

# The ECE Advocates' **TOOLKIT**

## Effective Communications and Messaging

by the  
**Child Care Law Center**

June 2021



[childcarelaw.org](http://childcarelaw.org)

# Table of Contents

---

Introduction	3
From ASO Communications: The Fundamentals of Early Childhood Framing	4
Child Care Law Center Advocacy Communications	6
ASO Communications: Lessons & Best Practices	8
Advancing Racial Equity in Child Care Communications	12
Lightbox Collaborative: The Fundamentals of Messaging	17
Sample Messages for Specific Organizations and Audiences	19
Situational Narrative for Child Care During COVID-19	21
Additional Resources	22
Conclusion & Acknowledgements	22



# Introduction

---

**In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, Californians, and indeed Americans, better understand how essential child care is for strong, thriving families and just communities.**

Both federal and state lawmakers have increased government funding allocations to the child care sector and, broadly, the public has responded favorably, according to opinion polls.

**Yet many of our neighbors and civic leaders do not fully understand that a child undergoes significant development between the ages of zero and three.** During this time, nurturing relationships form the foundation for a child's life. Voters still do not consider early learning on par with K-12 education. State and federal legislators' approval of funding for child care has slowly grown, but remains low in comparison to the need. And voters still reject or only narrowly pass local measures in support of child care. The result is that we are denying a strong start in life to children of color, children with disabilities, and to children whose families face challenges due to economics or immigration status. Collectively, we've made child care a privileged benefit, with access dictated by social injustice and limitations.

In response to this persistent problem, the Child Care Law Center, with support from the Stein Early Childhood Development Fund, set out to share with Los Angeles-based early care and education advocates research-based concepts in communications theory. In this work we were assisted by leading experts in the field: cognitive linguist Anat Shenker-Orsorio of ASO Communications, and strategic communications firm Lightbox Collaborative.

Over the course of two years, these communications professionals engaged more than sixty early care and education advocates at thirty organizations in Los Angeles. Participants took part in a daylong workshop: *"Making Our Best Case for California's Kids,"* where Ms. Shenker-Orsorio opened their eyes to new ways of reaching potential partners, supporters and policymakers who are *"sitting on the fence."* In the second phase of the project, Child Care Law Center invited five early care and education organizations to work with Lightbox Collaborative to develop a *"mini message platform"* to address a current communications need.

This Communications & Messaging Toolkit shares the most salient points from these experiences. We hope you find its takeaways and guidance helpful as you educate and inspire action to support child care, education, and nurturing experiences for young children, their caregivers, and their families.

# From ASO Communications: The Fundamentals of Early Childhood Framing

---

In our ASO workshop and in consultations with Lightbox Collaborative, we learned about the **importance of framing**. The Frameworks Institute, a leader in working with nonprofit organizations to communicate more effectively describes frames as “**mental shortcuts to make sense of the world**.” These mental shortcuts are based on what we already think and believe. Like a frame around a TV or piece of art,

## Framing focuses our attention



For instance, I say, “I went to a restaurant last night.” You think of food. Food goes into the frame. A single word triggers an entire host of associations. We unconsciously place incoming information into one of our frames – good or bad, safe or dangerous, important or unimportant. That frame influences what we think and how we feel about the issue. For this reason, as Frameworks Institute says, “understanding which frames serve to advance which policy options with which groups becomes central to any movement’s strategy.”

## Too often, we let our opponents set the frame and then try to

In the realm of early care and education, this often looks like an economic argument for the importance of child care. “We should educate all children equally so they can go on to be productive workers as adults.” In this frame, child care is an “investment” that pays off later in worker and economic productivity (and in the reduction of expensive negative outcomes such as use of public benefits or incarceration). This “return on investment” frame puts the focus on children’s future potential, **instead of on their happiness and well-being in the present**.



Yet the economic frame is not the most effective for attracting people to our cause. The best frame for child care, as it turns out, is our individual and collective sense of identity. We should care for children because it's the right thing to do. There's a compelling moral argument for the nurturing and equal care of all children, full stop. We care for children because we are good people. Most of us who are parents would agree that all children deserve the same standard of care we want for our own kids. Many of us believe that how we treat the most vulnerable in our community is a measure of our humanity and our society as a whole.

There will be those who hold a hard position for or against a certain issue, but many of us don't have an opinion or can be swayed. The right frame, rather than any fact, is what's necessary to change minds. Most residents of Los Angeles County already believe child care is important; our challenge is attracting them to advocate for it as a social justice issue.

We do this by drawing on the warm feelings children evoke in our hearts. Child care is a process based in trusting relationships. It is not a commodity.

## The best frame

for child care advocacy

is the right of all children to be seen, nurtured,  
and raised with dignity and love.

We should care for children  
because it's the right thing to do



# Child Care Law Center: Advocacy Communications

---

**Child care is essential for strong, thriving families and just communities. Enriching, safe care should be available to all children regardless of their mental or physical needs, race, ethnicity, language or family income.**


But for too long, policymakers have allowed inequitable policies to exist, and young children, families and child care providers have been harmed as a result. The Child Care Law Center addresses the systemic and racial injustices embedded in child care law and policy. We inspire advocates, supporters, constituents and policymakers to demand that our laws deliver on making child care more inclusive and just.

Child Care Law Center has engaged with ASO Communications and the Lightbox Collaborative since 2017 with the goal of converting more Californians from supporters of child care in theory to supporters in practice through grassroots organizing and advocacy. When it comes to early care, those most impacted by the issue—parents and guardians of young children—are the least able to take time out of their daily lives to coordinate a protest, lead a letter writing campaign, or testify in the state legislature. We know we must mobilize others, including parents of older children or future parents, to stand up for the experience and growth of today's infants and toddlers.

**The problem is not that Californians do not believe every child should have excellent child care. The problem is that not enough of them actively advocate for it.** By improving the framing and language through which we convey the importance of early childhood experiences, Child Care Law Center has been able to draw new advocates to the opportunities our organization facilitates, including community legal education and policy, and legislative development.

**We are strong advocates of women and women-of-color-led home-based child care because, when we resource them appropriately, they are the very best place for our children to grow: nurturing, play-based, and culturally competent.** Child Care Law Center has resisted efforts to address inequities in childhood education by expanding the K-12 system to ever-younger children. Instead, we staunchly defend the rights of families to have fully resourced child care options that include licensed homes, centers, and family-friend-or-neighbor care in their communities. We humanize child care providers, parents, babies, and toddlers with asset-based language that connects improving their experience and increasing their resources to realizing racial and economic justice.





All child care providers should be treated fairly whether they are a large center, family child care home, or family, friend or neighbor. Every family is different, and they should have the right to choose the type of care that best fits their needs

For women, especially in communities of color, who have been denied resources and social capital, becoming a valued child care provider can be a viable economic opportunity and door to entrepreneurship

Every child has the right to grow and learn. Enriching, safe care should be available to all children, regardless of their family's income, mental or physical needs, race or ethnicity, or the language they speak

We prioritize the needs of low-income families and communities of color, who have long been excluded from society's resources. Righting the wrongs of the past is necessary to ensure a brighter future for everyone

Our work ensures that policies are just and equitable to everyone involved in child care – children, families, and providers. Nobody should be left out or left behind

When providers are valued, they are able to support their own families. They can view their jobs as careers, with stability and growth for themselves and the children under their care

# ASO Communications: Lessons and Best Practices

---

## Tread with caution in the ECONOMY frame

Advocates often default to “selling” their solutions on the basis of future financial gains or staving off future losses or expenditures. While practical and reasonable sounding, these arguments reinforce the notion that what matters most is Gross Domestic Product — not people.

**Avoid:** focusing solely on the economy, implying kids are products—  
“invest in children”  
“doing [X] will grow/help the economy”  
“this is best for the economy”

**Avoid:** conflating the value a person produces with amount paid—  
No: “child care providers earn minimum wage”  
Yes: “child care providers are paid minimum wage”

**Use sparingly:** referencing only children’s future potential

Fine: “improve their chances for better life outcomes”

Better: “improve their experiences today for better outcomes tomorrow”

Fine: “early childhood education boosts school readiness”

Better: early education nurtures children today and sets them up for a better tomorrow

**Embrace:** insisting people’s needs hold primacy

- do right by our children
- all children/people have rights
- doing [X] will improve people’s health and wellbeing
- this is best for California

## Child Care as Commodity vs. Important Process/Relationship

Be cautious about implying child care is a product, when in fact it’s a highly nuanced and specialized process, that occurs at every moment that the care is underway.

YES

- having your child in care
- providing stellar care for all children
- ensuring children are cared for

NO

“getting child care”  
“out of reach”  
“have/don’t have child care”



In our morally grounded “all children deserve care” frame, the lived experience of the child today has value. Child care is not a mere input for better odds of a future gain (better performance in K-12 school and later success as a worker or professional).

When advocating for the rights of child care providers, ensure the human actions of child care remain in view and that you portray providers as three-dimensional people with their own families and home life. Only focusing on their work life, while seeming to professionalize them, actually makes their humanity and rights less legible to your audience.

## CONSIDER USING

**“child care provider” or  
“person who provides care”**

**rather than**

**“child care worker.”**

This “provider” terminology helps establish professionalism and human needs of caregivers.



## Active Constructions and Naming those Responsible

---

Signal that people created current conditions and can alter them. By convincing your audiences that people making intentional and at times problematic decisions are behind the outcomes we witness, you make the case that other outcomes are possible. If we do not insist that current problems are person-made, we can't expect to prove our case that human beings could fix them:

### YES

**elected leaders refuse to  
provide resources for [x]**

**leaders decided to limit [X];  
official chose to allocate tax funds  
to [Y] and cut [X]**

**we choose to hold certain kids  
back from their full potential**

### NO

`"children do not  
have child care"`

`"[place] faces  
a critical shortage  
of [X]"`

`"disparities in  
learning emerge"`

Don't leave open the interpretation that parents are to blame for outcomes you decry:

**lawmakers deny children from  
struggling working families  
the advantages of more affluent kids**

`"low income children  
arrive at school behind  
more affluent kids"`

Make your demands clear and with consequences for lawmakers:

**Lawmakers must ensure [X];  
all California's children  
must have [x] by [year]**

`We must do more;  
we must ensure  
all children have access;  
much more can be done`

# Campaign Basics: Engage the Base, Persuade the Middle, Reveal Opponents as Outliers

---

Once you've named the problem and who is creating it, it's easier to proceed with a messaging campaign. **Remember, there are people who we cannot convince. Don't moderate your message in order to swing those not in the middle.** It's our job to provide an appealing, morally cogent alternative for the fence-sitters.

Isolation of the opposition is a by-product of effectively mobilizing your base to repeat the (positive, asset-based) message and persuade those in the middle who can attach to messages both progressive and regressive. Milquetoast messages do not get repeated and do not differentiate our beliefs from those who do not agree with us. A positive, clear message gets passed like a baton from hand-to-hand, person-to-person.

Most people can and do move in their thinking. To activate the "middle" we need to set the agenda around a specific campaign and issue. We don't take the temperature, we set it!

## Convincing our colleagues about the importance of "minding our words"

---

Of course, it's often hard to pinpoint exactly who is behind some bad deed or outcome. Or it damages your outreach to the lawmakers you need on your side to do so. There are ways you can convey a problem is person-made and therefore remediable, without necessarily spelling out who did what to whom. And, with government, take caution before pointing the finger too directly.

Words like "manufacture" "create" "place" and "bring," as in "tax dodgers create hardships for California's kids," tell audiences bad things didn't come from nowhere.

Another approach is to name particular politicians.

Be especially careful about characterizing government writ large as the source of the problem. "Instances of government inaction and even complicity in unacceptable wages and conditions for child care providers abound — must be stopped." However, because you need people to see government as the solution, it's problematic to fan the very present anti-government sentiment in our society. Emphasize lost opportunities, bad choices, historic wrongs, rather than blanket condemnations.

Sometimes, as we change our messaging, we are met with resistance. To improve internal alignment in the early care sector, we can use the same framework (engage the base, persuade the middle, reveal the opposition as outliers).

For example, with regards to not using the "return on investment (ROI)" message when talking about kids, folks who want to use alternatives to ROI messaging are your base, and those that still use this type of messaging because its "always done been done this way" are the middle. Encourage your allies on the topic to be the base, to repeat your message, and to join you in convincing the middle.

In terms of moving away from the "invest" frame more broadly outside of each of your specific organizations, we will accomplish change in increments. Remember that other organizations outside of the early care sector may use diverse messaging depending on their role. We can coordinate with them to accomplish our goals together.

