in Wisconsin wanted to inform a larger, more child-connected audience about groundbreaking scientific discoveries indicating the powerful impact of positive experiences on children's early brain development.² Central to their public education campaign was a unique news hook: Advocates secured a school bus, loaded it with educational materials, and hit the road. Called the Better Badger Baby Bus Tour — named to capitalize on the widespread familiarity of the state mascot — the colorful bus was an unexpected, and therefore newsworthy, platform from which to speak on the needs of Wisconsin's children. Still on the road today, the bus continues to extend the newsworthiness of a statewide story while offering regional news outlets the opportunity to localize the story by interviewing local child advocates. Advocates use the tour to accomplish several goals, from educating parents about brain development to increasing child care's presence in the news. Later, the relationships they have formed with local journalists along the way will be important as they pursue policy change. Advocates are also planning to use the tour to prompt "brown bag" forums for upcoming mayoral and county executive elections.

Generating news may not require this level of investment — think of the number of news stories that are written simply because a report is released. But those reports must be newsworthy, and advocates must spend the time to convince journalists to cover it. In most cases, creating news will require a concerted effort. As with any effort to create news, make sure your report and press materials highlight possible solutions, rather than focusing solely on describing the problem.

Piggybacking on Breaking News

When advocates identify a connection between their issue and the news of the day, they should make the story known to journalists. The issue doesn't have to be directly related to child care; advocates build the connection and in so doing create a newsworthy story. For example, when the state releases the latest unemployment data, early childhood education advocates could use the opportunity to release their own report about jobs in the child care sector. Once you have your policy goals and message developed, you can take advantage of piggybacking opportunities quickly.

Using the editorial pages and letters to the editor section is probably the most common and easiest way to piggyback on the news, but you have other options as well. Tying your story to a key anniversary date or a familiar, recurring event can also be effective. Be creative. For example, news organizations have to cover the state of the union or federal budget, but they may not have considered the implications for children. In anticipation of the State of the Union speech, you could prepare an analysis of the state of the child, and call one reporter to pitch the story on how the budget affects children.

By planning ahead, you may be able to anticipate several times during the year when stories on early childhood education may be particularly newsworthy. If these times are also appropriate from a policy perspective — e.g., if Mother's Day falls during the deliberations over a state's final budget — you may have extra success making news. Let our examples on pages 88 to 90 stimulate your creativity. Are there dates or events that have special significance in your community regarding your policy goal?

Waiting for a Winter Storm: “Piggybacking” in Action

On March 6, 2001, the New York City Chancellor of Schools faced a flurry of criticism for giving 1.1 million kids a snow day in anticipation of a blizzard. This was only the second time in 20 years that New Yorkers knew a day in advance that there would be no school. Chancellor Leavy announced the closure early “to give parents time to make child care arrangements.” The political problem was that the snow never came.

Faith Wohl, president of the Child Care Action Campaign, saw an opportunity to piggyback on a current news story and took it. Her letter to *The New York Times* broadened readers’ attention from the single event to the persistent problem faced by millions of parents.³

“The decision to cancel classes for New York City’s 1.1 million public school children was made on Sunday night. Why? Because even the schools chancellor knows that school is more than a place where children learn. It is also our best form of universal, affordable child care.... In fact, given the dearth of child care alternatives, most families choose between staying home with the kids or taking the kids to work.... The snow created a visible manifestation of an everyday problem.”

Faith Wohl,
President, Child Care Action Campaign
New York, March 6, 2001

A Year's Worth of Piggybacking Ideas

The calendar provides many opportunities to be creative about generating stories and opinion pieces on early childhood education.

January

- *New Year's* — Call for New Year's resolutions to work on behalf of children and for investments in high-quality child care.
- *First baby of the year* — What does society offer new babies? Whose baby will be the first to get off the list for infant care?
- *Flu season* — The importance of family leave policies.
- *Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday* — Invest in children's programs to reduce disparities experienced by poor kids and children of color.

February

- *President's Day* — What will the president's legacy be on children's issues? As society celebrates leadership, the governor should show leadership by investing in quality child care programs.
- *Black history month* — African Americans take action for children.
- *Valentine's Day* — To celebrate a victory, kids send Valentine's to legislators to thank them for having the heart to keep giving communities the high-quality child care they deserve.

March

- *Women's history month* — History of government-funded child care for women working in World War II factories.
- *Spring break* — For parents, the ability to work during school breaks is dependent upon adequate child care.
- *Read Across America Day (1st)* — Parental involvement in early education.
- *International Women's Day (8th)* — Celebrate women's contribution to children's lives.
- *Single Parent's Day (21st)* — Highlight policies that could support single parents.

April

- *April Fool's Day* — Policymakers shouldn't be foolish; we must invest in high-quality child care for our youngest citizens.
- *April 15* — American families deserve more than the tiny tax credit. Use tax day to create stories about the earned income tax credit.
- *Take daughters to work* — Parents often must bring children to work on other days when patchwork child care arrangements fail.

May

- *Mother's Day* — Support moms by creating good child care options.
- *Graduation* — Local preschool graduation, children ready for the next step; graduates of early childhood education programs ready to enter the child care workforce.
- *Cinco de Mayo: Independence Day* — Create child care policies supporting parents' desire to be independent and self-sufficient.
- *Memorial Day* — End of school, parents scramble to find summer care.
- *National Teacher Day (7th)* — Recognize the teachers of youngest children.
- *International Day of Families (15th)* — Support family-friendly policies.

June

- *Father's Day* — Support fathers by creating good child care options.
- *End of school year* — Issue a report card on how well your policy target has kept his or her child care promises.
- *Summer vacation* — Parents scramble to patch together activities and care for children. Year-long issue for parents of children under five years old.

August

- *Start of school* — Three-year-olds enroll in their first preschool.
- *Women's Equality Day (26th)* — Women's equality requires better family support programs and policies.

September

- *Labor Day* — Struggles of the child care workforce; child care allows parents to work.
- *Completion of the federal budget* — Have we done right by children?
- *Grandparents' Day* (Sunday after Labor Day) — Grandparents as caretakers; the need for family support policies for the sandwich generation.

October

- *Halloween* — Are we just tricking our children or treating them as they deserve?

November

- *Election Day* — Make the right choices for children.
- *Thanksgiving* — Thankful children are prospering in high-quality care. How many families/communities are thankful for or still hungry for affordable, quality child care?
- *National Family Week* (Nov. 24-30) — Support policies that support families.

December

- *School vacations* — Struggle to find child care reflects daily reality for many parents.
- *Christmas gifts* — What will politicians give our children?
- *Kwanzaa* — Time to invest in the community and celebrate strengths.
- *National Day of Disabled Persons* (5th) — Fund appropriate care for kids with special needs.

The above dates might also be useful as anniversary report cards, so to speak. New Year's, for example, is not only a time to look to the future, but also a time to assess the progress that policymakers have or have not made on early childhood education over the past year. Pick a meaningful date your group can make its own, coming back to it year after year to create news about the next policy goal to improve early care and education

Using the Editorial Pages

Letters to the editor, editorials, and “op-eds” (opinion editorials, or opinion pieces found opposite the editorial page) provide an excellent opportunity for bringing early childhood education issues to the public’s attention, extending the debate started by a news story, and promoting policy solutions. Policymakers pay a great deal of attention to the opinion pages, which they take as an indication of the public’s concerns, perspectives, and agenda. In fact, one staff member for a state legislator told us that the first task of the district office each morning is to fax to the capitol office the front pages and editorial pages of all the local newspapers, so the legislator can keep abreast of key issues in the community.

Letters to the Editor

Letters are usually 200 words or less and can be mailed, faxed, or e-mailed to the editor of the newspaper; these days e-mail is usually preferred. Don’t attach your letter; embed it in the e-mail. As in the winter storm example, letters are usually in response to a specific article or editorial the paper has published, offering a concise statement of support or objection. Responses should be sent within a day or two of the original article. The longer you wait, the less chance the letter will be published. Keep it short and punchy, highlighting your solution.

Editorials

Editorials are unsigned and written by the editorial board of the newspaper. Advocates can make an appointment to talk with the editorial board to ask them to take a position and make a statement about an issue or a pending policy. The meeting is usually attended by the newspaper staff responsible for writing the editorial and those who will make the decision about whether the newspaper will take a position on the issue. The advocates should have two or three people at the meeting who can speak about various aspects of the issue or represent different perspectives (for example, a parent, a provider, and a professional policy analyst). If the newspaper decides not to write an editorial, the advocates can ask if the paper would instead publish an op-ed that they will write themselves.

Op-ed

An op-ed is a 600–800 word opinion piece that appears opposite the editorials (hence, the shorthand “op-ed”). Op-eds are usually written from a personal point of view by a community member, advocate, or other non-journalist. They describe a problem, the proposed solution, and the relevance to the readers. Like letters, op-eds need to be timely, about what’s happening now. They should state a strong opinion. Op-eds can be especially useful later because they will usually be a concise description of the issue and your proposed solution — much easier to read and share with others than a long report.

On the editorial pages, newspapers typically publish the contact information and instructions for submitting letters and op-eds. Some radio stations and television news programs allow audience members to record commentaries that function like op-eds. Check with your local outlets for details.

Placing Paid Ads

Most advocates rely on “earned media” — generating news stories or opinion pieces — rather than “paid media” because paid ads can be very pricey and, more importantly, because news coverage has greater credibility. In certain situations, however, buying newspaper space or airtime is the only way to be sure that your message and your issue get into the media unadulterated. Ads focused on policy can be particularly effective at delivering a very targeted, timely message. Name names. Put pressure on policymakers to vote yes on your bill. Congratulate someone for taking a tough stand, and challenge others to do the same. Use your creativity and include compelling pictures or graphics.

