

# Developing and Sustaining Child Abuse Prevention Programs in Tough Times

This series contains excerpts from an online toolkit developed by the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information in partnership with the Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and other national child abuse prevention organizations.

## PREVENTION FACT SHEETS IN THIS SERIES

Collaborating With Your Community  
Making an Economic Case for Prevention  
Marketing for Prevention  
Evaluating Your Prevention Program  
Funding Your Prevention Program

For more information see the Prevention Initiative website:  
<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/topics/prevention>

# Marketing for Prevention

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WELL-DESIGNED MARKETING PROGRAMS can be pivotal in addressing the problems of child abuse and neglect. Effective communications programs can increase awareness, build community support, change attitudes, teach skills, and reinforce healthy behaviors.

However, local prevention programs that are contemplating a communications effort must answer several difficult questions:

- Who is the best audience for the prevention messages—parents, friends and family, the general public, doctors, school staff?
- What messages will be most effective?
- What methods of communication—posters, displays, print materials, television, radio—will be most effective in reaching the target audience and changing their behavior?

The field of child abuse prevention also may look to other disciplines or assistance, among them substance abuse prevention and public health. These fields have a longer history of using social marketing (the application of advertising, public relations, and marketing strategies in local communities to change behavior) with some success, and their experiences can inform similar efforts for the prevention of child abuse.

Research also can help answer some of the marketing questions. For example, there is evidence suggesting that a positive message—such as encouragement to be a nurturing parent—is more likely to be successful than is a message that blames or frightens, such as one about the civil and criminal consequences of abuse.

But there are no absolutes. The key to changing behavior is to tailor a message to reflect the point of view of the target audience, and each audience has different preferences and needs. Cultural context also is important. Each community defines child abuse and neglect and child protection differently. A marketing plan targeted at a specific audience and focused on the specific behavior you want to address is the only proven route to positive results.



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## Creating a Marketing Plan

The most effective social marketing programs are *targeted*, *local*, and *responsive to the cultural context* of each community.

Different groups have different definitions of child abuse and neglect and different ways of approaching the issue, and they will respond differently to various communication methods. Developing an effective campaign, therefore, requires preliminary research into the behaviors and preferences of the target audiences.

The following are some questions to consider during the planning process:

- What is the specific behavior you want to impact (e.g., shaken baby syndrome, neglect)?
- What specific audience do you want to target (e.g., teen mothers, isolated immigrant families)?
- Will this audience identify with the need to change their behavior? If not, how can you help them identify with your message?
- What objections might the target audience have to changing their behavior? How can you overcome those barriers?
- What promotion methods will be most effective with your target audience? (What media do they watch? Where do they get their information? What spokespeople do they consider to be the most credible?)
- What other organizations or groups in your community target a similar audience or have similar goals (e.g., local businesses and utility companies, religious organizations, service clubs, schools, PTAs, health care facilities, police and fire departments)? How can you work together?

### Examples

*Hearts & Hands: Howard Phillips Center for Children & Families*

[www.arnoldpalmerhospital.org/parents/child\\_health/phillips/index.cfm](http://www.arnoldpalmerhospital.org/parents/child_health/phillips/index.cfm)

The Howard Phillips Center for Children & Families has conducted extensive research into the roots and risk factors for child abuse and neglect in Central Florida. From this research, they developed a social marketing campaign, "Hearts & Hands," to promote a commitment to child abuse prevention and positive parenting skills for parents, caregivers, and the community.

In 2003, Orlando Regional Health Care received a grant from the Children's Bureau to design and conduct a 3-year evaluation to assess the campaign's impact. The evaluation will assess the campaign's ability both to change behavior, knowledge, and attitudes about parenting and to reduce child maltreatment rates.

*Darkness to Light*

[www.darkness2light.org/default.asp](http://www.darkness2light.org/default.asp)

*Darkness to Light* is an award-winning media campaign to reduce the incidence of child sexual abuse through public awareness and education. The campaign and an associated helpline for support and referrals were launched in Charleston, South Carolina, in January 2001.

