



Talking about

UK  
POVERTY  
2019/20

# Talking about UK Poverty 2019/20

This is a hard time for a lot of people in our society. We know – from what people have told us and from our research – that rising living costs, low-paid and unstable jobs, and the current design of the social security system are locking people in poverty. We know that this is unacceptable. But we also know we can break poverty's grip.

In our leading independent report, UK Poverty 2019/20, we highlight the injustice of poverty in our society – and what we can do about it. We show how some parts of the UK, and some groups of people, are more likely to be caught in poverty's constraints.

We've taken the launch of this report as an opportunity to release a new edition of our Talking About Poverty toolkit. This straightforward guide gives you the key messages from our latest content and findings and is designed to support you – our friends and allies campaigning to turn the tide on UK poverty – to prepare a quality response, tell a well-framed story on the issues you're concerned about, and join us to call for action. Together, we can be a collective voice for change that's impossible to ignore.

# What is framing?

Framing means making deliberate choices about how you communicate. It's about understanding how people think and feel, and telling stories that change hearts and minds. We're working with the FrameWorks Institute to understand the public's attitudes to poverty in the UK and use insight from research with 20,000 people to talk about poverty in a different way.

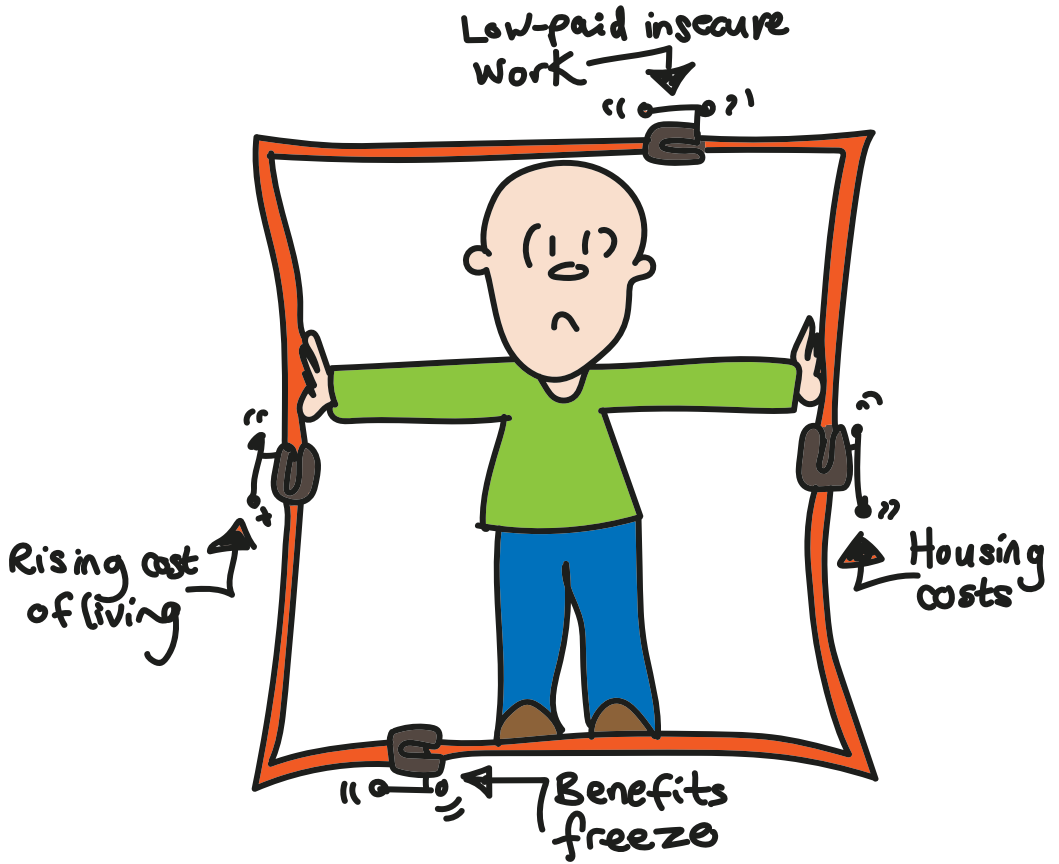
# Talking about poverty – five golden rules

## **Shared values**

Across our society, people believe in compassion and justice – we believe in helping and protecting each other from harm. We can make a moral (but not preaching or judgemental) appeal to people’s values of compassion and justice to show why poverty matters. This is about all of us. We share a moral responsibility to ensure that everyone in our country can have a decent standard of living.