Of course, given advocates’ frequently tight budgets, the cost of a paid ad may be prohibitive. A full paid ad running in *The New York Times* on a specific day, for instance, could cost tens of thousands of dollars. For your policy goal and target, though, you may not need *The New York Times*. Ad prices in city or regional papers are considerably — and in some cases drastically — less expensive. You might be surprised to find ad space costing a few thousand or even a few hundred dollars. When you combine resources with like-minded organizations, ads become even more affordable.

Using Paid Ads: Child Advocates Thank Mayor

In San Francisco, children’s advocates used paid advertising to highlight a positive policy change that the news media were ignoring.⁴ The job market was tight in San Francisco in 2000, and that meant a crisis for child care. Child care workers, typically paid less than \$7 an hour — less than parking attendants — were leaving the field for more lucrative jobs. Families that qualified for subsidized care could not get it because the child care centers did not have the staff.

Working with Coleman Advocates for Children and Youth, among others, Mayor Willie Brown took an unprecedented action: He allocated \$4.1 million to increase the wages of 1,000 child care workers serving low-income families. Never before had the city subsidized the salaries of non-city employees. The advocates were thrilled and immediately alerted the local news media about the mayor’s unprecedented action. The reporters, however, refused to do the story. They did not want to “toot the mayor’s horn.”

The advocates thought it was a legitimate story and were frustrated by the non-responsive reporters. They decided to tell the story themselves in a full-page ad in the west coast edition of *The New York Times* (see opposite). The ad ran on August 7, 2000, during the Democratic National Convention, which was being held in San Diego that year.

The ad proclaimed: “*Child Care History in the Making — San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown Sets National Standard for Quality, Affordable Child Care!*” It suggested that readers challenge their own mayors to take the same action in their hometowns. Advocates reported that Mayor Willie Brown was still talking about the ad and taking pride in his decision six months later when he signed the next budget allocations for child care.



CHILD CARE HISTORY IN THE MAKING

San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown Sets National Standard for Quality, Affordable Child Care!

About the Child Care Crisis

Nationwide, more than 13 million young children in working families are cared for by more than 3 million child care professionals. Child care workers, on average, make barely \$7 an hour, less than what parking lot attendants make.

1 in 5 child care workers leaves the job every year, meaning lower quality care for children and the loss of thousands of dedicated caregivers who can't afford to stay in the field. In California alone, more than 200,000 children in working families await individual care.

Meeting the Child Care Challenge

Working with children's advocacy groups, San Francisco civic leaders have set the standard for the nation by making a remarkable investment in child care. The result? Higher quality care for children, more support for working families, and concrete rewards for dedicated caregivers.

Mayor Brown delivers millions for groundbreaking child care agenda:

- A Child Care Facilities Fund which supports 2,000 quality child care spaces.
- A High Quality Child Care Fund which provides mental health services and educational materials for centers and homes.
- The SF CARES Initiative, California's first local incentive program to reward child care workers for continuing their education and remaining in the field.
- A City-paid health benefits fund for uninsured family child care providers.
- City-funded child care subsidies for working families.

AND...\$4.1 MILLION to increase wages of 1,000 community-based child care workers. San Francisco is the first city in the country to invest in its child care workforce!

What You Can Do?

HELP MAKE YOUR CITY THE BEST PLACE FOR KIDS

Send your mayor this message:

"San Francisco invested millions in quality, affordable child care. So can you!"

Dear Mayor _____

I want you to invest in child care -- just like San Francisco!

Let's make sure that _____ supports children and their caregivers. Our families are WORTH IT!

Sign of _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

YES, I want to learn more about Coleman Advocates' work on behalf of children and families:

Send me more information about: (check all that apply!)

Parent and Youth Leadership Becoming A Coleman Member

The Children's Amendment Budget Advocacy & Applied Policy Work

Organizing Child Care Workers

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____

Send to: Coleman Advocates 459 Virginia Street, San Francisco 94112

Tel: 415-299-8161 • email: generalinfo@colemanadvocates.org

**Story Elements:
Compelling Visuals, Media Bites, Authentic Voices, and Social Math**

Getting the attention of the media is one step; now you've got to be sure you can tell the complete story in a way that's compelling, interesting, easily accessible — and that supports your policy goal. That's where story elements — visuals, media bites, authentic voices, and social math — come in.

Story elements help journalists do their job. For better or worse, journalists are under tight deadlines, face limited resources, and generally aren't able to sift through a long report to pull out the most compelling statistics or arrange an attention-getting visual. The more you understand and meet reporters' needs for a story, the more successful your media advocacy will be.

Creating Compelling Visuals

“We must be intentional about creating visual images for the public, our policymakers, and news stories. If you say ‘school’ to people, everybody’s got a picture of a school in their brain. When we say ‘early learning’ or ‘early childhood education’ or ‘child care,’ a picture doesn’t emerge or may not be accurate, depending on the person’s individual experiences. We need to illustrate what we are talking about and what we want to see for our kids in appealing and memorable ways.”

— Nina Sazer O’Donnell,
Families and Work Institute⁵

Television news is particularly dependent upon good visuals for telling stories. If you’re hoping to have news cameras at your event or news conference, you will have to have good visuals. Don’t neglect the power of visuals for the print media, either. Today’s newspapers are giving more play to photos and graphs. Dramatic visuals that quickly bring a story to mind can also help convince journalists to cover something that they might otherwise skip, or can help convince an editor to place the story more prominently.

Use your creativity and strategic thinking to brainstorm visuals that frame your policy goal. Every child care story has many potential visuals. For instance, to demonstrate the crucial connection between child care and parental employment, you could show parents — dressed in the uniforms of “essential” jobs like firefighters, nurses, bus drivers, judges, etc. — dropping their children off at a center. Plus, camera crews always love kids. What is more visually compelling than the pudgy, smiling faces of toddlers? But, as an advocate you have to decide if that cute picture helps create the story you want. Will the reporter, and eventually the reader or viewer, connect those kids back to the serious early childhood education policy issues at stake? Perhaps you can find a way to ensure that connection is made, or perhaps you will decide that it’s best to leave the kids out of the picture for the moment.

Breaking Ground for Kids, with Kids

Santa Cruz County, California, like many regions of the country, faces a severe shortage of child care. Advocates from Child Care Ventures, a collaborative of public and private child care and small business agencies, wanted to use a ground-breaking ceremony for a new child care center in a low-income housing development to highlight the types of solutions needed in their county.⁶

The Vista Verde Child Development Center grew from an innovative partnership that included Child Care Ventures, the county office of education, social services, affordable housing providers, local business development agencies, and a local community credit union. While this new collaboration was exciting for the field, having officials at a typical ribbon-cutting event didn't seem like a newsworthy visual.

Advocates knew that bringing in cute kids would entice the news cameras. But while kids were one part of the story — the reason society needs child care centers — the advocates' strategic goal was larger than one center or the 60 kids it would serve. Their goal was to encourage public and private interest in developing educational opportunities for many more children in Santa Cruz County.

The visual solution was to have the kids break the ground with small golden shovels while wearing hard hats, which reinforced the facilities development message. The compelling photograph likely attracted more readers and better newspaper placement than if the article had run alone.



The California Child Development Administrators Association (CCDAA) provides an example of a situation where children helped get news attention and frame it well. CCDAA had put forth a bill to increase the state reimbursement rates for early education teachers, who had not received a cost of living increase in many years — a problem that exacerbated already high teacher turnover rates.⁷ Since the CCDAA goal was to influence legislators, they held their news conference on the steps of the state capitol in Sacramento. Advocates wanted news stories of the event to include visuals emphasizing their policy target. Unfortunately, despite their hard work, they were unable to get any reporters to commit to attend the event or cover the story.

On the morning of the event, however, a new hook presented itself. Teachers from an early education center brought groups of adorable children, all wearing signs pointing to the CCDAA policy goal, such as, “Support my teacher, she supports me.”

The kids made this event a visually compelling story. Elected officials calling for investments in early education teacher salaries were flanked by eager children singing their ABCs, which they learned under the guidance of a dedicated teacher.

CCDAA seized the opportunity. They called all the reporters again, letting them know that the story had been visually enhanced with cute kids. Within minutes of the calls, three TV stations sent reporters and camera crews. All three stations ran the story that night on their news broadcast. The lesson was clear: When journalists were given what they needed to tell a good story, the CCDAA event and policy goal got coverage.

Moreover, the news coverage not only increased the visibility of the issue to news audiences that night, but also attracted state representatives, who came out to address the crowd and to lend their voices publicly to the child care call when they saw the cameras.

Bringing children to the event clearly secured the news attention and therefore the attention of policymakers. By having the children wear signs such as, “Increase my teacher’s pay so she can stay,” advocates also ensured that the compelling visual of children would be connected back to their policy goal of increasing teacher salaries.

Check Out Child Care's Value to the Economy

Depending on your policy goal, kids may not be the best visual for your story. Staff of the National Economic Development and Law Center (NEDLC), as part of the Local Investment in Child Care (LINCC) project, wanted to demonstrate the importance of child care to the California economy.⁸ Their objective was to get policymakers to grant child care the same level of attention and resources given to other industries crucial to the economic health of the state. NEDLC and LINCC members held a news conference at the state capital to release a report summarizing the financial contributions of the licensed child care industry to California.

Photographs of kids would not have reinforced the policy point that child care deserves the economic development support and protection given to other industries. Instead, organizers created a giant check from “the licensed child care industry,” made out to the California economy in the amount of \$5 billion, the amount of revenue that child care generates annually in the state. Second, they created graphics to compare the contribution of child care to more recognized industries such as vegetables and women’s clothing. Both of these visuals told a compelling story and brought home the hidden contributions of child care to California’s economy.



