

The Association of Directors of Public Health Talking about adversity, trauma and resilience

Recommendations from FrameWorks UK

Background

ADPH has received funding from The Health Foundation to undertake a three-year four nations collaboration project focused on Infants, Children and Young People (ICYP) and health inequalities. The project aims to increase engagement across the four nations and bring together key partners across the wider determinants of health – including education, public health professionals, health professionals, children’s services, and social services – to discuss policy, evidence base and share good practice. Resources will be developed as part of the project to support professionals and services to improve outcomes and tackle health inequalities for ICYP. The project will [build on our ACEs work](#) and existing four-country work, including work undertaken by the UK Public Health Network.

Context

This document outlines out the three recommendations set out by FrameWorks UK at our workshop on Tuesday 25th June 2024. The workshop brought together ADPH members and professionals working in the children’s sector to build understanding of the power of framing and provide practical recommendations on how to communicate about adversity, trauma and resilience in ICYP.

Framing refers to the choices we make about what we say and how we say it. It’s what we emphasise, how we explain an issue and what we leave unsaid. This is an important aspect of public health as mindsets guide our thinking. Our task as public health professionals is to strengthen the mindsets that are helpful in achieving social change and avoid those that are unhelpful to us.

FrameWorks UK is a not-for-profit communications research organisation. They work with charities, public sector bodies and other mission-driven organisations to identify the best ways to build understanding and support for social progress and issues like health inequalities and child development.

The following recommendations from FrameWorks UK are designed to help professionals effectively reach the public, community and policymaker audiences by tapping into language and ideas that expand the public’s mental model of how adversity, trauma and resilience works and sparking a sense of collective responsibility for all children.

It is important to note that the session and recommendations draws upon research done in the US as well as the UK because, to date, not enough has been done in the UK.

You can read one of the recent reports from US [here](#) and some older work completed in the UK [here](#).

Recommendations

Recommendation one: Focus your story on community strength, not widespread trauma or crisis

- Lead with the idea that communities have many strengths, and our policies and programmes should promote and preserve strengths.
- Position adversity and trauma as threats to strong, vibrant communities as opposed to talking about them as isolated problems to solve.
- Don't use the scope or severity of the problem to engage people as this causes people to turn away and feel fatalistic about the challenges.

Recommendation two: Harness the power of three - adversity, trauma and resilience

- When talking about trauma, put it in the context of what comes before it and what can come after it to signal that trauma is one possible response to adversity, and that recovery is possible.
- Talking about trauma on its own calls to mind severe physical injury or exaggerated stories of a mildly unpleasant experience ('oh that was so traumatic'), therefore does not carry the meaning that we want it to.
- Focus on explanation to build understanding of how adversity, trauma and resilience work. You can use a 3-part technique to do this:
 - Why we should act (to preserve community strength).
 - What the problem is (preventing adversity and the need to support resilience).
 - What is needed (state the solution you want to see).

Recommendation three: Talk about positive outcomes and collective solutions

- Avoid giving the impression that adverse experiences automatically translate into negative outcomes, or that a trauma response permanently impedes a person's ability to function.
- Balance 'something can be done' and 'this is a real problem, and we need to act now to address it'. This balance of efficacy and urgency in communications creates a can-do spirit.
- Be specific about solutions; give concrete solutions on how we can solve this problem.
- Try to frame the problem as a systemic one and offer solutions that fix conditions, rather than fixing people.

These recommendations have been supported by:

