Strategic Messaging Toolkit: General Public and Media Message Architecture

The core targeted message at the center of this Strategic Messaging Tool Kit is as follows:

We can't allow our children to pay the price as families and communities struggle in these perilous times. We must support the CTE, (STATE)'s leader in promoting proven strategies for preventing child abuse and neglect.

This message is focused on three primary audiences:
(1) Governors and state legislators;
(2) Influentials – e.g. business & community leaders, national experts in brain research or economics; and
(3) Partners and programs – e.g. child advocacy groups, funded or potentially funded programs.

Prevent Child Abuse America has developed complementary messages to focus on two additional, less-informed audiences:

(1) The media; and (2) The general public.

The following message architecture frames the messaging for these audiences, followed by specific tools and templates that can be used for broad-based public relations and grassroots efforts.

Messages for the Media and the General Public
— Developed by Prevent Child Abuse America
— With Dig Communications

General Public and Media Message Architecture

• Child abuse and neglect prevention is the most critical issue we can address for the long term prosperity of our (community, state and) country.

• Toxic stress from child abuse and neglect impedes healthy brain development.

• Effective child development is effective economic development.

• The future of our country depends on the opportunities we provide kids today.

• We all recognize that children are a priority and now is the time to demonstrate it.
General Public Template Communications Tools

The following communications tools can be used when engaging the general public and media in promoting the importance of child abuse prevention and the critical need to protect funding sources.

Section I. General Public and Media Q&A

Below are some questions that are often raised and some possible responses for advocates to use.

Q. Why should we place funding for abuse prevention programs above funding for other critical programs such as job creation, after school programs, public health clinics or school funding increases (may include any “competing” program funding in the given state)?

A. This issue impacts so many others – our education system can only be effective when brains are being properly developed so children can learn to the best of their ability. We also know the association between abuse and neglect and the resulting health concerns, which become a strain on public health resources. And there’s the connection to the child welfare and the criminal justice systems, all of which contributes to the massive economic impact of our failure to prevent abuse and neglect ($104 billion per year). These are just some examples of why this is the most critical issue we can address for the long term prosperity of our state and country. We all recognize that children are a priority and now is the time to demonstrate it.

Q. But aren’t these just glorified welfare programs being pushed by a liberal agenda that is leading us to socialism?

A. To the contrary, we know that developing healthy children who are ready to learn is one of the most critical economic priorities we can support. It will be a substantial contributor to our country’s ability to compete in the global economy in the long run. When we prevent child abuse and neglect we help children develop into healthy, productive members of society, who are better able to contribute to our economy and our competitiveness globally. And whatever your politics, we all recognize that children are a priority and now is the time to demonstrate it.

Q. Don’t you promote home visitation and other concepts that invade the home and impede the rights of parents to raise their children as they see fit?

A. We promote programs that are proven, through evidence, to reduce incidence of abuse and neglect, thereby helping children develop more effectively, which is core to community and economic development. We believe most parents want to be the best parents they can be and are willing and able to open themselves up to advice, support and guidance that will help them be good parents.

Q. Why should taxpayers today, struggling through a recession, protect spending on a program that’s benefits won’t be felt for another generation, while programs with more immediate benefits suffer?

A. The benefits are not entirely long-term; many of the costs to society involve things like the child welfare system, prosecutions and incarceration, treatment and other short-term costs. Prevention strategies can offset other near-term costs for ongoing challenges ranging from juvenile crime to reduced learning capacity and social problems in schools to chronic health concerns. These are not decades away – they impact our communities and our economy within just a few years.

Q. We all know that the only kind of prevention that works is locking up abusers and throwing away the key; why would we continue to waste taxpayer money when we should be building more jails and hiring more police to arrest abusers?

A. Response programs and prosecution efforts are a critical part of the equation, but our children, families, communities and economy deserve effective, evidence-based primary prevention strategies. We promote programs that are proven, through evidence, to reduce incidence of abuse and neglect, thereby helping children develop more effectively, which is core to community and economic development. The investment in prevention helps reduce other enormous costs – societal and financial – as children grow and develop.

Q. But you can’t prove that prevention programs work, can you?

A. Our prevention work is evidence-based, such as the case with home visiting, which the Promising Practices Network for example, has documented in great detail (promisingpractices.net/programs_topic_list.asp?topicid=4).
Q. These programs are funded through outdated entitlement funding processes that we must eliminate as a state, don’t you agree?

A. We are not the decision-makers regarding different funding mechanisms and schemes. What we know is that this is the most critical issue we can address for the long term prosperity of our state and country. We all recognize that children are a priority and now is the time to demonstrate it. Whatever process is used should ensure that we adequately fund proven, evidence-based primary prevention programs.

Q. What about other prevention and home visiting programs that seem to have far more data and evidence to support their approaches? Shouldn’t we fund those programs over yours?