Developing Media Bites

Think of the news interviews you have heard in which the speaker said something that got you to pay attention, to laugh, or, most importantly, to wholeheartedly agree with her point. Perhaps it was a summary statement or a response to a question. Maybe the speaker elicited irony, humor, values, or images. In any case, the speaker said something concise and clear with conviction that resonated with you. In other words, she used a media bite.

One essential fact of the media is that news time (and space) is limited. When people are quoted in the media, it's often only one or two sentences. That doesn't mean that the reporter doesn't convey advocates' views in other parts of the article. Rather, you're simply more likely to be quoted in the newspaper or on a news program if you can say your point in a short, concise, compelling fashion.

Having a well-prepared and well-practiced media bite can also help you in an interview should you get into trouble. Since a media bite should sum up your position and help cut through the clutter, you can use it if you find yourself drifting off topic, or if you are confronted by a reporter who tries to move the interview away from your priority area. For example, Larry Wallack, the founding director of the Berkeley Media Studies Group, is an expert on alcohol policy issues and is frequently interviewed by the media. When he finds himself challenged by the opposition, or if the reporter's questions begin to stray from his overall goal, he brings the focus back by saying, "Look, we are talking about the nation's number-one drug problem." It's an attention-getting statement that helps him regain control of the conversation, regardless of what the last question was or where the interview has drifted.

How do you develop media bites? Speak to shared values, stressing points such as fairness, common sense, or the care and protection of children. Talk about what is at stake and who is affected. Use the "Support Our Youngest Citizens" frame to raise the stakes. Explain why early care and education matters to people's lives whether or not they have children, and offer a solution. Your media bites don't have to contain all of these elements; just try one or two.

For examples of media bites, see our policy sheets in Chapter 5, Answering Difficult Questions on page 71, and the following section, "Cultivating Authentic Voices."

Cultivating Authentic Voices

Reporters need a personal story to illustrate the topics they cover; in addition to advocates and researchers, reporters need to talk to people who have been directly impacted by a problem. In the news room, these interview subjects are called, rather ironically, “real people.” We refer to them as authentic voices, because their authentic experiences bring emotional power to the story.

But the personal story — the portrait — still needs to be connected to the policy landscape. That’s why before sending parents, child care teachers, or other “real people” to talk with journalists, it is important to prepare them so that they feel comfortable during the interview and are successful at linking their personal experiences to larger policy solutions. Preparing your messengers means you have to do some preparing yourself. You will need to spend time and resources figuring out what messengers you need and finding them. They will need to be trained, using mock interviews, practicing talking points, and providing sample letters to the editor that they can infuse with their own experiences and creativity. In other words, you’ve got to help your authentic voice develop the skills they need to succeed.

In child care stories, authentic voices might include parents who were able to transition from welfare to work because they had access to subsidized child care; business owners who recognize the value of child care in creating a stable workforce; kindergarten teachers who see the value of quality child care in preparing kids to learn; or city planners who understand the need to have child care centrally located to housing, employment, and transit locations.

As the above list makes clear, different members of your community of allies — from parents to planners — have experiences with and authority to speak about different aspects of the child care situation. A wide range of advocates can support the same goal while arguing their point from different perspectives.

In the following op-ed, Patty Zoll McWaters skillfully weaves together her experiences as a parent and as an advocate to make the case for quality child care. Beginning the piece from the perspective of a parent creates a compelling, authentic lead, while speaking knowledgeably about the programmatic and policy issues encourages readers to trust her analysis and solutions. In particular, she articulates the skills children gain in quality pre-kindergarten, which is helpful for convincing policymakers who don't have experience with this issue. She also outlines the difference that quality pre-kindergarten makes for children, their parents, and our society, which makes the case for public investment. Finally, she highlights the discrepancy between the abundant scientific knowledge of what children need and the lack of political motivation to put that knowledge into action.

Speaking Up as a Parent and an Advocate

Ventura County Star, April 7, 2002

Preschool readies children for success

READY TO LEARN: Publicly funded programs should be available to all who choose them

I registered my daughter for kindergarten just the other day. My red-haired, freckle-faced little girl is only five months away from officially being inducted into the school system. I wonder if she will be nervous on her first day, if she will feel comfortable in new surroundings, if she will like her teacher and her classmates. I wonder about these things, but I do not worry about them.

The confidence I have in my daughter's ability to adjust to and succeed in kindergarten comes from the fact that she has spent the past two years in a quality preschool program. She has had the benefit of group socialization, exposure to reading, science and math and the opportunity to assert her independence.

My husband and I feel extremely fortunate that we have the financial resources to afford two years of preschool. What if we didn't have those resources or what if I were a single parent with no money to spare for preschool? All of my "wonders" about my daughter's success in kindergarten would quickly turn to "worries."

>>

Children who are unable to attend a quality preschool program are at a significant disadvantage when starting kindergarten. Studies show preschool-age children have a tremendous capacity to learn.

It's more than just socialization. Children grow in their reading, mathematics and science skills. The foundation for each of these academic areas can be cultivated by a quality preschool experience. In addition, we know that children who attend a high-quality preschool are less likely to be held back a grade, be placed in special education or drop out of school than those who do not have this experience.

If a child's capacity to learn is so fertile between the ages of 3 to 5, why are we waiting until kindergarten to give all children equal access to education? It is time for our country to recognize the benefits of early education, as it long has for older children, by making publicly funded preschool available to all children whose parents choose to enroll them.

Fortunately, some groups understand the importance of early education. A recently released report titled "Preschool For All" by the Committee for Economic Development argues that states should take the lead in developing a logical system of early education. The report also proposes that financial responsibility for preschool should be equally shared by the federal and state governments, with today's parental costs scaled back over time.

Such cost sharing is only fair, as high-quality preschool programs benefit our society, as well as individual children and families. California legislators also acknowledge the need to integrate publicly funded preschool programs into the existing system of early education, although that acknowledgement needs to be turned into action.

A strategic plan for education, currently being developed by a joint legislative committee, includes a component to ensure that every child has access to activities and experiences that promote early learning and school readiness.

However, the adoption of this strategic plan may still be several years away and it is unclear whether legislators will commit the necessary funding to start up and sustain a universal preschool system.

So, while it appears that support for a universal preschool system is widening, a true commitment on the part of legislators is still needed. It is my hope for the future that all parents have the option to choose preschool for their child, regardless of their financial resources. When this day comes, perhaps all parents will approach the first day of kindergarten with excitement, not with worry and uncertainty.

Patty Zoll McWaters of Ventura is an advocate for quality child care and early education programs in Ventura County.

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What motivates different groups?

In Chapter 3, we discussed how important it is to understand the values and motivations of your target. What would encourage a governor to support investments in early childhood education might be very different from what would motivate a business person to do so. In trying to deliver the right message to each audience, select an appropriate spokesperson. Hearing a call to action from a peer may have a stronger effect on your target than a request from an outsider. Who has the power to make the change you want? Who might they listen to? What would that authentic voice say from their unique position? Remember, as the old saying goes, “The messenger is the message.”

What follows is a list of some authentic voices and the points on which they might focus. The list isn’t exhaustive. Use it to spark your own creativity, develop media bites, choose and train your authentic voices, and imagine how you can best move your target to act.

Business leaders

- Quality child care improves employee productivity. Parents who aren’t worried about their kids are more focused on their work.
- Early childhood education helps prepare and educate the employees of tomorrow.
- We want to be good corporate citizens, and investments in early childhood education are a great way to “give back” to the community.
- Child care is part of the critical infrastructure that makes the local economy sound for our business.

Child development researcher/academic

- Early childhood education ensures that kids will be ready and able to succeed when they begin school.
- Brain research shows that the early years are critical years. Early childhood education can positively impact a child’s physical, emotional and cognitive development.
- Studies have shown that every dollar spent on early childhood education programs saves seven dollars on crime, school absenteeism, and other expenses later.⁹

Clergy

- Child care centers and homes have become our new community centers, places where the ties among parents, children, neighbors, and the community are strengthened. Early childhood education is an investment in the social fabric.

Early childhood education teachers and providers

- As a child care teacher, I know that quality counts. When I get more training, I can improve the curriculum and stimulating environment for the kids in my class, and provide them with the solid foundation they need.
- We are not just teachers; we are business people who make a contribution to our local economy through the wages we pay and the goods we purchase. When our business is solvent, it helps our community's economy to thrive.

Governors and state legislators

- Child care means more jobs, higher revenues, more secure parental employment, and better business productivity.
- America isn't about divisions between the haves and the have-nots. America is about making sure everyone has an opportunity to learn and achieve. Early childhood education provides that opportunity.
- Even when the economy slows, we live in the most prosperous and wealthy nation in all of history. There is no good reason why we can't support and fund programs that provide such a valuable service for our children and parents.

K-12 teachers

- As teachers, we can tell when kids have had a quality early education. Quality early childhood education means kids learn how to share, follow directions, and work well with other children. It ensures that kids will be ready and able to succeed when they begin school.
- Brain research shows that the early years are critical years. Early childhood education can positively impact a child's physical, emotional, and cognitive development.

Law enforcement

- Studies have shown that every dollar spent on early childhood education programs saves seven dollars on crime, school absenteeism, and other expenses later.⁹
- You've got to spend money to save money. If we don't pay for these programs now, we're going to spend much more on bigger problems down the road.

Local planners

- By providing a safe place for kids when parents work, child care makes for brighter, more livable communities. Communities with quality child care are more family-friendly places to live and attract profitable businesses.
- Child care is part of our vital infrastructure, just like roads, public transportation, and housing. We need to address it with the same seriousness.

Mayors, city council members, local officials

- Child care is necessary for a thriving local economy because it means parents can work, spend money locally, and take care of their families.
- America isn't about divisions between the haves and the have-nots. America is about making sure everyone has an opportunity to learn and achieve.
- Child care, specifically subsidized care, brings in state and federal monies that help support our economy.

