

Changing the Child Support Message in California

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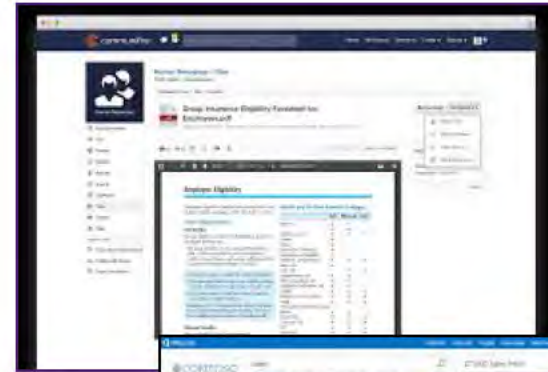
Changing the Message

Agility

Changing the Message

MEDIA AUDIT

- ★ Conducted Online
- ★ Print or Web articles, stories and/or blog posts
- ★ 2015 through 2017



Changing the Message

MEDIA AUDIT

- ★ Keywords:
 - California Department of Child Support Services
 - Child Support, Child Support in California
 - Alisha Griffin, Director
 - Acknowledgement of Parentage, Paternity
 - Child Support Awareness Month
 - Deadbeat Dad
 - Teen Mom

Changing the Message

THE GOOD NEWS

- ★ Most coverage is generated by local offices, and is basically positive
- ★ Negative coverage tends to be at the national level
- ★ All in all, nobody is really talking about us

THE BAD NEWS

- ★ All in all, nobody is really talking about us
- ★ Which explains why nobody knows who we are or what we do

Changing the Message

**This is actually good -
we don't have to try to change minds
or dispute strongly held beliefs**

WE JUST NEED TO EDUCATE

Changing the Message

MESSAGING AUDIT



Changing the Message

MESSAGING AUDIT

- ★ Website

Changing the Message

MESSAGING AUDIT

- ★ Website

- Ogilvy: “What is missing is an overview of the child support process and sequence of events. A brochure and a download that is printable that outlines how child support works and the order of actions to take is badly needed. This is the most important tool that the state and/or each county could create, because it educates a new customer and outlines expectations for a process that we know is challenging. ”

Changing the Message

MESSAGING AUDIT

- ★ Social Media



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MESSAGING AUDIT

- ★ Social Media
 - Ogilvy: "Facebook is damaging the Child Support brand. Even content that did not relate to child support generated anger and created a public forum for parents to fight with each other."



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MESSAGING AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS:

- ★ Social Media
 - Posts and tweets should be strictly informational, about programs and resources
 - Highlighting local department activities such as backpack drives, resource fairs and sports team nights in the community are also appropriate
 - Do NOT give parenting advice

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RECOMMENDATIONS (continued):

- ★ Social Media
 - Pictures of happy children are misplaced here
 - Focus on service and value to parents
 - Provide information on services or programs that you offer and help parents understand how Child Support Services might be valuable for their situation
 - Public Service Announcements should be informational rather than inspirational

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Ogilvy: “While Child Support Services thinks of itself (and wants to be) an organization that supports families and positive parenting, messaging on websites and in all materials should be basic, informational and straightforward.”

“Images of happy children and happy parents are not helpful to people in the position of needing or paying child support. Helpful comments about ‘being there for your child’ are NOT what parents need to hear from Child Support Services.”

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QUESTIONS SO FAR?



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FOCUS GROUPS



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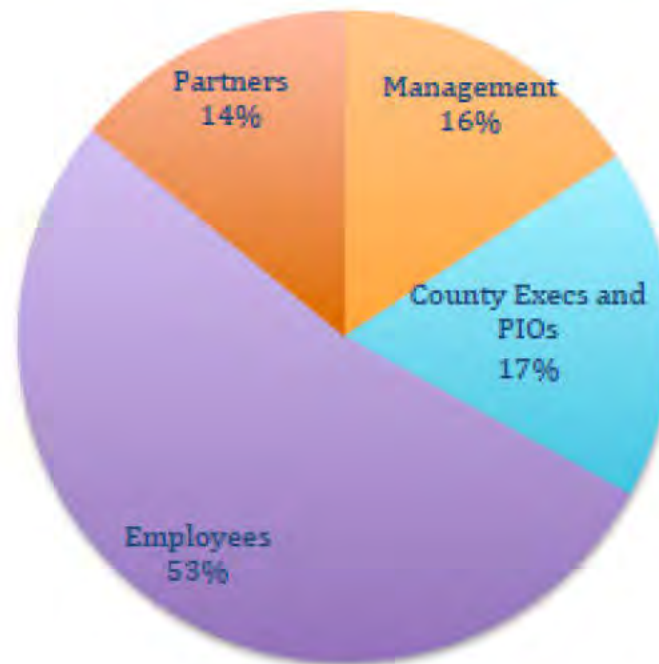
FOCUS GROUPS

- ★ Employees/County Partners
 - 10 small group discussions, 121 participants

- [REDACTED]

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Comprehensive Focus Group Composition



Management County Execs and PIOs Employees Partners

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Communicators/Outreach – high awareness of consumer difficulty



Changing the Message

Employees – GREAT commitment and sense of value, but also aware of consumer confusion/difficulty



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County Partners – a mix of awareness and frustration



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State Level Partners –

“Nobody is vested in the ownership of this program. At the state level, they are interested in the policies, but counties run the programs and the money comes from the feds, so you can’t get a state legislator interested.”

“They should think of themselves more broadly – they should view themselves as a service center. It’s almost the opposite of enforcement.”

“We need navigators to help them (parents)...feel respected.”

Changing the Message

When awareness is low, misconceptions are high.

AND,

When there is no clarifying or competing messaging coming from the state or county, people have no reason to believe that their understanding is inaccurate.