An evaluation of the *Darkness to Light* initiative by the National Crime Victim's Center at the Medical University of South Carolina clearly shows that the percentage of adults talking to children about child sexual abuse rose from 37.6 percent to 54.3 percent after the campaign aired. *Darkness to Light* began expanding its efforts nationally during the spring of 2003.



## Developing and Testing Messages

Once research into the target audience is complete, the next step is to begin developing messages and materials to reach that audience. When developing messages for child abuse prevention programs, there is some evidence to suggest that appealing to positive motivations and emotions, rather than negative ones, may be more effective.

For example, target audience members may be more likely to identify with messages about positive or nurturing parenting than with those about “child abuse prevention.”

A message focused on the benefits of asking for help—such as reducing stress and raising a happy child—may be more likely to be successful. Messages focused on the consequences of abuse—such as losing custody of a child—may result only in increased anxiety, denial, or fear.

Testing materials with members of the target audience is an essential next step. Testing helps determine whether the target audience is likely to understand the message and how they will react.

At the least, testing allows program planners the opportunity to refine already effective materials. Occasionally, testing helps programs avoid costly mistakes that might lead to failed campaigns.

Questions to consider when developing messages and materials:

- Have you chosen a message with which your target audience can identify?
- Have you tested your messages and materials with select members of your target audience?
- Have you used the results to enhance messages and materials, as necessary?

### Example

*Prevent Child Abuse America/FrameWorks*

[www.frameworksinstitute.org/products/childabuse.shtml](http://www.frameworksinstitute.org/products/childabuse.shtml)

Prevent Child Abuse America has funded research by the FrameWorks Institute to get a more comprehensive understanding of how Americans view child abuse, neglect, and maltreatment in general, as well their reactions to specific reforms and arguments that child policy advocates have advanced. The goal of this work is to evaluate the existing body of research available to *Prevent Child Abuse America* against the findings that emerge from new research, and to identify promising ways to reframe these issues in ways that engage people in prevention, motivate them to prioritize proven policies and programs, and overcome existing mental roadblocks.

## Implementing the Program

The media can be an effective partner in disseminating your message to a target audience. Because the news media have specific criteria for judging what is worth covering, program planners need to frame issues in appealing or compelling ways to get the media’s attention.

Try to find a current news issue, event, or annual celebration (such as National Child Abuse Prevention Month) to use as a “peg” for the story. Be sure to provide a local angle, and remember that the news media like stories with conflict, human interest, or novelty.

Evaluation is the final critical step of any social marketing program. Evaluation not only helps programs improve but also helps them demonstrate their effectiveness to funders and other key stakeholders.

Marketing questions to consider:

- What is your “news hook?”
- Have you considered other sources of free publicity in your community?
- Has the level of media attention to child abuse prevention increased since you began your efforts?
- Are you using feedback from the evaluation (both positive and negative) to improve your program?



## Examples

### *Child Abuse Prevention Initiative*

<http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/topics/prevention/index.cfm>

The Office on Child Abuse and Neglect (OCAN) and its National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information are hosting a series of events and partnerships with the broader child abuse prevention community to raise awareness of child abuse prevention in a much more visible and comprehensive way than ever before.

The Prevention Initiative website is designed to help professionals and concerned citizens promote child abuse prevention activities during *National Child Abuse Prevention Month* in April, and throughout the year. The 2004 Child Abuse Prevention Community Resource Packet—available on the Prevention Initiative website—includes tips and boilerplate materials for working with the media.

### *Cherish Every Child (United Way of Lane County, Oregon)*

<http://cherisheverychild.org>

The *Cherish Every Child* campaign, developed by the *Success By 6® Initiative* of the United Way of Lane County, Oregon, seeks to raise public awareness about the importance of parenting and early childhood wellness.

TV, radio, and print public service announcements emphasize the critical nature of early brain development and provide information about what children and parents need to succeed. The ads also encourage the community to take responsibility for improving the health and safety of all children.



*Examples and resources in this document are informational only and do not represent an endorsement by the Children's Bureau.*

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**National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information  
National Adoption Information Clearinghouse**



*Gateways to Information: Protecting Children and Strengthening Families*