Non-parents

- Child care makes our community more inviting, which is certainly good for our long-term economic and social health, not to mention property values.
- This is simply an issue of making the world a better place. Providing quality child care can make a big difference to children and the citizens they will become. It's good for us all.

Parents

- We no longer live surrounded by our extended family. Child care centers and homes are our new community centers, where we know our children will be cared for with love and support, and where we can connect with other parents.
- We know that we're responsible for our children's education. We also know that our children benefit from the socialization and learning opportunities that can come from a child care center. We see the incredible benefits of good child care for our kids. They are happy, confident, and learning.
- Child care allows us to work. Without it, we wouldn't be able to hold down jobs and provide for our families.

Realtors

- Child care, by providing a safe place for kids when parents work, creates family-friendly communities. Child care makes our community more inviting to families, which is good for our long-term economic and social health, not to mention property values.
- Accessible, affordable child care is a community benefit my clients demand.

School board members

- Early childhood education ensures that kids will be ready and able to succeed when they begin school. Our schools will be more successful if our students enter with a foundation from which to learn.
- Quality early childhood education can reduce the need for, and the costs associated with, K-12 special education, which is good for the education of all students.

Seniors

- What kind of legacy are we leaving for our children? What do we as seniors want to be remembered for? Providing quality child care can provide children with high-quality lives. That's something to be remembered for.
- Children grow up. The care they get now will shape the world they live in when they get to be my age.
- Early childhood education ensures that our grandchildren will be ready and able to succeed when they begin school.

Unions

- Child care means more jobs, higher revenues, more secure parental employment, and better worker productivity.
- Our members know that society runs more smoothly when everyone has access to the basics: education, health care, and child care.

Alameda County in Action

California advocates from the Alameda County Local Investment in Child Care (LINCC) project wanted to engage three groups in their campaign to improve early education: business leaders, local elected officials, and state elected officials.¹⁰ In planning a news event, advocates made sure that they had speakers from each of these groups publicly appeal to their peers. As evident in the following article, each group's representative was best able to make the case for what their part of the solution must be. For example, business leaders emphasized the need for business owners to open centers to care for their employees' children. Local government officials highlighted the need for local governments to plan for child care needs and allot money accordingly. A state government official lobbied for a bill that would put millions into teacher wage increases and facility development.

Altogether, the spokespeople expanded the frame on child care from a personal, family problem to an issue that, if not addressed, would damage the economic health and vitality of the community. State Senator Liz Figueroa summed it up by saying, "If there are not enough child care facilities to accommodate our growing workforce, people will choose to live and work somewhere else."

Child care crisis seen

By Michele R. Marcucci
STAFF WRITER

FREMONT — Local politicians and business leaders appealed to a group of their peers Friday morning to help solve Alameda County's burgeoning child care crisis, saying it could ultimately damage the county's economic prospects.

"If there are not enough child care facilities to accommodate our growing work force, people will choose to live and work somewhere else," said state Sen. Liz Figueroa, D-Fremont.

Figueroa hopes to help fix the problem with a bill she introduced Friday that would put \$356.7 million into teacher wage increases, new centers for low-income families and training and technical assistance grants.

Hayward Mayor Roberta Cooper encouraged local governments to plan for their child care needs and to allot money for those needs, listing nearly a dozen programs the city helps fund.

Officials seek to stem

Men's Wearhouse founder George Zimmer encouraged business owners to open centers to care for their employees' children. Zimmer himself opened a center at his company's Fremont office three years ago, after three high-level female employees became pregnant.

The county has just one child care slot for every three children under the age of 14, although many of those children are cared for by relatives or family friends, said Alex Hildebrand, project coordinator for the county's Local Investment in Child Care project.

And that, care providers said, is due to wages for child care workers which average \$8.50 an hour and rents that are too high for cash-strapped care centers to pay.

Paul Miller, director of Tri-Cities Children's Centers in Fremont, said state reimbursement rates for subsidized

posing economic peril

m decline in county

child care slots are about \$200 less per month than what it costs to provide care for those children.

Tenna Land Moore, executive director of the Community Child Care Coordinating Council, which serves southern Alameda County, said her agency's child care centers have staff that commute from as far away as Stockton because Bay Area residents can't afford to live here.

She said that wages have lagged almost 25 percent behind inflation over the past 20 years. Perhaps as a result, the staff turnover rate for child care workers in Alameda County is more than 30 percent, according to information from Moore's agency.

Michael Jett, director of the state Department of Education's Child Development Division, said that state funding has not kept pace with centers' costs.

But he said the division was able to make up some of the shortfalls last year and that it has provided proper cost-of-living adjustments over the last five years.

Despite the need for more care, some cities are losing existing child care centers faster than they can open new ones. Fremont, for example, lost four child care centers and 85 family child care homes in 2000 and opened just three new centers and 36 new homes to replace them.

As a result of the shortfalls, Land Moore said her agency is cutting back on the badly needed infant care it provides at its West Oakland child care center. Infant care is the most expensive to provide, she said, and the least plentiful.

In the last few months, Berkeley lost three child care centers and is losing a fourth in June, said Isabelle Mussard, director of the Dragonfly child care center, which is closing Wednesday.

Calculating Social Math

“Everyone working to increase investments in early education needs to be able to roll off their lips a concise, good statement about the unmet needs of children. We need to offer concrete answers and put the numbers in a context that makes sense.”¹¹

— Patty Siegel,
California Child Care Resource and Referral Network

Every day, people are bombarded with news stories involving very large numbers. We hear about billions of dollars for various programs, or hundreds of thousands of people at risk for a particular disease. After a certain point, the numbers stop making sense, which is why advocates must become skilled at social math. Social math is the practice of translating statistics and other data so they become interesting to the journalist, meaningful to the audience, and helpful in advancing a policy.

By placing statistics in a context that provides instant meaning, social math makes large numbers comprehensible and compelling. It helps people see the importance or meaning of the numbers, rather than the numbers themselves.

To do this, first, choose your statistics wisely. It’s critical that you select numbers that best support your policy goal, and only those that would be compelling to journalists and policymakers. Also, keep the overall number of statistics you use in interviews, graphs, and other media-related materials to a minimum. The more numbers you provide, the more likely your point will be lost.

Once you’ve selected which numbers to use, it’s time to make some creative comparisons. Try one of the following:

Break the numbers down by time:

If you know the amount over a year, what does that look like per hour? Per minute? For example, the average annual salary of a child care worker nationally is \$15,430,¹² roughly \$7.42 per hour. While many people understand that an annual salary of \$15,430 is low, breaking the figure down by the hour reinforces that point — and makes the need for some kind of intervention even more clear.

Break down the numbers by place:

Comparing a statistic with a well-known place can give people a sense of the statistic's magnitude. For instance, approximately 250,000 children are on waiting lists for child care subsidies in California. That's enough children to fill almost every seat in every Major League ballpark in California.¹³ Such a comparison helps us visualize the scope of the problem and makes a solution all the more imperative.

Provide comparisons with familiar things:

Again, the point is for people to focus on the meaning behind the numbers, rather than the numbers themselves. For example, "While Head Start is a successful, celebrated educational program it is so underfunded that it serves only about three-fifths of the eligible children.¹⁴ Applying that proportion to social security would mean that almost 13 million currently eligible seniors wouldn't receive benefits."¹⁵ Policymakers would stand up and act quickly in that case. This social math example helps put pressure on them to do the same for children.

Provide ironic comparisons:

For example, the average annual cost of full-time, licensed, center-based care for a child under age two in California is twice the tuition at the University of California at Berkeley.¹⁶ What's ironic here is how out of balance our public conversation is. Parents and the public focus so much on the cost of college when earlier education is dramatically more expensive.

Or, in another ironic comparison:

The average child care teacher makes \$15,430 a year. Does that salary reflect our society's priorities? In comparison, child care teachers make less than locker room attendants (\$17,230),¹⁷ service station workers (\$17,280),¹⁸ or laboratory animal caretakers (\$18,570).¹⁹ Child care teachers make only half as much as correctional facility officers and jailers (\$33,770).²⁰

This comparison underscores the value (or lack thereof) that we place on those who care for our children and, by extension, the degree to which our society values our children.

Localize the numbers:

Make comparisons that will resonate with community members and policymakers. For example, saying, "Center-based child care for an infant costs \$11,450 per year in Seattle, Washington" is one thing. Saying, "In Seattle, Washington, a father making minimum wage would have to spend 79% of his income per year to place his baby in a licensed care center"²¹ is much more powerful because it illustrates why it is impossible.

Social Math in Action: Child Care and the Vegetable Industry

As part of its work on the Local Investment in Child Care (LINCC) project, the National Economic Development and Law Center (NEDLC) released a report examining the economic contributions of the licensed child care industry. As it turns out, those contributions are considerable: The industry generates approximately \$5 billion per year.

Such numbers, however, weren't going to provide much punch on their own, so NEDLC compared child care to other more prominent — and recognizable — industries in the state. The resulting graph helped NEDLC and LINCC make the case that child care, as a contributor to the state's economic vitality, deserves the same attention and resources afforded to other industries.²²



Preparing to make your case with social math

Before a journalist interviews you, there will likely be certain numbers related to your policy goal that you will want to have ready, both as a stand-alone statistic and as a social math comparison. Below are several examples. Some may be difficult to get in your region or may not apply to the goals you are pursuing, but with whatever numbers you choose to use, be creative in developing those social math comparisons.