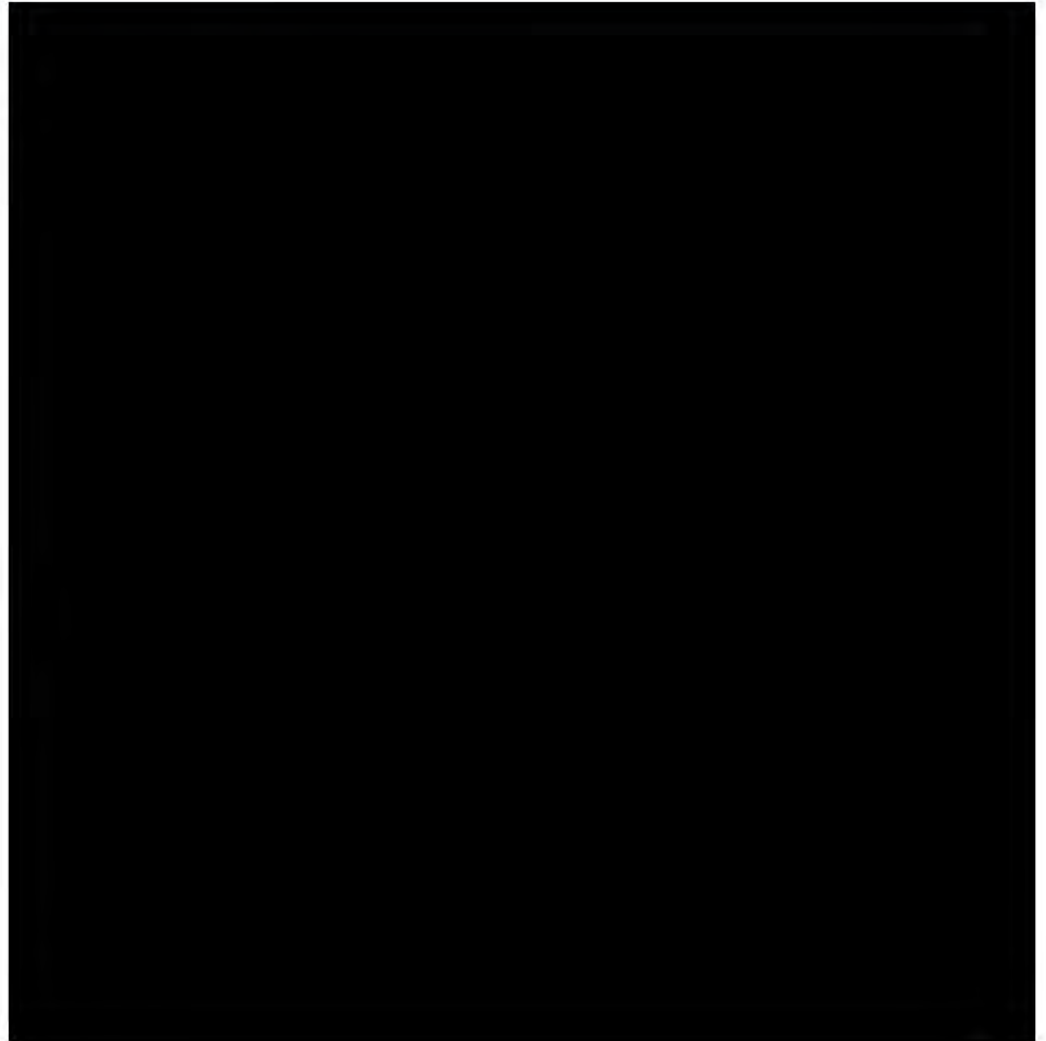
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CONSUMER FOCUS GROUPS



Methodology: Qualitative Consumer Research

- 78 people participated
- 10 in-person focus groups across five locations
- In each location: one group of females either receiving or paying child support and one group of males either receiving or paying child support



CONTEXT:

Life's joys and anxieties, and how they tie in to child support.

Changing the Message

Children bring the greatest joy, but they also bring significant concerns

What brings me joy in life . . .

"Seeing my kids do well in school."
– Female

"The first birthday party I had for my kid." – Male

"Seeing my kids happy."
– Male

"Watching my kids play football."
– Male

"Seeing my kids prospering."
– Female

"Spending time with my kids."
– Male

"Cooking with my kids."
– Male

What keeps me up at night . . .

"I'm really the one who is there for my son and what if something happens to me?" – Female

"Worrying about my kids hooking up with bad influences."
– Male

"I worry about money and managing my kids and how well they are doing in school."
– Female

"I worry about my son's future education, about where he may go and being set for life." – Male

"My kids are teenagers. I worry what my kids are up to and if they are behaving." – Male

Men often mentioned activities (or only mentioned activities) that did not involve their kids. Almost all women focused on their kids.



Changing the Message

Money worries everyone

"Not knowing how I'm going to pay my next bill."

– Female

"I worry about not being able to provide for my family."

– Male

"I just want to be debt free." – Male

*"I worry about my kids future and what I can leave for them.
Paying child support – it is difficult to get ahead and buy a house,
a car or make any investment."* – Male

Latinas [REDACTED] **had the most low paying and unpredictable jobs and were most concerned about money.**



Changing the Message

There's an undercurrent of sadness pervading life

Disappointment and regret for their kids
(especially felt by women)

"I wish the father felt like being a parent the way I do."

– Female

"Dad never calls or texts my son."

– Female

"I worry about how being without a dad will affect my kids."

– Female

"What worries me is that my son is in therapy, because his father never sees him. He is very affected by that."