## Advancing Racial Equity in Child Care Communications

In the realm of child care and early childhood education, the idea of "school readiness" can inadvertently fall into the commodity/productivity frame, or produce pejorative notions of immigrants and people of color. Lightbox Collaborative discusses this further in this toolkit. We often use terms such as "gaps" "disparities" and "lack" in referring to the development of Black and Brown children.

For example, advocates will say:

Achievement gap(s)  
Health disparities  
School readiness gap/disparity

without any indication of who is responsible, or acknowledging that the implied standard is that of our dominant culture.

**They should instead consider constructions that illustrate the experience of the child or student, and such as:**

**Barriers to achievement/school readiness;  
Intentional obstacles to health/well-being/experiential learning**

In the early care and education space, we also frequently use terms such as:

Often, these terms are used in reference to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC).

Poverty;  
Child poverty;  
Poor;  
Low income;  
People living in poverty

**We should instead try:**

**Struggling to make ends meet;  
Working to provide for family**

People do not self-identify as poor and poverty casts them as passive. “Struggling” and “working” brings attention to people’s efforts.

In all of our messaging, we should explicitly name race when it is present. If current policy and law is disproportionately hurting a specific group, by all means say so. And make clear how people of all races must be involved in solution making. When we name racism and the harmful effects of systemic racism perpetuated by people in power, we are recognizing racism as a shared societal problem. Instead of making racism the problem for people of color, we are shifting to individual and collective responsibility.



# Unnecessary Hedging

Child care advocates often sell themselves short in describing what they do or what they've accomplished!

seek to, work to, strive to, dedicated to,  
fighting to, whose mission is to ...

Avoid extraneous phrases like

These diminish your achievements and, with this, decrease desire to affiliate with your organizations and campaigns. Although it will feel like bragging or claiming singular credit for group effort or something still underway, it's critical to call yourselves the winning team if you want to recruit new players. Thus an organization that "works to ensure" would now simply "ensure," another that "seeks to educate" would just "educate."

"Access to"

is another phrase that frequently appears among early care advocates. This hedges not your efforts but the desired outcomes. When possible, eliminate this phrase and cut right to the outcome or program you want to deliver.





# Getting Specific: Best Practices for Developing and Promoting Campaigns

---

We detail **Lightbox Collaborative's GAME—Goal, Audience, Message, Engagement**—tool below. Know what your goal is for any given communication, and "raising awareness" is not a goal. Next, you must consider your audience, and "general public" is not an audience. Often, the press or lawmakers need to be the focus of specific communications or engagement.

When pushing legislation, send notes/social media posts that praise and thank state senators and assembly members as well as proponents of the legislation. Positive posts also profile and define the issues.

Develop relationships with members of the press before you need them. Write to them to praise or comment on a story. Create moments that the press can cover, giving them access to a setting in which your "story" is happening. Offer an unlikely or surprising source for an op-ed or profile. Thank reporters and repost stories once they are published.

## The Brownie Mix Example: Make Your Case Appealing and Asset-Based

When we look at a box of brownie mix, you don't see a complicated recipe on the front, you don't see a picture of the bag of dried powder that's inside it—you see a luscious, fudgy, hot-from-the-oven brownie.

So when you're selling the concept of nurturing, safe child care, you should lead with adorable babies, toddlers, and children and all the joyful, sweet moments of their growth and development. Too often, advocates are emphasizing policy rather than the outcome of that policy.

Of course, it does take 1 ¼ cup of water and a single egg to make the recipe, but those instructions and stipulations are not how you sell a box of brownies.

For example, don't focus on the taxes needed to support child care, but rather what those taxes will buy. And don't focus on the obstacles and the problems, but on the past wins and how it's within our power to provide child care to each and every youngster in our community.

Child care advocates tend to share too much detail about the problem using technical terms and language: the number of subsidized child care slots, family income thresholds, reimbursement rates for child care providers. These are policy problems/issues, and not appropriate topics when trying to compel or convert a specific audience to the side of supporting child care.