Providers — Improving salaries and/or training

- Average provider salaries compared to averages in other sectors (e.g., kindergarten teachers, garbage collectors, other local jobs)
- Percentage of providers with health and retirement benefits
- Requirements/amount of time needed to earn a degree in child development
- Costs of continuing early childhood education at local community colleges
- Availability of community colleges offering early childhood education degree or certification programs

Costs of child care

- Cost of child care by age group
- Cost of child care as a percentage of family income

Supply of child care

- Licensed slots available in region vs. estimated need
- Breakdown of available slots (e.g., infant, toddler, pre-school)
- Slots available during nontraditional hours or for special-needs kids
- Percentage of children ages 0–13 with working parents

Subsidy issues

- Waiting lists for subsidized programs
- Qualifying income level for subsidized programs
- Number of eligible kids not receiving care
- How much higher is the true cost of care than the state reimbursement rate?

Facilities-related issues

- Red tape: the number of permits needed to open and operate facilities, the cost and amount of time to obtain them, etc.
- Number and cost of permits needed for child care facilities compared to animal shelters, alcohol-related stores, or other establishments
- Number of local child care programs that open and close yearly

Quality

- Ratio of kids to providers for high-quality programs at different ages
- Annual teacher turnover rates
- Contrast number of teachers leaving the profession with the number of early childhood education graduates locally

Universal preschool

- Cost estimates
- Number of kids who might enroll
- Number of facilities currently available to handle the potential demand

Conclusion

We hope that after reading this chapter, your head is now brimming with creative ideas to attract the media's attention and help you tell your child care policy story in an effective, compelling way. We're also hopeful that the excitement that often surrounds news conferences, a sharp editorial, clever media bites, and well-prepared spokespeople hasn't clouded one of our earlier and most important points: It's not (just) about the media.

Your media work will be more efficient, more focused, and, most importantly, more effective if you continually keep your policy goal at the forefront of your planning. After all, it's policy improvements, and not simply media exposure, that will ultimately improve the child care landscape. An interested reporter or a great story alone may feel like a success — and on one level it certainly is — but without the clear call for policy change, and without the necessary grassroots support to push for that change, the amplified voice provided by the media might be forgotten and fade away.

So, keep your primary goals in mind, and don't neglect the importance and necessity of well-developed overall, media, and message strategies. Working with the media takes time, sweat, and money. Make sure it's all worthwhile.

In the next chapter, we apply our advice in this book to some common early education policy goals. You will find five sections, each organized around a different policy goal, and each with sample messages, media bites, social math, and authentic voice ideas that support that goal. We hope you will adapt and use these materials to make news strategically and improve child care.

¹ Wallack, L., Woodruff K., Dorfman L., and Diaz, I., *News for a Change: An advocate's guide to working with the media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999.

² Conversation with Anne Arnesen, Wisconsin Council on Children and Families, Fall 2002, and e-mail correspondence, May 8, 2003.

³ Wohl, Faith, "Tales of a Winter Storm," Reprinted by permission. *The New York Times*, March 8, 2001, p22A.

⁴ *The New York Times*, west coast edition. August 7, 2000. Advertisement developed by Coleman Advocates for Youth, San Francisco, CA.

⁵ Nina Sazer O'Donnell, Families and Work Institute. Statement made at Berkeley Media Studies Group roundtable meeting, June 11, 2002, Berkeley, CA.

⁶ For more information, contact David Foster at Child Care Ventures, Santa Cruz, CA, (831) 477-5534.

⁷ For more information, contact the California Child Development Administrators Association, Oakland, CA. www.ccdaa.org.

⁸ For more information contact the National Economic Development and Law Center, Oakland, CA. www.nedlc.org.

⁹ High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, *High/Scope*, July 2003. www.high-scope.org/Research/PerryProject/perryfact.htm.

¹⁰ Marcucci, Michele, "Child care crisis seen posing economic peril," *Oakland Tribune*, February 24, 2001.

¹¹ Siegel, Patty, California Child Care Resource and Referral Network. Statement made at Berkeley Media Studies Group roundtable meeting, June 11, 2002, Berkeley, CA.

¹² Edwards, V.B. (Ed.), "Building Blocks for Success: State Efforts in Early Childhood Education," *Education Week*, Vol. XXI (17). January 10, 2002, p21.

¹³ Munsey and Suppes, *Ballparks*, Fall 2002. www.ballparks.com.

¹⁴ Belsie, Laurent, "Preschools are popping at the seams," *Christian Science Monitor*, July 9, 2002, p13 Features Section.

¹⁵ Social Security Administration, Monthly Statistical Snapshot, March 2003. www.ssa.gov/policy/docs/quickfacts/stat_snapshot/index.html.

¹⁶ Trounson, Rebecca, "UC Regents Increase Nonresident Tuition," *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 2002, p7 California Metro.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics, *2001 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates*. www.bls.gov/oes/2001/oes393093.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics, *2001 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates*. www.bls.gov/oes/2001/oes536031.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics, *2001 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates*. www.bls.gov/oes/2001/oes319096.

²⁰ U.S. Department of Labor: Bureau of Labor Statistics, *2001 National Occupational Employment and Wage Estimates*. www.bls.gov/oes/2001/oes333012.

²¹ Facilities and Rates in King County, Child Care Resources, May 9, 2003. www.childcare.org/community/stats-facilities-rates-kc.htm#Seattle.

²² Moss, Stephen, M.P.P., *The Economic Impact of the Child Care Industry in California*. Oakland, CA: National Economic Development and Law Center, 2001.

Chapter 5

Making the Case: Applying the Frames to Specific Policies

In the previous chapters, we provided a general conceptual framework and child care-specific examples for each layer of media advocacy, including overall strategy, media strategy, message strategy, and access strategy. But, arguments about child care don't happen in a vacuum — they take place in the context of a specific policy debate. So, in this chapter we've chosen several policy areas and developed examples and messages that we hope you can build on in your real-world advocacy work. The policy areas are:

Improving Quality

Universal Preschool

Subsidies for Low-Income Families

Child Care Teacher Development

Facilities Development

For each policy area, we apply the elements of a media advocacy plan that you have read about in this book. We clarify the possible goal and offer sample objectives, tactics, and targets for each policy area. (Be aware that certain tactics may be applicable to multiple objectives, even if they are not listed as such here.) We present media bites based on the five key values frames outlined in our message hierarchy in Chapter 3. We suggest other story elements —

spokespeople, visuals, and social math — that can help you package the issue in a way that will help reporters tell a complete, news-worthy story.

As always, these suggestions are meant to spark your own ideas. We are not child care policy experts, so trust your own instincts on the policy objectives and targets. Due to local variations, not every policy or strategy will apply everywhere. For example, our tactics related to “Universal Preschool” suggest increasing the number of family-, center-, and school-based facilities. In Georgia, though, advocates’ preschool expansion strategy applies only to centers and schools. We are sure that you will find similar variations across the board; don’t let them get in your way. Adapt, customize and expand upon the messages and story elements so they will be most effective for your particular media advocacy efforts. Each element will be most effective if you put it in the context of your current policy aim. Use the examples as starting points for making the case for your policy solution.

Overall, we hope that this section will illustrate how media advocacy can come to life and will inspire you to help build a case for the substantive changes that need to be made for children, families, and our society.

Improving Quality

Strategy

Goal:

All children receive high-quality educational child care that prepares them to excel in school and life.

Sample Objectives:

1. Develop educationally stimulating child care provided by consistent, well-trained, and well-compensated teachers in age-appropriate, engaging settings

Tactic: Provide scholarships and compensation increases to child care teachers when they complete additional education classes

Targets: Local child care planning and funding entities, state policymakers, corporate/business donors, foundations, community college officials

Tactic: Increase reimbursement payments to subsidized programs based on their measurable quality improvements

Targets: State and federal policymakers

Tactic: Increase the quality set aside for federal child care funding

Targets: U.S. Congress, President

2. Increase access to high-quality child care

Tactic: Provide funding to enroll all eligible children in high-quality programs such as Head Start and Early Head Start

Targets: State and federal policymakers

Tactic: Establish a standards-based rating system to indicate the level of accreditation/quality offered by each child care program

Targets: State licensing agency, child care advocates

Tactic: Fund loans and/or grant programs to improve the safety and quality of children's play and learning spaces

Targets: State policymakers, banks and credit union loan officers, local child care planning councils and funding entities

Sample Message:
Applying the Values Frames to Improving Quality

Quality improvements in child care and early education will build a better future for us all, translating into rewarding, engaged communities in years to come. We know that improving quality can be done if we set our minds to it: The U.S. military improved the quality of its early care system because it knew about the payoff for children, who learn in stimulating environments with well-trained teachers. It makes sense, since children's brains develop at such rapid rates when they are young. With so many kids in care, we should do all we can to make sure that care is of the highest quality possible.

Story Elements

Media Bites

“Support Our Youngest Citizens” frame

We all have a stake in making sure that all children get the quality care and education they need. They will grow up to be our neighbors, our doctors, our firefighters, and our political leaders. Quality early childhood education provides our youngest citizens with strong foundations.

“Our Can-Do Spirit Will Get Us There” frame

Our military figured out how to do child care right by investing in quality and universal access. Our government knows how; it just needs to be created for all Americans.

Providing high-quality child care to all of our children is a challenge, but as Americans, we solve big problems — we put a man on the moon — when we are determined and dedicate the resources to do it.

“With So Many Kids in Care, Let’s Do it Right” frame

“The question is not just how many children are going to be in child care. The issue is: How do we make the child care and early education the children are in better?”

“Child Care Is Early Learning” frame

Child care is more than babysitting. It fosters children’s social and educational development. The higher the quality of care, the more children will learn, develop, and grow during this critical period of life.

“Take Advantage of Early Brain Development” frame

The brains of infants and toddlers develop at a fantastic rate. High-quality child care takes advantage of that window of opportunity by nurturing and encouraging their learning and laying the foundation for a lifetime of success in school and life.