– Female

Personal loneliness

For some, bitterness



Changing the Message

Child support is inherently negative

- It's about **failure**: of a relationship, a marriage, of birth control, of judgment, of one's ability to provide for one's family, etc.
- It's **public, like a scarlet 'C'**: It unmask "deadbeat dads" and "baby mommas"
- There's a lot of **shame**: many feel inadequate and unworthy of respect
- Child Support Services becomes the focal point of **blame**: negative feelings towards their ex or themselves transfer to us

It stirs **anxiety** and provokes **anger**



FIRST ASSOCIATIONS EXERCISE:

**First word that comes to mind when thinking
about Child Support Services**

**NOT ONE PERSON
MENTIONED FAMILY,
PARENTS
OR CHILDREN**

Changing the Message

The general market groups used almost all negative words



The words most often mentioned have to do with **how** and **what**, not **why**: “money,” “paperwork,” “bureaucracy,” “government”

They also have to do with financial outcomes, e.g., “unfair,” “not enough,” “unpredictable” and “debt”

Only five people had a positive word come to mind

Latinas in Fresno used the same or similar words as the general market. They are particularly disenchanted by DCSS as many are very poor and on welfare, making their DCSS checks very low.

Changing the Message

MARTIAN EXERCISE:

How would you describe Child Support to someone who had never heard of it?

Changing the Message

Some talk about finding agreement between parents

*"It's an **intermediary** between two parents when there is some kind of dispute or miscommunications in relation to their children's welfare."* – Male



*"An agency that makes sure that **both parties** of a **child contribute** what they deem fair to the child financially." – Male*

*"DCSS is the **middleman** to protect and serve people in need." – Female*

*"Department of Child Support Services acts as a **middleman** between the mother and father of your kids." – Male*

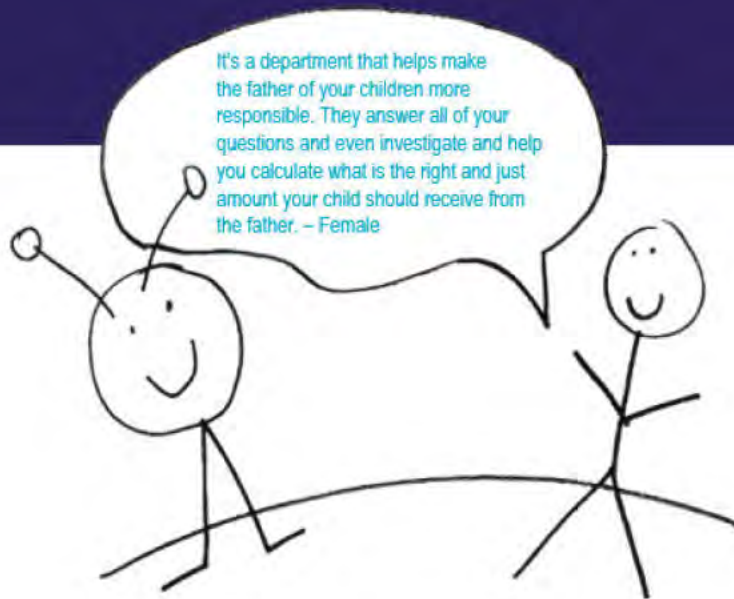


Changing the Message

Many women and most men see DCSS as serving women

*"The Department of Child Support Services is a great middleman that **takes the stress off me** having to deal with the children's father who is abusive." – Female*

*"Be prepared to be **under the mercy (control) of an outside agency.** Be prepared to **never get a fair deal.**" – Male*



VS.

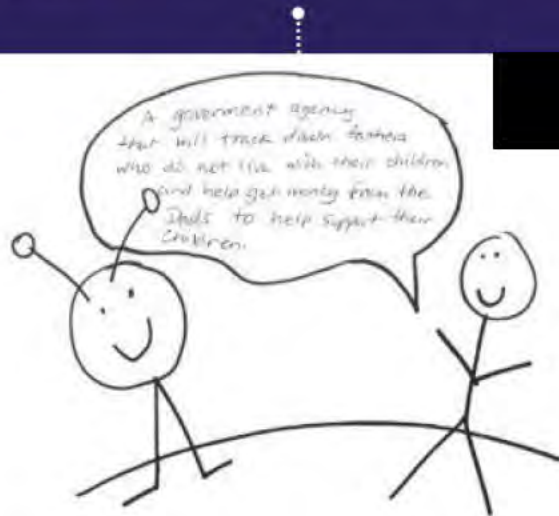


Changing the Message

Some, especially women, focus on DCSS helping children

"A government agency that will track down fathers who do not live with their child and help get money from the dads to support their children."

– Female

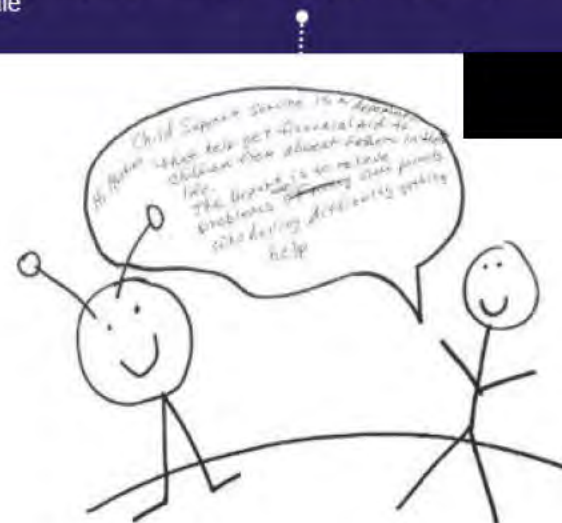


"The department is there to make sure your kids have a better future and some medical insurance." – Male

"Intercedes on the children's' behalf." – Female

"Child Support Services is a department that help[s] get financial aid to children from absent fathers in their life. The department is [there] to relieve problems from parents who [are] having difficulty getting help."