Child care subsidy

For example, advocates will say:

**We should instead consider phrases such as:**

**Child care support;  
Support care for all kids;  
Ensure child development.**

“Subsidy” implies a special extra just for some and calls to mind the “deservingness” issue. In reality, all children deserve quality care and as a state and country, we bar certain families from attaining it. Of course, in certain work contexts, you will discuss subsidies, but you should not use the word in contexts where you are aiming to convince or convert audiences to the value of child care.

**Remember:**

**Don't take your policy out in public!**

Our challenges are enormous, that's true. But people are motivated to participate in something good. Stay grounded in the moral imperative of caring for all children and show how it's possible to realize that goal. Point out that not supporting children's growth is an active choice that people have made and that it is within peoples' power to change that. Cite past successes.

And remember, people are drawn to the opportunity to create good. Not just diminish something bad. Our choices are commonly more about our own self-identity than about the issues themselves. When you illustrate the path to success and articulate the moral argument, it allows people to join you in being a good person and doing the right thing. To that end, avoid arguments stated in the negative, i.e. “End Childhood Poverty,” “Stop Asian Hate,” “Defund the Police,” etc.

Cognitively, these negative messages tend to draw more attention to the subject, so childhood poverty, Asian hate, and the police are actually what dominate, not their alternatives. There has to be a beautiful tomorrow.

**Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.  
did not have a complaint,  
he did not have a bullet point  
policy list,**

**he had a *dream***



# Lightbox Collaborative: The Fundamentals of Messaging

---

## About Messaging

Effective messaging makes an authentic connection with audience members and serves as the external expression of an organization's mission and vision in a way that resonates with those key audiences. It begins at the most emotionally resonant level and fills in supporting details only after expressing the vital purpose of the work and describing the impact you have on people's lives.

When you are deeply entrenched in the nuances of a complex organization, it is easy to take shortcuts and leave out important pieces of your story because you “get it” and have internalized it so deeply. It's also easy to fall into the habit of leading with activities or demands, which is akin to leaving out the beginning and middle of the story and heading straight to the end. As you work to improve your communication, remember the key principles of meaningful messages outlined below:

---

### Perception over reality.

A person's opinion isn't based on reality – it's based on their perception of reality. Listen to your audiences' perceived reality, then craft your messages to resonate with it, and use these new messages to reshape perception.

### Emotion over logic.

Logic supports our emotions and is used to justify our decisions, but research indicates we usually apply logic only after we've made our emotional decisions. Logic plays a part in decision-making, but emotion is always the main ingredient. Emotions will get people passionate about your cause. Appeal to your audience's emotions first and you'll win them over.

### Brevity over precision.

You don't need to accurately describe every single part of your program in your messaging. And in a world where we've grown increasingly accustomed to sound bites and 280-character tweets, you won't have enough attention or time to do so. Use the few moments of attention people give you to convey what is essential about your organization.

### Values over features.

Above everything else, your work is founded on values. Don't talk up programs and services that may not matter to your entire audience; talk about the core values behind your efforts– values that your audiences share. Vibrant language over jargon. Whenever possible, use clear and concise (and emotional!) language to make sure your audience can understand and connect with your message.

### Actions over magic words.

Smart messaging expresses action; messaging isn't magic, and it can't paper over strategy or execution that's missing in action. People can tell if your actions don't line up with your words.

### Your audience over you.

Chances are, you are not the audience you need to influence. You and your closest stakeholders are immersed in the work and already bought in. Your messaging is crafted to help you reach people who are not yet engaged. It needs to resonate with their perspective and answer for them, “So what?”

# Strategy: The GAME Plan

---

Presented with an intriguing opportunity/tool/campaign tactic?  
Here are the three powerful questions to ask before deciding to go forward:

- 1 What's the message it will carry?
- 2 To whom?
- 3 and to what end?

With those power questions, you've just helped your colleague create a solid Communications GAME Plan:

## Goals

What are you trying to achieve through communications? And how will you know you've achieved it?

## Audience

Who needs to be engaged toward the above goal? Who has the power to get it done? And who influences them?

## Message

What are we saying to move the audience toward the goal? Is the call to action as clear as can be? Does the message anticipate – and overcome – potential obstacles to engagement?

## Engagement

What channels and tools will we use to engage the audience in conversation about our message toward the goal?

---

Often, folks want to start with engagement, because it's the most tangible element of a communications effort. But successful engagement starts with solid strategy. The GAME Plan is a practical, intuitive approach to ensure all your organization's communications efforts are aligned around smart strategy.