Messengers

Kindergarten teachers, who can tell which kids have attended quality preschool by their readiness to learn in the classroom

Law enforcement officials, who can talk about the role of quality care in preventing delinquency and other problems

Parents, who can describe the benefits of quality care on their children’s development

Brain scientists and social science researchers, who can provide evidence of the importance of stimulating, nurturing care

Early childhood education specialists, who can paint a picture of a high-quality care setting

Business leaders, who can say “you get what you pay for” — that quality care for kids now means a quality workforce in the future

Military officers, who can talk about the importance of child care in allowing military parents to focus on their work

Metaphors

Plants can’t grow well if their soil is poor, if the pot they are in is too small, or if they don’t get enough light. Similarly, children can’t grow into healthy adults if the quality of their surroundings is poor, if they don’t have adequate space to run and play, and if they don’t get proper nurturing.

Visuals

Contrast images of a high-quality educational center with a low-quality, less stimulating environment. Show kids interacting with one another or with a teacher as opposed to sitting passively and watching TV.

Social Math/Data

Share clear data demonstrating the success of quality programs (just remember to keep it simple). For example, “Eighty-three percent of Head Start graduates left kindergarten knowing their letters. Basically, Head Start worked. It prepared them for kindergarten.”¹

Speak to the economic “payoff” of investments in child care. For instance, adults born in poverty who participated in a high-quality, active-learning preschool program at ages three and four have half as many criminal arrests, and higher earnings. Over participants’ lifetimes, the public is receiving an estimated \$7.16 for every dollar originally invested.²

Universal Preschool

Strategy

Goal:

Make free, high-quality preschool available to all four-year-olds (or three- and four-year-olds) whose parents want it.

Sample Objectives:

1. Increase the number of quality programs

Tactic: Increase overall program funding levels for child care family homes, centers, and school-based preschools that adhere to quality standards

Targets: State and federal policymakers, governors

2. Increase the number of facilities

Tactic: Offer financial incentives, such as low-interest loans, to build more facilities appropriate for preschoolers in areas that lack capacity

Targets: Banks and credit unions that can fund facilities loans; state policymakers; real estate developers

3. Improve statewide quality standards for preschools

Tactic: Lower student-to-teacher ratios, mandate high-quality curricula, increase training requirements for teachers, etc.

Targets: Department of Education, state policymakers, licensing agency

Sample Message:

Applying the Values Frames to Universal Preschool

Universal preschool prepares our youngest citizens for their roles in our society. Preschool does this by giving children consistent, nurturing relationships in structured environments that help them learn and stimulate healthy development. Providing quality preschool for every child whose parents want it is not an easy task, but it is certainly achievable. Just as we made higher education accessible with the GI Bill, we can build on and improve systems already in place. It is worth our effort, because with so many parents working, and so many kids in care, we should find a way to do this right.

Story Elements

Media Bites

“Support Our Youngest Citizens” frame

“Pre-K is not a partisan political issue. There isn’t a single four-year-old in Florida who is a registered Democrat, Republican, or Independent. But all of them — and the four-year-olds who follow them — will benefit in ways that will make Florida a better place.”³

“Our Can-Do Spirit Will Get Us There” frame

“It took vision to save Yosemite, dig the Panama Canal, build the Golden Gate Bridge, or go to the moon, but we did it. Some believe universal preschool is the next big idea. Count me in as one of those who believes.”⁴

“With So Many Kids in Care, Let’s Do It Right” frame

Two-thirds of all women with preschool-aged children now work outside the home. Universal preschool would ensure that all children receive high-quality education while their parents are working to support their families.

Investing in quality preschool makes economic sense because it builds a foundation for early learning and development for all our children that ultimately saves taxpayers a tremendous amount of money.

“Child Care Is Early Learning” frame

“Quality preschool programs are a key piece of education reform because they reach children at a critical time in their development and prepare them for formal schooling.”⁵

Universal preschool gives children the opportunity to learn from adults who are trained to nurture their social development and eagerness to learn.

“Kids who attend a good preschool program acquire the discipline of the school day. They learn sound concepts, letters, numbers. They’re ready to learn and they’re used to dealing with their peers.”⁶

“Take Advantage of Early Brain Development” frame

Universal preschool is important because children’s brains are growing and developing well before they are in kindergarten.

Messengers

Kindergarten teachers, who can describe how well-prepared kids are more likely to succeed in school when they have attended a good preschool, and who can also attest to the challenge of having one-quarter of their class ill-prepared

Education reform advocates, who can speak about the role of preschool in paving the way for excellence in K-12 education

Parents, who can describe how preschool gives their child new experiences and educational opportunities

Police officers, who see universal preschool as a means of reducing future juvenile and adult crime

Business people, who can speak to the value of preparing the future workforce, or to the need for their employees to have stable care for their children

Metaphors

Vaccinations: Children can't start school unless their bodies are prepared — that's why we vaccinate them. Quality preschool will do the same thing with their minds, prepare them for school.

Visuals

Show kids in supervised, interactive group learning activities.

Social Math/Data

Explain how the investment in child care pays off. For example, for every dollar spent on quality preschool, more than seven are returned to society, by reducing crime and social service costs and increasing tax revenue.⁷

Highlight the learning implications of preschool. For instance, if 100 children emerge from first grade not knowing how to read well, 88 of them will still not read well by the fourth grade.⁸

Acknowledgments

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Child Care Subsidies for Low-Income Families

Strategy

Goal:

Make affordable child care available for all low-income families

Sample Objective:

Increase federal and state funding for subsidized child care

Tactic: Increase federal funding to provide federal child care program subsidies for all eligible families

Targets: State and federal policymakers, governors

Tactic: Expand eligibility levels for federal child care programs (e.g., raise the qualifying income levels)

Targets: U.S. Congress, the President

Tactic: Expand eligibility levels for state child care programs (e.g., raise qualifying income levels)

Targets: State legislators, governors

Tactic: Maintain and/or increase child care subsidy stipends for former welfare recipients

Target: State and federal policymakers, governors

Tactic: Increase levels of reimbursements for providers of subsidized care

Targets: State and federal policymakers, governors

Sample Message:
Applying the Values Frames to Low-Income Subsidies

Making child care affordable for all families will enable us to build a strong, productive society starting with our youngest citizens. It requires political will, but we can do that — we’ve done it before. The stakes are high, so the imperative is strong: Children learn to be cooperative in a stimulating, nurturing environment, and they do better in school when they have had a good start. All children’s brains develop rapidly when they are young, regardless of how much money their parents bring home. The children of working parents should not be penalized because of the high cost of care. Subsidies make sense to keep parents working and contributing, and to give their children the best chance to succeed.

Story Elements

Media bites

“Support Our Youngest Citizens” frame

We must ensure that all of our youngest citizens grow up to be productive, healthy members of society. We can build the foundation for a strong society by ensuring that quality child care is available to all families, especially those with the greatest needs.

“Our Can-Do Spirit Will Get Us There” frame

Finding the resources to meet the child care needs of low-income families will be a challenge, but as Americans we excel at meeting challenges. We created a quality child care system for all military families that we should now extend to other American families.

Head Start proves that we can create a successful, quality early education program. Our challenge now is to fully fund the program so that all eligible children can benefit from this success.

“With So Many Kids in Care, Let’s Do It Right” frame

With so many mothers in the workforce, we have to be sure that their kids are getting the care they need to grow and thrive.

“Child Care Is Early Learning” frame

Child care can help children leapfrog over disadvantages.

Nurturing, educational care from trained teachers means kids have a better shot at later school success.

“Take Advantage of Early Brain Development” frame

We must take advantage of the window of opportunity to enhance early brain development. We must give all children, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, the opportunity to reach their highest potential by subsidizing high-quality child care.

All children’s brains develop exponentially; rich or poor, they all need the stimulating, nurturing environments provided by high-quality care. Subsidies will help make this care affordable to everyone.

Messengers

Low-income parents, who, because of subsidies, have been able to pursue education or employment, allowing them to be more self-sufficient

Upper income parents, who, seeing the benefits provided by their children’s child care, want that same benefit for all children

Kindergarten teachers, who can tell which low-income kids have had strong early learning opportunities and enter their classrooms prepared

Police officers, who see child care (including after-school care) as a means of reducing future juvenile and adult crime

Business leaders, who understand that workforce and marketplace needs of tomorrow depend on preparing children today

Metaphors

Child care as the first step that allows parents to climb the career ladder

Patchwork quilt of inadequate, informal care that parents have to stitch together

Visuals

Create a pie chart showing a middle- or low-income family's expenditures on housing, transportation, child care, etc. Such a chart could then be compared with charts showing the market rate cost of child care as a percentage of family income.

Cut out paper dolls representing the number of children waiting for subsidized care. The scale (e.g., one doll equals 100 children) could be altered to fit the space available (e.g., a wall, a large stage, the steps of a capitol building).

Social Math/Data

Compare the cost of care with a minimum wage worker's salary. For example, the average cost of infant care in Boston is \$12,324, more than a minimum wage worker there makes in a year.⁹

Use creative comparisons to articulate the need for care. For instance, a quarter of a million kids are waiting for spaces in subsidized child care in California. That's the same as having 3,246 packed school buses driving around the state each day with no place to go.¹⁰

List how many employees are able to work because of subsidized care, and list employers who benefit.