– Female



Changing the Message

Some men vilify the system, seeing DCSS as being autocratic or for itself

"The **enforcers**. The government. The **feds**. No escape! The system." – Male



"It's a group of people who **threaten loss of freedoms** if you don't comp with an **arbitrary** set of rules set forth by the consideration of an older lawyer wearing a robe." – Male

"Overlords." – Male

"It's a way to **control** you from breeding too much." – Male

"A non-transparent, unaccountable, **for profit** business in **collusion** with the U.S. courts system with its main function to **disempower men**." – Male



PERSONIFICATION:

**If Child Support was a person,
what would that person be like?**

Changing the Message

Strong and corporate

For some women, this means: competent, professional and determined



“A professional woman.”
– Female

“A man in a suit. He enforces the law... businesslike, to the point, professionally dressed.”
– Female

For most men and other women, this means: arrogant, aggressive, calculating and dominating



“A very tall, blond woman, arrogant, calculating and cold and drives a Hummer.”
– Male

“She is Russian or German and wearing black leather.” – Male

“Tough, strict, stern.” – Female

Changing the Message

Unapproachable and cold

“He drives a Jeep Wrangler. Rugged and will run someone over.”

– Female

“I think of ‘Men in Black’: blank, intimidating, just stares.”

– Male

“A muscle man with a briefcase.” – Female

“An aggressive male, like a military guy, older, mean and sexist.”

– Female

“Cold hearted.” – Female

“A man, strong, strict, often angry, wearing a suit and tie.” –
Female

“Not a good listener. Impersonal.” – Male



Detached and Indifferent



No common ground, understanding or empathy

"There aren't any beat up cars in their community. Gated communities that are mid-to-upper class." – Male

"A white man. Privileged, can't relate."
– Female

"Don't mingle with us." – Female

"He lives in places that a single black mother does not live in."
– Female

"He has walls no one can climb." – Female

Changing the Message

Latinas [REDACTED] were the most positive, creating an image of a professional, approachable and just person

Trustworthy and Loyal

“A tall, strong woman, 40-45, who wears pants, Ferragamo shoes, a nice blouse and blazer and drives a sporty Lexus or Black BMW that is clean, new and elegant.” – Female

“She wants the best for your children.” – Female

“Her house is very organized. Its simple but clean.” – Female



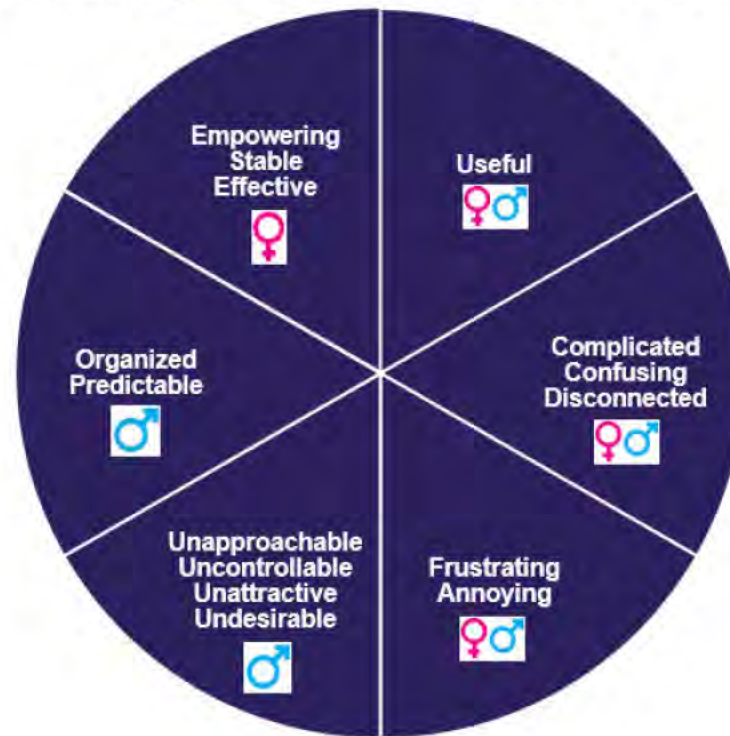
ADJECTIVES: Child Support Today

**Choose up to six words that
best describe Child Support today**

Changing the Message

Almost all commonly chosen words are process-oriented and emotionally distant

"DCSS takes something so emotional and makes it so financial." – Female



"With the IRS you know the rules but not with child support." – Male

"I go there with a bag full of papers and I am always missing the one they need."
– Female

"It's like the DMV. Inflexible."
– Male

"I'm just a number. They treat me like I'm on welfare."
– Female

"Overbearing, intimidating."
– Male

COLLAGE: Child Support Today

**Choose images that best describe
what Child Support is like today**

Changing the Message

Corporate, bureaucratic and unhelpful



“Like a **maze**. You have to figure your way out.”

– Female

“Like a blank piece of paper. You get no answers.” – Female

“They ask you for **books** of information.”

– Female

“There’s **so much** and so many people. It’s a cycle that doesn’t change.” – Female

“They are **a waste of time**.”

– Female

Changing the Message

Women: reminds them of their vulnerability



“**Alone** and hanging from one arm.” – Female

“I feel underwater, **alone**.” – Female

“I’m walking on eggshells.” – Female

“You feel very **intimidated** in that office.”

