

Safe Children and Healthy Families Are a Shared Responsibility

**A National Child Abuse Prevention Initiative
led by the Office on Child Abuse and Neglect,
Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services,
and Child Welfare Information Gateway**

Reframing Child Abuse & Neglect Case Study

Summary of Project

Name of Campaign: Safe Children and Healthy Families Are a Shared Responsibility

Purpose & Strategy: The purpose of the National Child Abuse Prevention Initiative is to raise public awareness about the prevention of child maltreatment, including ways in which communities can support families and children. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Children's Bureau, Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, and the Children's Bureau's information clearinghouse, Child Welfare Information Gateway worked in partnership with more than 25 national organizations and selected Federal agencies to develop a bilingual (English and Spanish) community resource packet for distribution to State and local organizations during Child Abuse Prevention Month in April and throughout the year.

With the release of the research from Frameworks Institute, national child abuse prevention organizations and related Federal agencies recognized the importance of engaging the public in a dialogue on strengthening and supporting families and enhancing parenting skills, rather than identifying and defining the problem. Building on this national momentum, OCAN and Child Welfare Information Gateway shifted the focus of the community resource packet to a strengths-based family strengthening message promoting parenting and community support.

The packet provides information on strategies to strengthen families and support parents. The packet pages were perforated to enable easy tear out of one-page handouts for families, and an accompanying poster were inserted into the back pocket.

The content of the packet is organized into the following sections:

1. Supporting Families: Preventing Child Abuse
2. Promoting Safe Children and Healthy Families: What Organizations Can Do
3. Promoting Safe Children and Healthy Families: What Individuals Can Do
4. When Children Are Not Safe: Child Abuse and Neglect
5. Organizations and Programs That Promote Safe Children and Healthy Families

The poster provides five tips for supporting children, parents, and families in the community:

1. Support children and parents in your community.

2. Take a positive perspective and focus on what parents and families are doing right.
3. Address the issue by talking about what can be done to support safe children and healthy families.
4. Recognize that parenting can be challenging.
5. Strengthen coping skills and supports for families and children.

Child Welfare Information Gateway also developed an associated website with content pages from the community resource packet, a downloadable logo from the packet, and resources to raise awareness of promising practices for preventing child abuse and neglect.

Goals and Desired Outcomes: The goal of the National Child Abuse Prevention Initiative is to engage individuals and organizations in taking action to prevent child abuse by:

- Recognizing environmental protective factors that strengthen families and reduce the risk of abuse and neglect in families.
- Providing information on family support strategies and programs that promote protective factors in families, and messages that promote family support.
- Involving faith communities, men and fathers, and related health, childcare, and educational professionals in distributing educational resources that support children and parents in the community.
- Providing tips for being a nurturing parent and factsheets on understanding a child's behavior from a developmental perspective.

Tactics: The primary strategy of the National Child Abuse Prevention Initiative is to cultivate partnerships with national organizations for development and dissemination of the packet. More than 60,000 copies of the community resource packet were made available to the public at no cost. Each partner organization that distributed the packet assisted in promoting a consistent call to action and a message of "A Shared Responsibility." The partnerships enabled the initiative to reach a much broader audience including pediatricians, health care workers, child care providers, teachers, and faith leaders who regularly have contact with children and families in their communities.

Messages: The message of the National Child Abuse Prevention Initiative was proposed and agreed upon after considerable input and discussion with partners. The title of the packet, "Safe Children and Healthy Families Are a Shared Responsibility" was developed to promote a consistent message: "Children do well when their parents do well, and families do better when they live in supportive communities. We can all play a positive part."

Target Audiences: There are several target audiences for the packet:

1. National and State organizations that want to share resources with their local member agencies

2. Administrators for children and family services seeking to share information on child abuse prevention to policy makers, media, and the general public
3. Child abuse prevention, child welfare, and related professionals who are interested in providing resources to families and parents
4. Concerned citizens and parents (including Spanish speakers) who are interested in resources and information on raising children.