## Avoiding the Racialized Pitfalls of “Quality” Child Care and “Investment”

The term “quality” generates a lot of discussion in the early childhood sector. The Amplifying Our Voices guide (linked in the resources) explains why: “...advocates and providers are raising concerns that the term can ignore the cultural competencies and value of care providers who have not been deemed ‘high-quality’ in the past, namely non-licensed care providers (who are more likely to be people of color, be linguistically diverse and have lower incomes).”

We know that “quality” is a term child care advocates use often, and that it can be a shorthand among key audiences. We encourage you to instead use descriptions of what you mean when you say quality. These terms might include “nurturing,” “safe,” “well-resourced,” “developmentally appropriate,” “play-based,” and “fun.” This will broaden the range of audiences who can see themselves in your messaging.

A recent poll by LA Partnership and UNITE LA found that 68% of “civically engaged residents” view child care as a social justice issue and 76% see funding for early learning as promoting racial justice. In the situational narrative we speak to those values.

# Sample Messaging for Specific Organizations and Audiences

---

A platform of key messages helps to keep the focus on the values underlying your efforts, the problem you're aiming to solve, the solutions you're advancing, and the concrete ways your supporters can make a difference.

One tool we use to develop campaign messages comes from the Opportunity Agenda (linked in resources). The tool's components are as follows:

**Values messages** explain the why. They tap into deeply held and shared values, answering the question why should your audience care? Importantly, during a time when so much is shifting, your values stay steady. Values messages allow audiences to hear – and relate to – your point of view.

**Problem messages** present a conflict or threat to your values. They articulate the problem that your effort intends to solve, and outline your motivation for action. These messages use statistics and facts carefully, and show how the problem hurts us all.

**Solution messages** support our vision for a more positive future once this problem is dealt with. Solution messages tap into a spirit of “can-do” ingenuity. They also assign responsibility, making it clear who needs to do what.

**Action messages** offer an action your audience can picture themselves doing. The more specific an action message, the better.

---

## Case Study

The following messages are crafted for a grassroots, neighborhood-based nonprofit that is organizing local residents to increase resources for child care providers and families with infants, toddlers, and young children.

---

## Values Messages

- The first years of life are the best time to ensure a strong future for all of Los Angeles' children.
- Whole-child-focused, affordable child care is a social justice issue.
- All families regardless of income, nationality, or race should have the resources and opportunities they need to thrive.
- Our world is brighter when our children are able to learn and grow no matter where they live, the color of their skin, or their mother tongue. Our communities are stronger when every child is healthy, safe, and engaged in early learning.
- Early education advances equity.
- The people who are closest to a problem are closest to the solutions too.
- Family child care providers are a community asset, offering warm, nurturing care, often in a child's home language and a child's own neighborhood.
- Most family child care providers are women of color, providing a vital service by offering warm, nurturing, engaging care, often in a child's home language, culture, and community.

## Problem Messages

- Lawmakers have not allocated sufficient nor equitable funding and resources for early care and education. This means that even before the pandemic, families struggling to make ends meet often could not find affordable and reliable care, especially for babies and toddlers. Now, the whole system is in trouble. We need to take this opportunity to rebuild it right.
- The demand for early care and education far outstrips supply. This was a problem before the pandemic and it is far worse now.
- Child care and early education policies are shaped by a history of racism and social injustice. This has created major racial disparities in children's access to care that would help them grow and thrive.
- Due to systemic underfunding of child care and early learning, we don't pay providers enough.
- When child care providers are forced to close their doors, the community loses a valuable asset and the providers – mostly women of color – lose their livelihood.

## Solution Messages

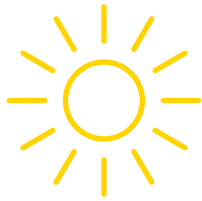
- Our time is now. As our communities plan for recovery – in our neighborhood, across Los Angeles and beyond – decision makers and elected leaders will certainly hear our voices call for the early education and child care resources that our families need to survive and thrive.
- We can and must incorporate child care into our pandemic recovery efforts.
- Those closest to the problem must be part of the solution.
- Our neighborhood/community must be part of determining what future child care resources and early learning policies look like. We have all learned so much during the pandemic about how to get by. What we know can help inform the recovery.
- We need to hear from those who are most impacted – you have the solutions!
- Your participation is critical to building stronger early learning centers, safer communities, and a more powerful voice for our neighborhood.
- Together we can build a powerful movement of families and early care providers in our neighborhood, to promote healthy and safe communities and provide our youngest children with the early learning they need to thrive.
- With the framework our organization offers, all of us in the neighborhood have a way to take action together to make our own lives and our shared community better, like we did before [insert example of past win/impact]
- Together, we can push City and County leaders to do what they know is right.