– Female

Changing the Message

Men: biased, thieving and for some, corrupt



“**Thieves.**” – Male

“They’re worse than the mob.” – Male

“I’ve been **stolen** from.” – Male

“It leans towards women – those gender roles, those sexist roles.” – Male

“It’s a **business.** It’s about getting the money.” – Male

Changing the Message

**These exercises reflect a lot of negativity about
Child Support Services.**

**So we asked about an IDEAL Child Support;
the Child Support Services of the future.**

Changing the Message

Collaborative and flexible



“You’re working on a **team** together.” – Male

“With the **power** to reach good agreements with them.” – Female

“You can have a **partnership** to take care of your kids.” – Male

“Everyone winning **together**... a group effort.” – Female

“We’re happy now and we’re sticking it out together.” – Female

Changing the Message

Women: understanding and empowering



“Strong, beautiful, **powerful.**” – Female

“Like the **safety** of a good car.”
– Female

“See me, for me.” – Female

“Like Oprah. Giving. Listens and is more
compassionate and empathetic. Less
sterile and more welcoming.”
– Female

Changing the Message

Men: kinder and gentler



“A great relationship, like milk and cookies.” – Male

“Nice and sweet to us.” – Male

“I want to be with my family and put them [Child Support] on the sidelines.” – Male

“You can finally rise out of the water.”
– Male

ADJECTIVES: The IDEAL Child Support

**Choose up to three words that best describe
an ideal Child Support Services**

Changing the Message

Commonly chosen words expressed a need for predictability and access and a desire to be heard



"It would be nice if we could sit around a table like here right now, and just have a fair discussion where I felt like they cared about my needs."

– Male

"It would be so nice to be offered a cup of coffee to deal better with all of the frustrations."

– Female

“A WORLD WITHOUT”

**What would life be like without
Child Support Services?**

Changing the Message

Women react emotionally and envision abandonment, uncertainty and turmoil

"Disaster."

"Chaos."

"Drama."

"No man would pay willingly."

"No more safeguard."

"How would I survive?"

"Without this help, I would feel unprotected and horrible."

"Without DCSS people would feel like a sick person without access to any medication."

Changing the Message

Men react practically, either seeing an opportunity for escape or recognizing the system's purpose despite its faults



"If I can communicate with the mother then fine, but if I can't then [DCSS] is necessary because parents can't talk to each other. If the parents aren't friendly, then the system does help."

– Male

Changing the Message

**QUESTIONS
ON THE
FOCUS GROUPS?**



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**THE RESEARCH
RECOMMENDS:**



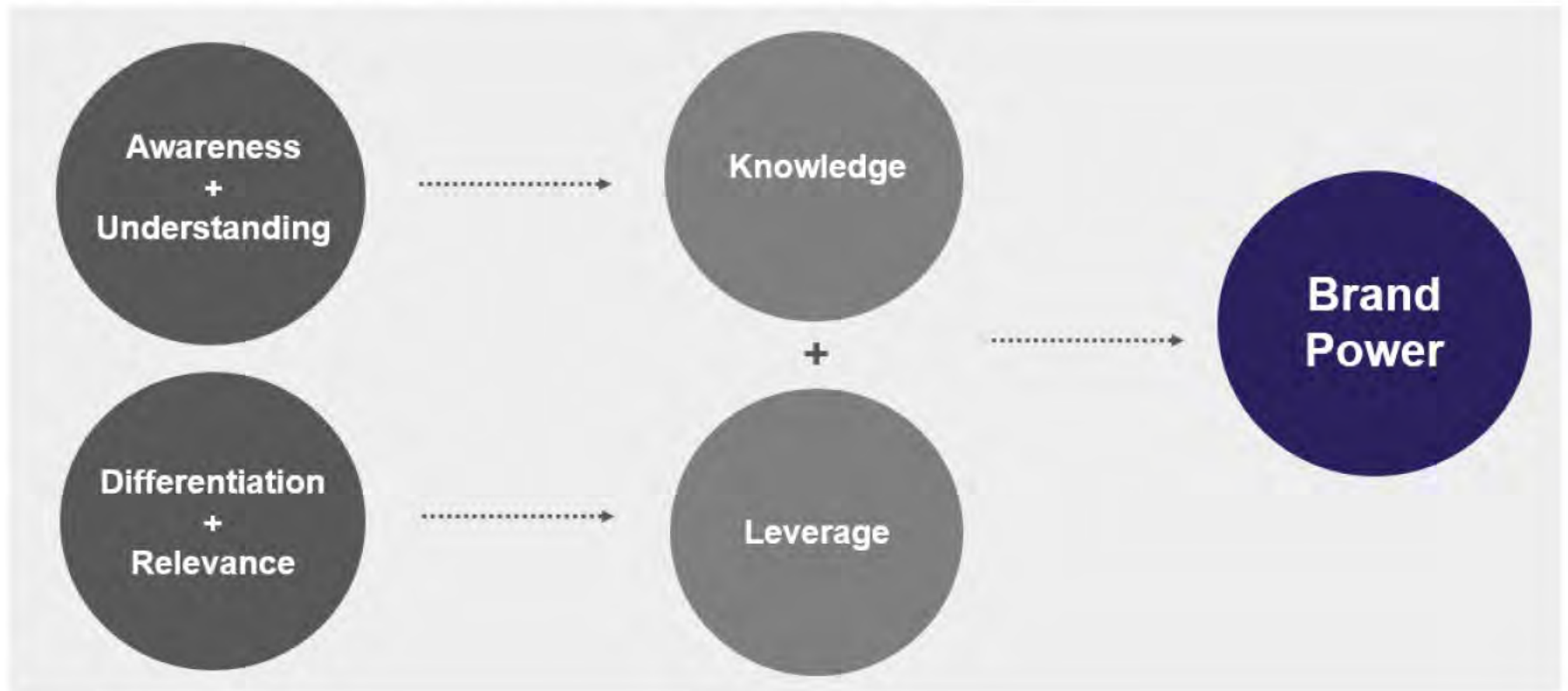
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WHAT DO WE MOST NEED TO ADDRESS?