Child Care Teacher Development

Strategy

Goal:

Well-trained and consistent child care teachers will be available for all child care settings

Sample Objective:

Improve salaries, benefits, and the training/qualifications of early education teachers to reduce staff turnover

Tactic: Implement scholarships and wage-enhancing programs based on increased teacher education or training

Targets: Local child care planning or funding entities, state policy-makers, corporate/business donors, foundations

Tactic: Provide business skills training for child care providers to stabilize child care supply

Targets: Government business development entities, such as Small Business Development Centers, SCORE (a group of small business consultants affiliated with the U.S. Small Business Administration), etc.; community colleges (e.g. business programs)

Tactic: Expand early childhood development curricula at all institutions of higher education

Targets: Higher education representatives, state legislators, governors

Tactic: Allow child care teachers to enroll in state health care programs

Targets: State legislators, governors

Sample Message:**Applying the Values Frames to Child Care Teacher Development**

Child care is an employment issue with far-reaching effects, not just on the economy, but also on the development of our youngest citizens. A highly qualified teacher, there day in and day out, is a key component of a nurturing and stimulating environment that allows children to develop their minds and bodies at a time when their brains are growing exponentially. Providing decent wages and adequate training for early childhood education teachers across the nation is a big task, but the military did it, and so can we.

Story Elements**Media Bites****“Support Our Youngest Citizens” frame**

Children will more likely develop into productive, caring citizens if they can learn from qualified teachers who are well prepared and compensated enough to remain in the field.

Making sure our youngest citizens are nurtured and educationally stimulated while their parents can't be there is one of the most important tasks in our society. We must invest in the training and salaries of child care teachers so that we attract and retain the best professionals to work with our children.

“Our Can-Do Spirit Will Get Us There” frame

Stabilizing and strengthening our labor force of child care teachers will be a challenge, but as Americans we are used to tackling tough problems. We know the solutions; we just have to fund them.

Since America mastered the assembly line, the skyscraper, and air flight, finding solutions to the child care teacher development challenge is well within our abilities.

“With So Many Kids in Care, Let’s Do It Right” frame

With so many parents depending on child care, our economy depends on maintaining a stable, dependable child care labor force.

How can we expect early education teachers to stay in a field where they earn so little that they qualify for low-income child care subsidies themselves? What would happen to our economy if they all left the field, even for one day?

We don’t allow barbers to start their jobs without formal training. Caring for children is even more important — their teachers need good training.

Child care’s hidden and inappropriate subsidy is the low wages of child care providers. Let’s give teachers the compensation they need to do their jobs well.

“Child Care Is Early Learning” frame

My son didn’t know from one day to the next who his teacher was going to be. That’s not good for his sense of security, confidence, or learning.

You can’t do right by children — or their learning — if their teachers are going through a revolving door, with a new one appearing several times a year.

“Take Advantage of Early Brain Development” frame

The brains of infants and toddlers develop so quickly. Well-prepared early childhood education teachers help make certain that each child reaches his or her potential during this crucial window of opportunity.

Children can learn so much before kindergarten if they have well-trained and consistent teachers to help them explore the world and learn. That’s why we need to increase salaries and keep good teachers in the field.

Messengers

Child care administrators, who can talk about the negative impacts of staff turnover

Employers, who recognize that their employees will miss work if the child care system is unstable or inadequate

Parents, who are thankful for what they have learned from teachers and can attest to the positive impact that a long-term provider has had on their children

Deans and instructors in early childhood programs at community colleges, who can discuss the implications of good training and a solid curriculum on future providers

Teachers, who can talk firsthand about how proper training has helped them work more successfully with children

Former teachers who had to leave the child care field because they couldn't stay, due to low salaries and few benefits

Metaphors

Child care as a profession requiring training, skill, and appropriate compensation just like K-12 teaching, social work, nursing, etc.

A revolving door to describe the out-flux of old teachers and the small number of new teachers entering the field

Visuals

Prepare children to support their teachers at a rally with signs saying, "Support my teachers so they can support me."

Plan a graduation ceremony for early childhood education students. Have preschoolers pass out the diplomas to their graduating teachers.

Social Math/Data

Compare the average wages of a child care provider to other service industries, such as parking lot attendants, pet groomers, trash collectors, and other teachers (e.g., kindergarten teachers). One example: We don't expect dog groomers to work for \$7 an hour; how can we expect that from our children's teachers?

Compare the annual turnover rates in the child care industry with those in K-12 education.

Display the success rates (i.e., low default rates) of home loan programs for K-12 teachers as a means of advocating for the extension of such programs to child care providers.

Present data on the number of teachers who improved their education and training as a result of scholarships and quality- and wage-enhancing programs.

Facilities Development

Strategy

Goal:

Appropriate, high-quality child care facilities are conveniently located for families and all children who need care

Sample Objectives:

1. Provide development and financing incentives to build, expand, or renovate child care facilities

Tactic: Develop grant and loan products (both public and private) to provide affordable financing for child care facility development projects

Targets: Banks and credit unions, loan officers, city councils and local politicians, state policymakers, housing development authorities and organizations

Tactic: Implement developer fees to offset the costs of increased child care needs, and tax credits to reward developers who include child care facilities in their projects

Targets: Planning departments, city councils and local politicians, boards of supervisors, housing and transit officials, developers

2. Adjust land use policies and practices — including zoning, permit processes, and business license fees — to promote facilities development

Tactic: Include specific child care language in county and municipal planning documents (e.g., general plans) to encourage the growth of child care businesses

Targets: Planning departments, city councils and local politicians, boards of supervisors

Tactic: Improve zoning requirements and permit processes related to facility development (e.g., allow child care centers in residential areas and remove high permit fees for small child care businesses)

Targets: Planning departments, city councils and local politicians, boards of supervisors

Tactic: Co-locate senior centers and child care facilities

Targets: Land developers; local, state, and federal housing and transit officials; local planning departments; city councils and local politicians

Tactic: Build child care facilities at public transit hubs

Targets: Local, state, and federal housing and transit officials; planning departments; city councils and local politicians; boards of supervisors; state policymakers

Sample Message:

Applying the Values Frames to Facilities Development

The benefits of quality early childhood education are well-known: It prepares our youngest citizens to take full advantage of their growing brains in an environment that promotes learning, sharing, and caring. The tragedy is that there are not enough quality facilities to go around. Increasing the number of facilities is not that difficult. With a few small steps, we can pave the way for more of a good thing: Child care facilities that are just down the road will put parents on the road to work and children on the road to success in life.

Story Elements

Media Bites

“Support Our Youngest Citizens” frame

Providing quality child care prepares our youngest citizens for their future roles in society. But we can’t prepare all of our children, because there aren’t enough high-quality child care sites.

“Our Can-Do Spirit will Get Us There” frame

Creating appropriate, convenient, and high-quality child care facilities requires creative solutions and new partners.

Businesses have found ways to develop child care for their employees. For example, Ford and the United Auto Workers partnered to provide on-site child care.¹² Other businesses have provided child care stipends as part of their benefits package. We need to extend these models to other settings.

We know how to build the infrastructure to make our community thrive. We’ve done it before; we invested in the roads and housing that are critical to our social and economic infrastructure. Now it’s time to invest in the child care facilities that are also a critical part of the backbone of a strong economy, and ultimately, a strong community.

“With So Many Kids in Care, Let’s Do It Right” frame

With so many parents working, we need to build child care centers in locations that are convenient to housing, transit hubs, and workplaces. This makes sense environmentally and economically.

“Child care has a greater economic impact on business start-up and expansion than interest rates or transportation issues. The availability of quality, affordable child care is a major part of economic development.”¹³

Child care makes an economic contribution to our community. We all prosper when child care prospers. It generates money, jobs are created, and parents can work.

“Child Care Is Early Learning” frame

Kids benefit from child care, not from being driven to and from child care. Let’s get them out of their car seats and into learning environments as quickly as possible, with child care facilities close to homes, workplaces, and public transit.

Renovating or building state-of-the-art facilities isn’t just about making things look good. It’s about providing high-quality learning environments for our children — from the playground to art rooms to story circles.

“Take Advantage of Early Brain Development” frame

Children’s brains grow so quickly at an early age. A quality facility — designed with children’s needs and development in mind — stimulates children’s development.

Messengers

Traffic/transit specialists or officials, who can demonstrate that the proper placement of child care facilities reduces traffic congestion

Bankers, who can profit from facility development loans

Providers who might have had to close their facilities or who have otherwise benefited from loan products or other facilities development resources

Parents, who can describe long hours spent in cars with their children due to the lack of convenient child care facilities, or who experience a positive change after finding care closer to home

Builders who received approval for their developments because they included plans for child care facilities

Neighbors who believe that child care facilities in residential areas are good for local families, and even for residents who don't have children but enjoy hearing kids play

Seniors, co-located in a facility with children, who benefit from contact with the kids

Employers, who receive tax credits for on-site child care

CEOs and human resource managers, who see enhanced employee productivity and fewer sick days as a result of convenient, affordable facilities

Elected officials (e.g., mayors), who see child care facilities as a quality of life enhancement, a community infrastructure improvement, and an economic development measure

Metaphors

Child care is an important part of infrastructure, like housing, utilities, and transportation. Child care is like a road; you can't get to work without it.

Facilities are another link in the chain of housing, transit, and other infrastructures that support healthy, economic robust communities.

Child care is part of the foundation of a healthy economy.

Visuals

An office building with a child care facility at the ground floor to expand on the metaphor of child care as part of the economic foundation

Children in hard hats breaking ground on a new child care facility (See page 98 for an example.)

A community map with graphics of child care facilities and other community resources and infrastructure (schools, roads, etc.)

A graph showing the economic size of the child care industry compared to other local industries (See page 114 for an example.)

Charts indicating corporate tax breaks for other businesses compared to the burdens facing small child care businesses

Graphics demonstrating the burdensome child care facility development steps, the financial requirements involved, and the project time needed

Social Math/Data

Highlight the increasing need for child care in general. For example, the “U.S. Census Bureau data forecasts that by 2010, 85% of California’s work force will consist of parents. But today, licensed child care meets only about 20% of the state’s need.”¹⁴

Provide data on the economic impact of the child care industry (e.g., revenues generated, jobs created, comparisons to other industries, etc.).

