



# EVIDENCE-BASED BIRTH EQUITY MESSAGING

## Summary of FrameWorks Institute® Recommendations

The FrameWorks Institute has provided recommendations and suggested messaging to March of Dimes for talking about health equity for moms and babies. This document provides a summary of that work.

Birth equity advocates have an opportunity to communicate a new, powerful narrative. Crafting this new narrative will require the use of evidence-based framing tools and strategies that have been shown to help communicators encourage deeper engagement and build support for the types of systems changes that will improve birth outcomes for all. The chart below summarizes the techniques and tools that communicators can use to expand the issue's constituency base, spark productive dialogue with the public and policymakers, and build support for meaningful systems changes.

Key Concept to Explain:	Why It's Difficult to Communicate:	What Helps:
Birth equity advocates argue that disparities in birth outcomes matter to everyone--not just to the groups experiencing those disparities.	The public assumes that there are <i>Separate Fates for Different Groups</i> and that while poor birth outcomes are unfortunate, they have little bearing on the neighborhoods or communities in which children and families live or on society as a whole.	Use the value of <i>Maximizing Human Potential</i> to express the idea that our shared civic, social, and economic wellbeing depends upon everyone's contributions and participation.
<p>Sample language: <i>Our country's most important resource is human potential: the talents, skills, and energy that all people bring to society. We should do everything we can to make sure that children's potential is available to our communities. That begins with ensuring that every baby has a healthy start in life.</i></p>		

Key Concept to Explain:	Why It's Difficult to Communicate:	What Helps:
Birth equity experts highlight the dynamic interplay between biology and environment and emphasize the power of intervention to change context, alter biology, and improve birth outcomes.	The public struggles to appreciate how social and environmental conditions can shape birth outcomes via epigenetic mechanisms.	Experts can emphasize the dynamism of biology using tested metaphors such as the <i>Signature Effect</i> and <i>Toxic Stress</i> .
<p>Sample language: <i>Our unequal society has negative consequences for public health, including higher rates of Black women dying from pregnancy complications and giving birth prematurely. Institutions like education, housing, policing, tax systems, and more channel more stressful situations into Black communities. Chronic and severe adversity floods the body with dangerous levels of stress hormones, a condition known as toxic stress. This is a driving factor behind the higher rates of Black maternal mortality and premature birth. To save lives, we need to acknowledge that racism gets "under the skin" and create solutions that help to alleviate toxic stressors. One solution is the preventive and supportive care provided by group prenatal care. Studies show that it can reduce preterm birth among Black women by as much as 41%.</i></p>		

Sample language: *With a new understanding of how genes work, scientists are discovering exactly how social factors can cause health disparities across groups. Genes are like packages of instructions for the body – but they require an authorizing sign-off from the environment to be carried out. This “signature effect” begins at the earliest stages of life. For example, when a woman is exposed to high levels of stress during her pregnancy, this signs off on genes that affect the baby’s metabolism. The signature effect may explain why complications in pregnancy are associated with higher rates of metabolic and heart disease in adults.*

Key Concept to Explain:	Why It’s Difficult to Communicate:	What Helps:
<p>Birth equity advocates focus on redressing structural racism and social determinants through systems-level initiatives to improve maternal and infant health.</p>	<p>The public has an incomplete understanding of the role of race, racism, and structural factors in creating disparities in birth outcomes. They tend to blame individual mothers for poor birth outcomes.</p>	<p>Explain the social rather than behavioral causes of disparities in birth outcomes by paying close attention to attribution of responsibility. Explain how social and structural factors contribute to disparities.</p>

Sample language: *Given that rates of preterm birth are significantly greater for Black infants than for white or Hispanic infants, we must take steps to ensure that all children have the healthiest possible start in life.*

Sample language: *Public health researchers have been taking a closer look at birth outcomes, data that indicate how well our system works to give babies a healthy start. Such data identify the effects of the health environment, which includes factors like access to quality medical care, housing, transportation, safe neighborhoods and nutrition. The national statistics paint a troubling picture: America’s health environment begins to negatively affect Black babies from the earliest stages of life. For instance, preterm birth - which comes with serious health risks - is about 50% higher among Blacks than whites. We must devote more resources to ensuring good health environments for everyone.*

Key Concept to Explain:	Why It’s Difficult to Communicate:	What Helps:
<p>Experts emphasize that there are practical steps we can take to reduce birth disparities and improve outcomes for children, families, and communities.</p>	<p>Members of the public assuming that disparities are a “natural” feature of the social world and that the genetic factors that influence birth outcomes are predetermined and unchangeable.</p>	<p>Communicators should always highlight solutions.</p>

Sample language: *By taking concrete, commonsense steps to improve birth outcomes, we can ensure that all children have the healthiest possible start in life. March of Dimes is working to expand solutions we know will make a difference.*

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