- * People are unaware of the breadth of services we offer
- * People should feel comfortable in seeking information, so they can learn more about their rights and the benefits of child support services
- * Messaging is inconsistent across the state
- * What motivates parents is not the same as what motivates us

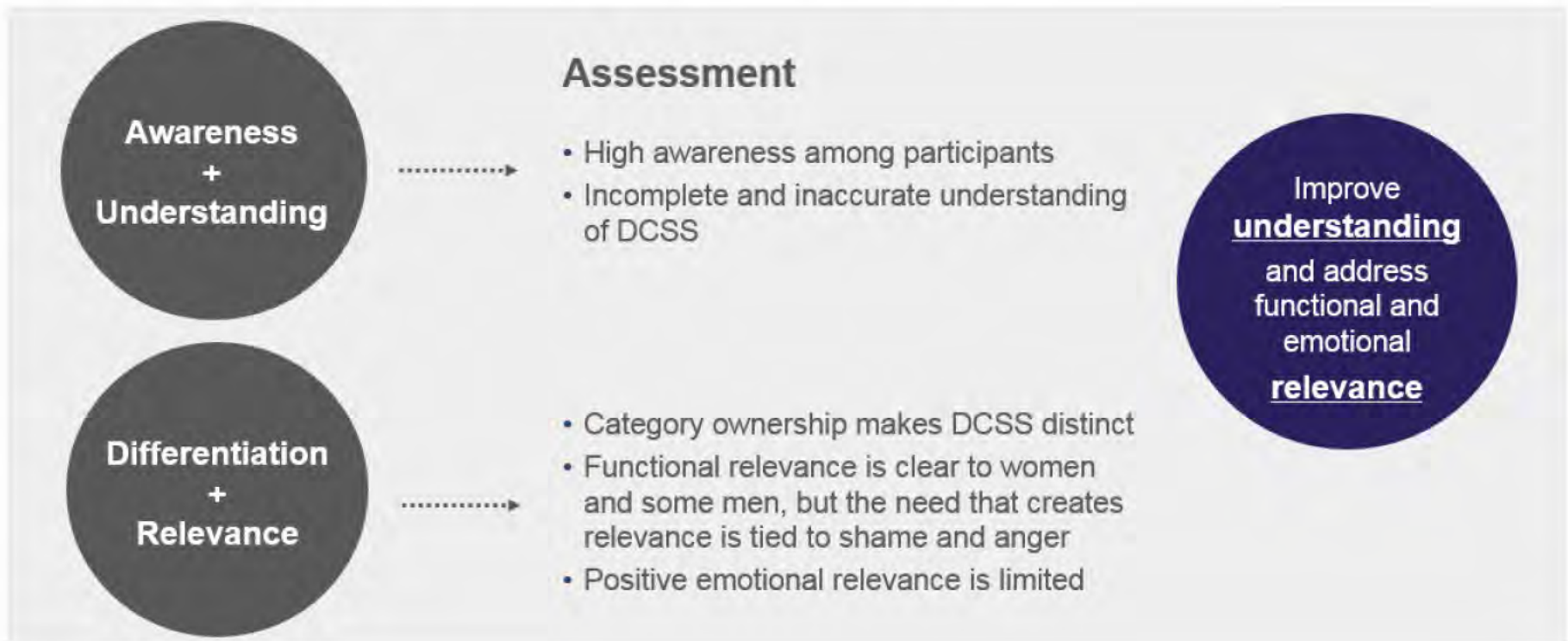
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Start with the elements of brand power



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UNDERSTANDING and **RELEVANCE** are the biggest challenges for Child Support Services



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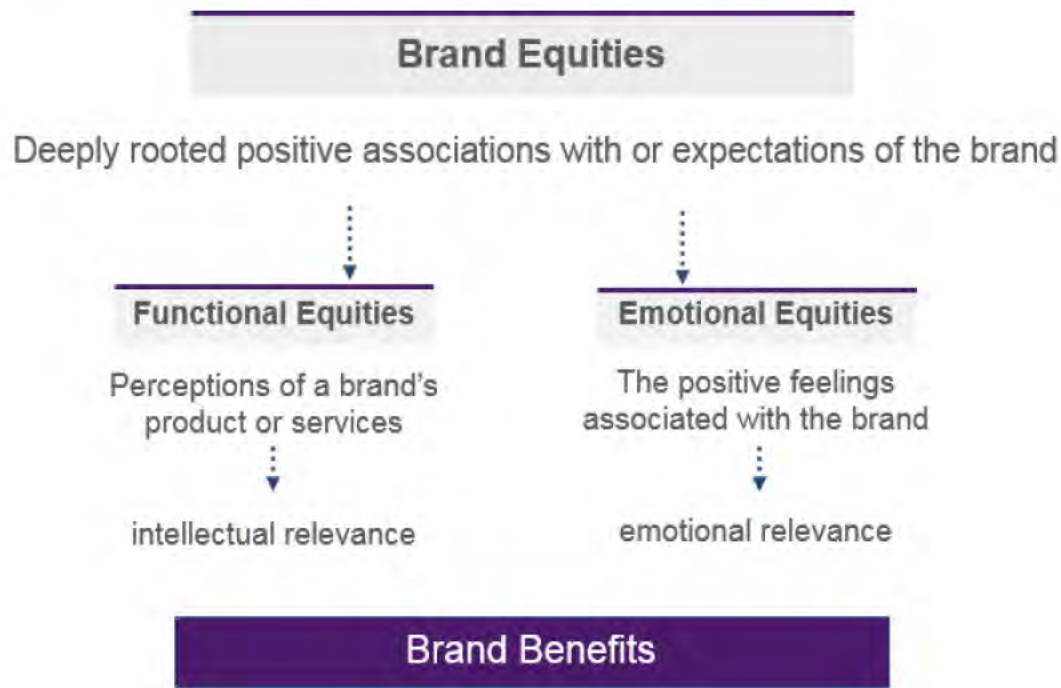
UNDERSTANDING is addressed by returning to the conclusions of the media and messaging audits.....

