



COMMUNICATIONS GUIDE

Using the Overloaded Metaphor to Talk About Preventing Family Stress that Leads to Childhood Adversity

OVERVIEW AND GOALS

Frame prevention as a public health issue: Childhood adversity and involvement with the child welfare system are preventable problems and solvable problems

WHAT THE METAPHOR CONVEYS

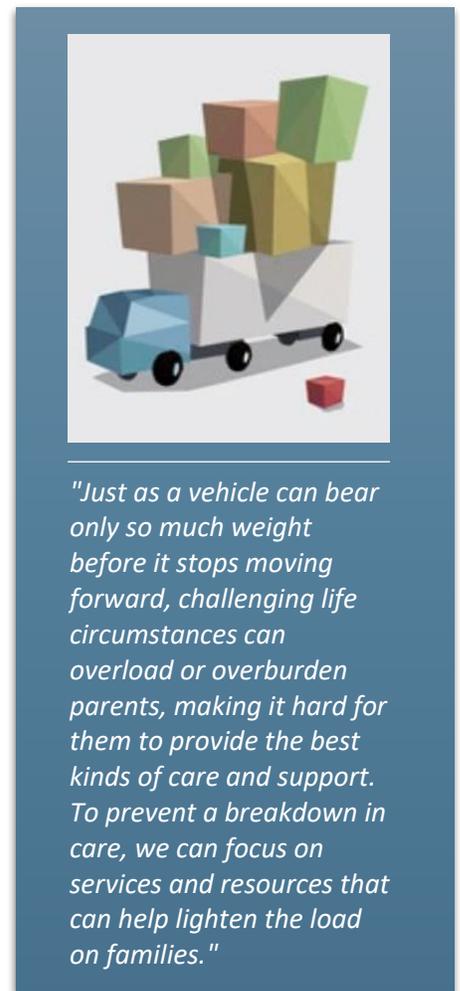
- Advance the idea that social conditions and contexts shape family life and children's experiences
- Emphasize the external pressures on families, rather than family or personal dysfunction
- Offer common sense evidence that suggests that many contextual factors contribute to neglect or involvement with child welfare:
 - economic insecurity—including housing insecurity, precarious employment, unemployment, and low incomes
 - lack of access to childcare
 - inability to receive medical care for a family member
 - unmet behavioral health needs

HOW THE METAPHOR WORKS

The metaphor of an overloaded vehicle helps people understand how external and multiple pressures on families contribute to neglect: These pressures, or layers of stress, can keep parents from functioning as they would like to in caring for their children.

KEEP IN MIND

- Be creative and express this idea multiple ways (e.g., juggling).
- Connect this metaphor to the collective experience of the pandemic where we have all experienced being overloaded or not having access to resources/supports.
- Don't use this metaphor to suggest that people are helpless victims of circumstance.
- Don't use this metaphor to paint a stark, sensationalized portrait of families or communities facing disadvantage.
- When tested, this metaphor was particularly effective with Parents who had experienced childhood adversity themselves because it gave them a way to think about the causes of their parenting styles without shame, guilt, or stigma.



Sweetland, J., "Reframing Childhood Adversity – Promoting Upstream Approaches," FrameWorks Institute, commissioned by the Alliance for Strong Families and Communities-Council on Accreditation and Prevent Child Abuse America. Learn more at alliance1.org/within-our-reach-office.