## Action Messages

- Participate in our survey to ...
- Make your voice heard – join us in ...
- Learn more about what's available to you as a parent or provider of child care. Come to our next meeting ...

# Lightbox Collaborative: Situational Narrative for Child Care During COVID-19

## Small children, big impact



Future builders. Future explorers. Future problem solvers. Our future is brighter when our children are able to reach their potential no matter where they live, the color of their skin, or their mother tongue. Our communities are stronger when every child is healthy, safe, and engaged in early learning.

## COVID-19 upheaval

The pandemic has disrupted everything about how our children are cared for. But it has not disrupted our care for our children – for all of Los Angeles’ children.

Even before the pandemic, policymakers allowed inequities to exist in funding for early care and education. As a result, most families struggled to find affordable and reliable care, especially for babies and toddlers. And providers, most of whom are women of color, have not been paid enough to make ends meet. Child care is a social and racial justice issue. Ensuring providers are compensated for their crucial work is too.

As Los Angeles struggled with an exploding number of COVID cases in late 2020 and early 2021, many families lost their jobs – and those who are still working have to work even harder to find child care. Many providers have been forced to close their doors. Parents have lost the familiar, nurturing environment they want for their little ones, and the providers – mostly women of color – have lost their livelihood.

Demand for child care outstrips supply more than 2 to 1 (Data from the UNITE-LA study, linked in resources). This is pre-pandemic. The programs that are open struggle to find supplies and to keep everyone safe while trying to maintain the same nurturing care and learning during these crucial early years.

Throughout the pandemic, child care providers have stepped into their role as child care heroes to support other essential workers, children, families, and our communities.



By early 2021,

52% of centers

31% of family  
child care  
providers

in Los Angeles County  
were closed



## Shared purpose, clear solutions



Thankfully, many members of our community know that if we do right by our children and the people who love and care for them, we’ll create a better Los Angeles, now and in the future. A recent poll of likely voters from throughout the county found that 80% support more public funding of early learning and care, and 76% believe it is “extremely important” that families have child care.

80% support more  
public early  
learning and care

76% believe it is “extremely important”  
that families have these programs.

# TOGETHER for the win



We know that when we come together to support kids now,  
we're creating a more equitable Los Angeles, a fairer world for our families, and

brighter possibilities for our children

---

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### Strategic Communications

[ASO Communications](#)

[Lightbox Collaborative](#)

[Berkeley Media Studies Group](#)

[Frameworks Institute](#)

[The Opportunity Agenda](#)

[Words to Win By](#)

### Communications About Early Childhood and Families

[Parent Voices Oakland: Informal Care Parent Engagement Study](#)

[Southern California Public Radio: Child Care, Unfiltered](#)

[Los Angeles County Early Childhood Care & Education Survey 2020](#)

### Organizing

[Power of We Messaging Guide Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Spanish and English](#)

[Courage California](#)

[A New California](#)

[PICO California](#)

["Greater Than Fear" Campaign, Minnesota](#)

### Conclusion & Acknowledgements

Child Care Law Center would like to thank the Stein Early Childhood Development Fund for its generous support of this communications project over two extremely tumultuous years in the lives of all Americans, and especially the families and communities of Los Angeles County who were hardest-hit and lost loved ones to COVID-19. **Thank You.**

Child Care Law Center is the only organization in the country dedicated exclusively to child care law. For over forty years, it has worked to make child care just and inclusive for children, families and providers. Towards this goal, the Law Center advocates, educates, and when necessary litigates, to break down the barriers standing families and equitable, enriching child care. For more information, or to speak with one of our staff, please visit us at [www.childcarelaw.org](http://www.childcarelaw.org) or email [info@childcarelaw.org](mailto:info@childcarelaw.org).