How the Reframing Research Was Used and Implemented

What elements and recommendations were used from the research? The following recommendations from the Reframing research conducted by the Frameworks Institute were considered in organizing and developing the content for the community resource packet:

- Address the prevalence of the family bubble – The packet focuses on how life situations can create stress in families and how communities can support families.
- Promote a child development frame – The packet provides information about child development and parent tipsheets on handling specific problems or behaviors based on different ages and phases of development.
- Do not begin the communication with child abuse – The packet includes the section “When Children are Not Safe” at the end of the packet and lowered its prominence on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Child Abuse Prevention website.
- Define a role for the community and stress community connections – The packet includes graphics that communicate support and community. The packet also included examples of communities that have made special efforts to support children and families.
- Demonstrate alternatives – The packet provides tipsheets for parents on developmentally appropriate expectations and handling difficult family circumstances (crying, toilet training, chores, setting rules, etc).
- Back up experts with front-line messengers – The packet includes a sample Op-Ed that could have been written by a pediatrician or other front line messenger.

How was this reframed approach different from previous strategies? In the past, the community resource packets focused on the problem of child abuse and neglect. The previous packet was titled “Gateways to Prevention: What Everyone Can Do to Prevent Child Abuse – Child Abuse Prevention Community Resource Packet.” The cover letter described child abuse as a national tragedy, taking the lives of three children every day and affecting millions of children and families each year. The packet used in the past described the national scope of the problem and defined child abuse in the first section. The packet and poster featured five Rs:

1. Raise the issue on the need for programs.
2. Reach out to kids and parents in the your community.
3. Remember the risk factors.
4. Recognize the warning signs.

5. Report suspected abuse or neglect.

With the release of the research from Frameworks Institute, OCAN and Child Welfare Information Gateway shifted the focus of the community resource packet to a strengths-based family strengthening message promoting parenting and community support. In contrast to the past, this year's introductory letter began by recognizing that a nurturing home environment, safe places to play, good medical care, and stimulating schools are some of the many ingredients necessary to help children grow up to be safe and healthy. All families benefit from the help of strong, supportive neighborhoods and communities, and we all play a role in helping children thrive.

Evaluation and Outcomes

The 2005 Community Resource Packet was extremely well received by prevention partners, professionals in local communities that distribute it to parents, and other concerned citizens. Of 32 completed evaluation forms, over half of the respondents rated the 2005 packet as "excellent" and the remainder rated the packet as "very good" or "good." Based on the positive feedback, it was proposed that Child Welfare Information Gateway make only minor updates and revision to the current packet for dissemination for Child Abuse Prevention Month 2006.

Child Welfare Information Gateway also conducted focus groups with Spanish-speaking professionals and families to learn more about their needs and help enhance the usefulness of Spanish-language products including the community resource packet. The focus groups found that Spanish-speaking clients often have limited time to read (due to work constraints) or difficulty reading (due to limited educational backgrounds) and products for this audience should provide clear, concise information at lower reading levels. Other recommendations from participants include creating shorter publications, using more bullets and white space, and using culturally specific visuals and illustrations to engage readers and communicate key points.

To ensure that the momentum continues to build in promoting child abuse prevention through the resources developed and distributed by OCAN and Child Welfare Information Gateway, an evaluation will be conducted to consider whether the resources (packet, poster, and website) are effectively accomplishing the stated goals of the prevention initiative and what other strategies (if any) might be useful in accomplishing these goals. Questions that need to be explored include:

- Is the message communicated through the packet perceived by critical constituencies to be the right message, and one that these constituencies are willing to promote?
- Are the packet and poster the best vehicles to communicate this message to the ultimate target audience, the general public?

Answers to these questions will assist in planning additional resources and dissemination efforts to promote child abuse prevention on a national level in future years.

Lessons Learned

What were some of the challenges faced when implementing the reframing research and how were they overcome? Child Welfare Information Gateway is nationally recognized as the place to obtain information on child abuse and neglect, not necessarily information on strengthening and supporting families. The most visited section of the Child Abuse Prevention website is “When Children are Not Safe” which includes statistics and information on identifying and reporting child abuse and neglect. It will take time, and repeated messaging, for the public to fully understand and recognize how supporting families in the community is an important and valuable strategy for preventing child abuse and neglect.

A service of the Children’s Bureau, Child Welfare Information Gateway consolidates and expands upon the services formerly provided by the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information and the National Adoption Information Clearinghouse.