

Sources of Information About Public Awareness Practices

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This *Milemarkers* bibliography includes selected references to public awareness practices and research useful for developing methods and strategies for locating children eligible for early intervention or preschool special education. Sources of information about public communications campaigns, public service announcements, preparation of printed materials, message framing, and social marketing are included.

The conduct of a public awareness program that focuses on the early identification of children who are eligible for early intervention or preschool special education services is an explicit requirement of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (1997). According to the regulations for the Act, a public awareness program includes, but is not limited to, the preparation and dissemination of materials to primary referral sources ... and the general public about services through television, radio, and newspaper releases, pamphlets and posters, and a toll-free telephone number (see 34 C.F.R. § 303.320).

A review of the public awareness literature finds that public awareness research and practice can be organized into several major categories: Public communications campaigns, public service announcements, preparation of printed materials, message framing, and social marketing methods and strategies. This *Milemarkers* includes selected references to research and practice in each of these categories that practitioners responsible for locating eligible children should find informative and useful for improving child find activities. Public awareness practices are one type of child find activity (Dunst & Trivette, 2004) that constitutes the focus of research and practice at the Tracking, Referral and Assessment Center for Excellence (www.tracecenter.info).

Public Awareness Practices

Public Communications Campaigns

Public communications campaigns are multimedia initiatives that include a mix of strategies that try to influence the ways in which people think, decide, behave, and act (Coffman, 2002; Rice & Atkin, 2001). They often include messages that are used to influence people's beliefs and behaviors, the medium used for delivering the messages (printed materials, billboards, public service announcements, etc.), and the methods or strategies used to effectively communicate the message (e.g., using a

well-known or respected individual as a means of presenting the message).

Public communication campaigns are generally defined both in terms of the *methods* they employ and the *objectives* of the campaign. According to Paisley (2001), "The definition of public communications campaigns can focus [either] on ... strategies of social control insofar as one group intends to influence the beliefs or behavior of another group (objectives) or the communicative method that is called noncommercial advertising" (pp. 5-6).

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Public Service Announcements

A public service announcement (PSA) is a short film, video recording, newspaper announcement, Web page posting, or radio announcement presented by a not-for-profit organization or governmental agency, or an advertisement or commercial by an advertiser as a public service, that attempts to persuade viewers or readers to take action deemed to be in their best interest. PSAs are typically short (can be viewed or read in 30 to 60 seconds) and have only one main point or issue that is the focus of message delivery. The reader is referred to the National Association of Broadcasters (www.nab.org/publicservice/) for examples of PSAs as well as useful resources for developing PSAs.

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- Printed materials include, but are not limited to, brochures, newspaper and newsletter articles, billboards, leaflets, pamphlets, flyers, posters, and other text- or image-based documents that are used to inform or influence people's decision making and action. A converging body of evidence indicates that the characteristics of printed materials matter a great deal if they are to influence decision making and action, and that different material characteristics are effective depending upon their format (e.g., brochures vs. billboards). For example, printed materials that have a targeted message or a targeted audience are more effective than nontargeted materials (Kreuter et al., 1996, 1999). The reader should find Paul, Redman, and Sanson-Fisher (1997) especially useful for developing evidence-based printed materials (Paul & Redman, 1997).
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- communicated. Messages can either attempt to elicit feelings or beliefs about the negative consequences of not taking action (loss-framed messages) or emphasize the positive benefits of taking action (gain-framed messages). Research now indicates that gain-framed messages that have a promotional (rather than a prevention) focus are more effective in appealing to people's preferences and reasons for taking action to change their life circumstances (Lee & Aaker, 2004). A recent survey by the Connecticut Department of Education (2004) shows that the ways in which messages are communicated to parents matters a great deal in terms of how they assess their likelihood of effective parenting.
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Message Framing

Message framing refers to the manner in which the idea inherent in any attempt to influence or persuade people's decision making and action is presented or

Social Marketing

Social marketing refers to the use of marketing methods and strategies to achieve social, rather than profit, ends. Andreasen (1995) defined social marketing as “the application of commercial marketing technologies to the analysis, planning, execution, and evaluation of programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of targeted audiences in order to improve their personal welfare and that of society” (p. 1). The reader is referred to the Social Marketing Institute (www.social-marketing.org) and the Center for the Advanced Studies in Nutrition and Social Marketing (<http://socialmarketing-nutrition.ucdavis.edu>) for useful resources on social marketing.

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Summary

Practitioners responsible for child find have at their disposal many options for conducting activities for locating infants, toddlers, and preschoolers eligible for early intervention or preschool special education. This *Milemarkers* included selected references to practice descriptions and research on the characteristics of public awareness activities found to be effective for informing consumers about available services and for influencing changes in beliefs and attitudes toward the need for these services.

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