WE JUST NEED TO EDUCATE

- ✦ Focus on service and value to parents
- ✦ Provide information on services and programs offered
- ✦ Help parents understand how Child Support Services might be valuable in their situation
- ✦ Be informational rather than inspirational

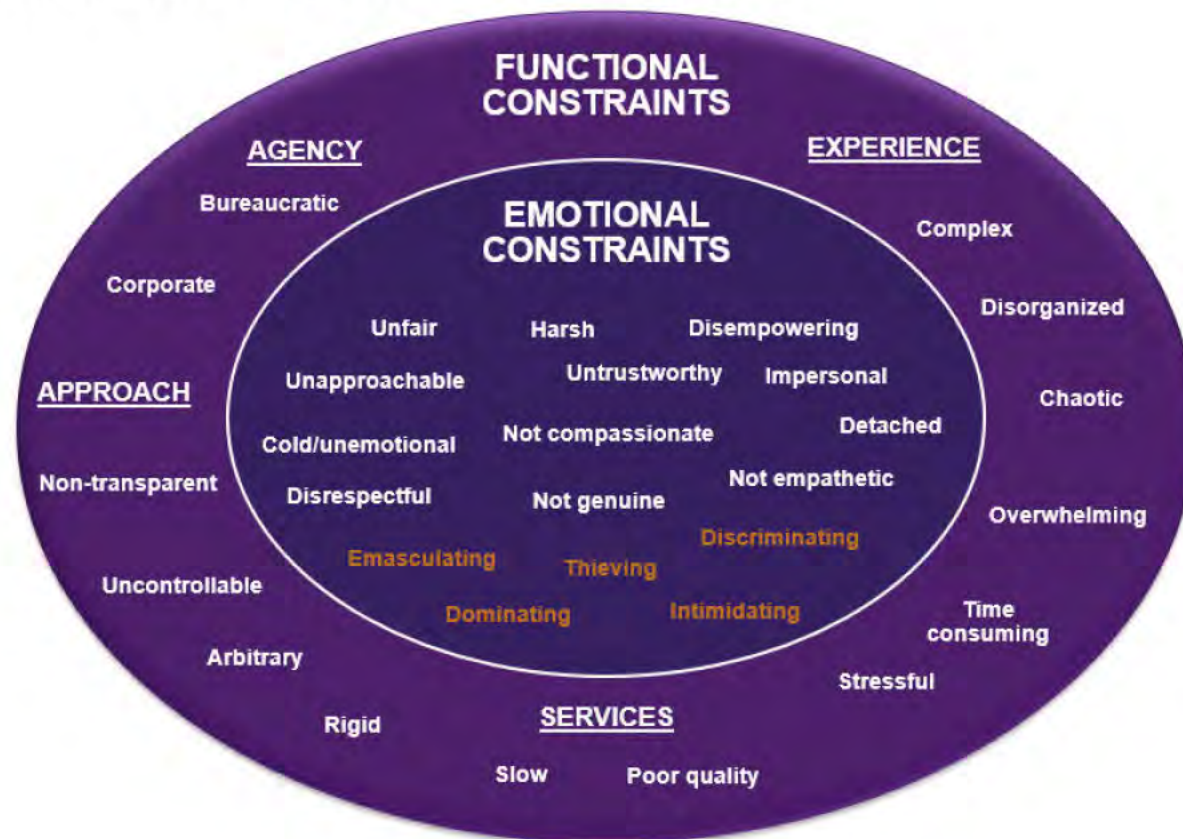
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Relevance is found by identifying benefits from functional and emotional equities and staying aware of “empathic attunement”



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The brand constraints of Child Support Services are fairly consistent across all audiences



Men only

Changing the Message

Our “brand constraints” are all about
PRODUCT and EXPERIENCE
- the “what” and “how”



- * We are not a “product brand” but we need to improve the product
- * We are not an “experience brand” but the negative experience deeply affects the brand

