

The Big Picture

Quick Start Guide to Talking Elder Abuse

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Framing is the process of making choices about what to emphasize and what to leave unsaid. Here's a quick tour of themes to avoid and alternatives to advance.

Instead of:	Try:
Appealing to sympathy	Appealing to <i>Justice</i> : This is about treating older people fairly
Talking about vulnerable populations and dependent victims	Talking about the importance of social connections to empower older people and reduce risk factors
Using crisis-laden or emotional rhetoric to condemn elder abuse	Demonstrating the collective—social and economic—costs of elder abuse
Relying on the public's limited conception of abuse as a two-person relationship	Intentionally expanding the definition of abuse to include self-neglect, sexual abuse, and systemic causes
Focusing only on individual perpetrators and victims	Explaining the underlying social conditions that can increase risk factors
The terms "perpetrators" and "victims"	Try less swampy language like "people who commit elder abuse" and "survivors"
Using data and expert jargon to explain the causes and consequences of elder abuse	Using the <i>Social Structure</i> metaphor: Society is like a building. Let's improve it with support beams that can keep everyone safe.
Providing solutions that emphasize individual responsibility	Providing solutions that emphasize collective responsibility and systemic/policy changes
Descriptions of the problem	Telling a complete story: Why it matters, how it works, and what can be done to address the problem

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