A. We promote programs that are proven, through evidence, to reduce incidence of abuse and neglect, thereby helping children develop more effectively, which is core to community and economic development. There are a number of various approaches and models that evidence has shown to be effective. What matters is that we all recognize that children are a priority and now is the time to demonstrate it.

Section II. Template Op Ed or Byline Article (<450 words)

As our state faces one of the worst budget crises in its history, there is tremendous pressure on legislators to cut funding and focus financial appropriations on only the state’s most critical programs. Funding is threatened for many meaningful programs that are focused on addressing important issues, but in these challenging economic times we have to make the tough choices to protect the funding streams that have the greatest impact our economy, our society and our future. I am here to tell you, without a doubt, that the prevention of child abuse and neglect is the most important issue for our state to support for the long term prosperity of our state and country.

This issue impacts so many others -- our education system can only be effective when brains are healthy and being properly developed so children can learn to the best of their ability. We also know the association between abuse and neglect and the resulting chronic health concerns, which become a strain on public health resources. And there’s the well established connection to the child welfare and the criminal justice systems, all of which contributes to the massive economic impact of our failure to prevent abuse and neglect (estimated at $104 billion per year).

This is obviously about much more than social policy and doing the right thing for our children – it is a critical economic issue. Even beyond the direct and indirect costs referenced above, we know that developing healthy children who are ready to learn is one of the most critical priorities we can support for our country’s ability to compete in the global economy. When we prevent child abuse and neglect we help children develop into healthy, productive members of society, who are better able to contribute to our economy and our competitiveness in the fast-paced global marketplace.

We promote programs that are proven, through evidence, to reduce incidence of abuse and neglect, thereby helping children develop more effectively, which is core to community and economic development. The investment in prevention helps reduce other enormous costs -- societal and financial -- as children grow and develop. Response programs and prosecution efforts are a critical part of the equation as well, but our children, families, communities and economy all deserve effective, evidence-based primary prevention strategies.

I hope that the legislature will recognize the importance of this issue, and its impact on so many other issues and protect the funding that is so important to our children and our economy.

We all recognize that children are a priority. Now is the time to demonstrate it.
Section III. Social Media Template Tools

Social Media is a critical aspect of any public engagement or grassroots organizing effort. To message effectively we must not only meet influencers and the public where they are at, but seek to co-opt all existing communications networks and platforms.

• Twitter Messages:

Our education system can only be effective when brains are being properly developed so children can learn to the best of their ability.

Helping children develop more effectively is core to community and economic development.

Healthy children who are ready to learn is one of the most critical priorities we can support if we are to compete in the global economy.

Getting prevention right early is less costly to society, and to individuals, than trying to fix things later.

We promote programs that are proven, through evidence, to reduce incidence of abuse and neglect.

Child abuse and neglect prevention is the most crucial issue for our state to support for the long term prosperity of our state and country.

An investment in prevention helps reduce other enormous costs – societal and financial – as children grow and develop.

We need the legislature to recognize prevention's impact on other issues and protect funding that is so crucial to our children and economy.

We all recognize that children are a priority. Now is the time to demonstrate it.

• Facebook and Blog Sample Posting:

While we always seek to partner with the media and influence how they discuss, analyze and report on the work of prevention, we also have the opportunity to rise above the clutter and impact the news cycle through platforms all our own. Two such platforms are Facebook and blogging.

SAMPLE

Getting prevention right early is less costly to society, and to individuals, than trying to fix things later. Prevent Child Abuse XX XX/ CTF promotes programs that are proven, through evidence, to reduce incidence of abuse and neglect, thereby helping children develop more effectively, which is core to community and economic development. The investment in prevention helps reduce other enormous costs – societal and financial – as children grow and develop. Response programs and prosecution efforts are a critical part of the equation as well, but our children, families, communities and economy all deserve effective, evidence-based primary prevention strategies. We hope that the legislature will recognize the importance of this issue, and its impact on so many other issues and protect the funding that is so important to our children and our economy. We all recognize that children are a priority. Now is the time to demonstrate it.
Section IV: Conclusion and Contacts

We hope that you find this manual helpful and that you share with us how you are using it and/or any other tools you develop to address the threat to prevention funding and infrastructure in your home state.

We also want to offer our appreciation for all you do on behalf of children, their families and the communities they live in.

Contact Information

– Prevent Child Abuse America: Ben Tanzer, Director of Strategic Communications, btanzer@preventchildabuse.org

– National Alliance of Children’s Trust and Prevention Funds: Teresa Rafael, Executive Director, trafael@juno.com

About the Authors

This document and the Prevent Child Abuse America public messaging included here was developed by:

– Ben Tanzer (PCA America)

– Jim Hmurovich (PCA America)

The PCA America public messaging development process was facilitated and the message language created by Bryan Specht, of Dig Communications, and a Prevent Child Abuse America National Board Member.