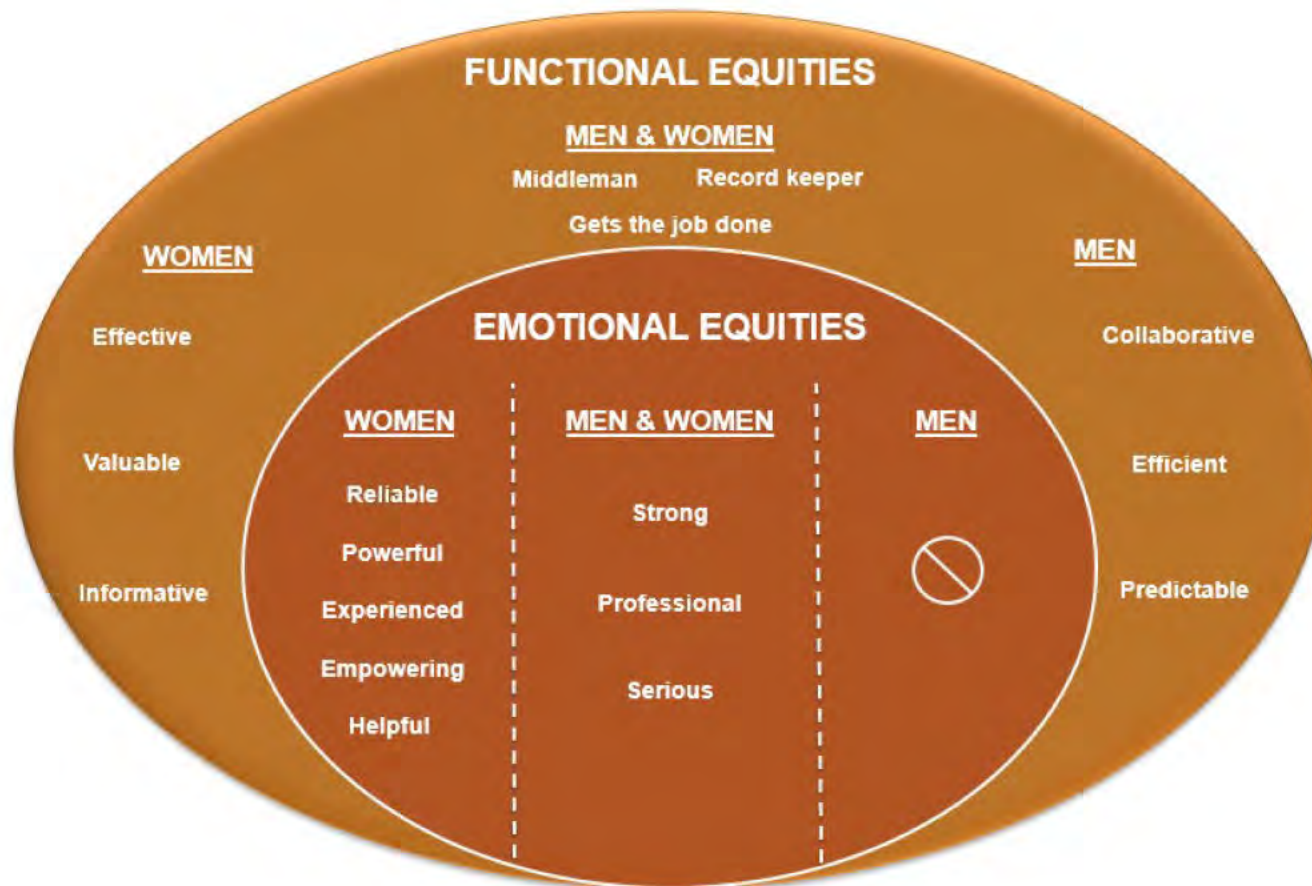
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WE ARE A PROMISE BRAND – the “WHY”

...but our “why” is not the same as our customer’s

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To find the brand promise, we start with brand equities



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The equities show that what Child Support Services offers is a path



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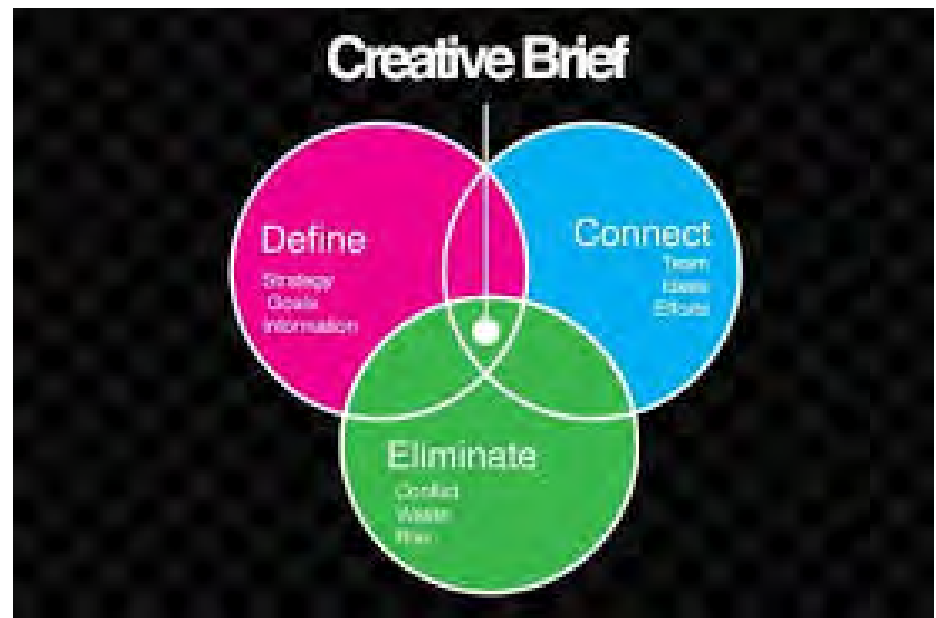
The research shows **directions that lack credibility:**

- ✦ Focusing on Family: Client families are not intact, most do not wish them to be intact, and they consider this a shameful failure
- ✦ Focusing on Children: We serve parents, not children, and the parents' motivation is not their children
- ✦ Focusing on Compassion or Trust: Compassion is a hard sell (we will still enforce) and trust must be earned

Changing the Message

CREATIVE BRIEF

What elements should define our message moving forward?



Changing the Message

Things to STOP:

- ✦ Giving Parenting Advice
- ✦ Using Acronyms
- ✦ Using the term “families,”
OCPA has started to use
“parents”
- ✦ Showing images of
children
without adults in the
photo



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THE MESSAGE:

Right now our customer sees Child Support Services as “The System”. They include the laws, the courts - all of it is considered part of Child Support

- ★ We are not the system,
- ★ We can explain and help you **WORK WITH** the system



Changing the Message

Directions to pursue:

- * We are the helpful middleman between you and your ex, between you and the courts, between you and "the system"
- * This is hard, we can help
- * This is complex, we help simplify
- * Storm to calm, difficult to easy



Changing the Message

Things to remember:

- ★ Stick to the basics of what we do and how that helps parents
- ★ Say it over and over
- ★ Use images of parents with Child Support employees
- ★ ALWAYS, ALWAYS, ALWAYS tie it back to our services



Changing the Message

Projects already begun:

- * Website overhaul
- * Q&A videos
- * Longer instructional videos
- * In-house photo archive using CA-DCSS employees to eliminate the need for stock photography
- * CSAM campaign
- * Logo Design



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THANK YOU



Speaker Contact Information

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Please be sure to complete the session evaluation.