Determine the reduction in automobile trips or traffic congestion by locating child care facilities near transit hubs or residential neighborhoods.

Report on tax breaks offered for the expansion of other businesses. Are similar tax or zoning breaks offered for child care?

Conclusion

As you adapt the ideas in the lists above to your particular policy environment, remember these basics:

Stay Focused on Strategy

Know why you are seeking news attention: what specifically about the environment surrounding children and their families do you want to change? What is your ultimate policy goal? What is the process for enacting the policy? Devise your overall strategy first, then figure out the media strategy. Be clear about who your target(s) are and when they change. Anticipate the opposition, and prepare those who have influence with your target. Determine all of this well before contacting reporters.

Cultivate Relationships with Reporters

Pay attention to who reports on children's issues, and don't be shy about introducing yourself. It's not likely that your local news outlets will have a "children's beat" reporter, though if they do, certainly get to know that person. Absent a specialist, look for connections to other beats. What about your policy goal would interest the education reporter? The health reporter? Business? Sports? Read what they write. Suggest story ideas that will appeal to them based on what they've written before.

Understand Newsworthiness

All the story elements listed in the policy examples above are designed to take advantage of what we know grabs journalists' attention. The tenets of newsworthiness are specific and consistent. Learn them, and learn to recognize them in the work you are doing. Take advantage of dates and anniversaries that reporters use to hook news stories. Look for the relationship between what you are trying to accomplish and other local issues in the news. And, don't be afraid of controversy — take advantage of it. The fact is, the changes you want to make on behalf of children are controversial, usually because they require the public to spend money or adjust the status quo. Use the controversy to highlight the benefits of the policy, explain why preparing our youngest citizens matters to every family in the region, whether or not they have children.

Pitch Stories, Not Issues

Humans are storytellers. We respond to drama, characters, plots, and scenes. Learn to describe the drama in your story in personal terms. Make it vivid and visual. Name the stakeholders, say who the winners and losers are in concrete terms. And remember, institutions can be characters too. The military is the hero in the “Can-do Spirit” frame — the entire institution transformed itself to create nurturing environments for children that parents trusted and could afford. Who is the hero in your story? What heroic action must they take? What will the reward be? Where will it all play out?

Do Your Logistical Homework

As you plan your news event, think through the whole day. What stories do you want to see — is everything in place to make it easy for the reporters to tell that story? Are you holding your news event in a convenient location? Is there parking? After your event, will reporters have time to file the story and meet their deadline? Do you have a sign-in table and someone designated to greet the arriving reporters? Are media kits all ready to go? Are the speakers prepared? Will they be available later in the day for phone interviews?

Resist the Urge to Say Everything You Know

Chances are you know far more about early care and education than will fit into any given news story. Be selective and choose strategically. Since there are many “right” answers to general questions about early childhood, choose examples and information that satisfy both your goal and the reporter’s questions. Use your favorite pivot phrases. Every reporter’s question is an opportunity to talk about the policy solution you’re seeking, if you can make the link.

Assess How You Do

Time spent determining your message, seeing that it promotes your values and your specific policy goals, preparing news events and messengers, and delivering the message at opportune moments is usually time well spent. But be sure that it is. Evaluate what you do, refine your frames, learn from your news coverage what works and what doesn’t. Simple reflection among the key players in the effort can help you determine how you’ll approach your next media advocacy effort.

¹ Joel Ryan, National Head Start Association, quoted in Labb, Theola, "Bush Proposal for Head Start Raises Play vs. Learn Debate," *Washington Post*, April 29, 2002.

² High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, *High/Scope*, July 2003. www.high-scope.org/Research/PerryProject/perryfact.htm.

³ Alex Penelas, Mayor of Miami-Dade, quoted in "Florida Governor endorses pre-K proposal," *The Miami Herald*, August 27, 2002.

⁴ Delaine Eastin, Former Superintendent of Public Instruction in California, quoted in "Eastin speaks on 'next big idea': Universal preschool," *San Mateo County Times*, May 30, 2003.

⁵ Leslie Postal, "Color them enthusiastic: Politicians embrace pre-K," *Orlando Sentinel*, October 29, 2002.

⁶ Melissa Tucker, parent, quoted in *Pre-K 4 All*, March 28, 2003. www.co.miami-dade.fl.us/4prek/Testimonials.htm.

⁷ University of Wisconsin study, quoted in Leslie Postal (reporter), *Orlando Sentinel*, 2002. Leslie Postal, "Color them enthusiastic: Politicians embrace pre-K," *Orlando Sentinel*, October 29, 2002. Web site for the study: www.waisman.wisc.edu/cls/index.html.

⁸ Study by the American Reading Association, referenced by *Pre-K 4 All*, website, March 28, 2003. www.co.Miami-dade.fl.us/4prek/pre-k_FAQ.htm.

⁹ "Key Facts: Essential Information about Child Care, Early Education, and School-Age Care," Children's Defense Fund, 1999 Edition, p 42. Minimum wage cite: California Child Care Portfolio, California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, 2001, p 28.

¹⁰ *The California Child Care Portfolio*, California Child Care Resource & Referral Network, 2001, p 7; Thomas "type C" conventional school bus seats up to 77 people, *Thomas Bus*. July, 2003 www.thomasbus.com/prod_school/typeC.asp.

¹¹ Munsey and Suppes. *Ballparks*. Fall 2002. www.ballparks.com.

¹² Greenhouse, Steven, "Ford to Offer Social Services for Workers and Retirees," *The New York Times*, November 22, 2000, p 8C.

¹³ Teresa Thomae, Santa Cruz Small Business Development Center, quoted in Yee, Promise, "Groundbreaking For the Construction of Vista Verde," *Register-Pajaronian*, October 31, 2001.

¹⁴ Orange County Perspective: "The real costs of child care," *Los Angeles Times, Orange County Edition*. September 16, 2001.

Conclusion

*If you don't like the news, go
out and make some of your own.*

Scoop Nisker,
news analyst

On July 23, 2003, a large story on California's budget woes dominated the *San Francisco Chronicle's* front-page. California's budget is wreaking havoc in myriad important programs: higher education, health care, even Department of Motor Vehicle services. Yet none of those were mentioned. The front-page article featured only one program facing the chopping block if the budget was not passed: state-supported child care. With so much at stake, why was child care the leading example of public services at risk?

Child care got the spotlight because local advocates have consistently worked to put it on the agenda, to frame it as a critical aspect of the state's economic infrastructure, and to develop the story elements that help a journalist easily paint the picture of why early care and education are vital. The advocates quoted in this story framed child care as a business and economic issue: "If I ran my shop the way the politicians run theirs, I'd be out of business in a week and correctly so," said Kate Ertz-Berger, executive director of the Contra Costa Child Care Council.

Child care advocates have come a long way. Local news and opinion about child care rarely focuses on the “warehousing” or babysitting mentality; instead news has included many stories about the economic impact of child care, the need for new facilities, the educational value of high-quality early care, and the value to employers of supporting their workers’ need for reliable child care services. Progress has been made in many locales around the country. The remaining challenge is to raise the volume, emphasize values, and hammer away at the action you want your target to take.

Raise the Volume

We know from our studies of the news that substantive stories about early care and education aren’t as plentiful as they could be. This absence should be considered an opportunity. It is always easier to frame than reframe, so if there is little news on early care and education in your region, you have an opportunity to fill the gap with stories that articulate the problem as you see it and highlight your solutions. Make news.

Emphasize Values

Work from the top of the values hierarchy, emphasizing the “Youngest Citizens” and “Can-do Spirit” frames at every opportunity. Activate your core supporters with the message that means the most to them; remind them that you are seeking their support for the particular policy of the moment because how we care for children influences our very democracy. The better beginning we provide for children now, the greater our chance for a society that reflects trust, respect, health, and comfort.

Name the Action

Your message on early care and education should include not just what you want people to *know*, but what you want them to *do*. The precise action will vary depending on your policy goal and your audience, of course, so take that into account. But always name the action, even if it seems obvious. Naming it reaffirms it to those who know and informs those who don't, because not everyone will know what the next logical step is. Tell them.

Our immersion in the field of early care and education, and the many dedicated souls we've met along the way, confirm for us that child care is on an unstoppable trajectory. While the successes may not come as fast as we'd like, they are coming. We hope you will use this book to accelerate and amplify those successes. Refine your strategies, celebrate your victories, and echo your colleagues across the country as they move from one policy front to the next creating the world we all want to live in: one where all children are cared for, nurtured, and prepared to take their place creating our society for the next generation.

Appendix

Related Berkeley Media Studies Group Publications

- Issue 7 - Child Care Coverage in U.S. Newspapers, May 1999. Published by BMSG and available for download at www.bmsg.org
- Issue 11 - Silent Revolution: How US Newspapers Portray Child Care, January 2002. Published by BMSG and available for download at www.bmsg.org
- Issue 12 - American Values and the News about Children's Health, August 2002. Published by BMSG and available for download at www.bmsg.org
- Issue 14 - Making the Case for Paid Family Leave: How California's Landmark Law was Framed in the News, November 2003. Published by BMSG and available for download at www.bmsg.org
- Wallack, L, Woodruff, K, Dorfman, L, and Diaz, I, *News for a Change: An Advocate's Guide to Working with the Media*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999.
- Wallack, L, Dorfman, L, Jernigan, D, and Themba, M, *Media Advocacy and Public Health: Power for Prevention*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1999.

News for a Change and *Media Advocacy and Public Health* may be ordered by contacting the publisher directly at 800-818-7243 or via www.sagepub.org.

Timeline Mapping Public Opinion on Child Care, 1970–2000.
Published by BMSG and available for download at www.bmsg.org



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