## **Metaphors**

Metaphors are a powerful way of explaining how poverty works. Using them means we can use something people are familiar with to explain something they don’t understand. The two metaphors we use to explain poverty are restricts/restrains and currents. Restricts/restrains is good for explaining how people get trapped in poverty, and how their options are severely limited, and currents helps to show the uncontrollable forces that sweep people into poverty.



Circumstances like losing a job or a relationship break-up can pull people into poverty.



But the social security system can be redesigned to help people stay afloat when they're struggling.

## Context

On their own, statistics and heart-breaking stories don't change people's minds about poverty. To help people make sense of them, we need to show the bigger picture. We need to show how different factors can pull people into poverty and how hard it is to turn the tide; or explain the way people's options are restricted by a combination of issues.

## Solutions

We know that poverty can be solved. It's important that we talk about how this can be done. We can talk about redesigning systems, such as the economy:

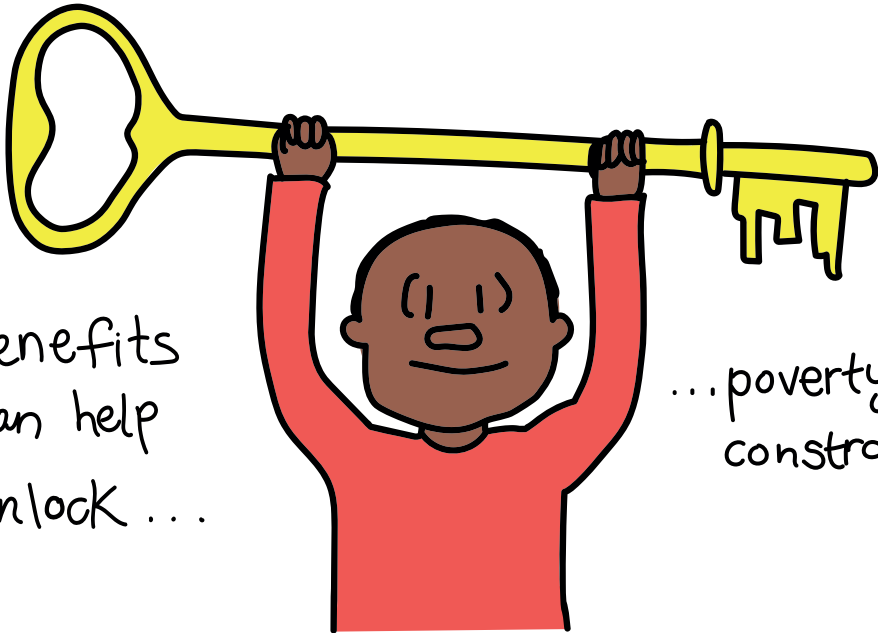
**“The economy we have today was designed – it is the result of a set of decisions that were made about our society's priorities and resources. Just as it was designed, we can redesign it so that it works for everyone.”**

We can also talk about how the social security system could be the key to unlock poverty's constraints, or an anchor to stop people getting swept further into poverty.



The economy we have today was designed – and it can be redesigned to work for everyone.





Benefits  
can help  
unlock ...

...poverty's  
constraints.

## **Tone down the politics**

People can be put off by overtly political language. It's better to appeal to the values that people have across political perspectives, and to unite people behind the changes that can solve poverty.

For example:

**“It is simply not right that we live in a society where so many are locked in poverty. We must all get behind the changes that can solve poverty.”**

# Messages from UK Poverty 2019/20

## **Headline messages**

For a decent standard of living, we all need secure housing, a reliable income, and support when things get difficult. Too many people in our society are caught in poverty's grip, held back from improving their living standards.

For the new government to truly 'level up' our uneven nation and unlock opportunities, it must break poverty's grip on all the places and families where it has taken hold.

## Themed messages

### Talking about work

**Your headline message:** In-work poverty is on the rise – an unacceptable situation. This is often because people’s pay, hours or both are not enough for a decent standard of living. We need as many people as possible to be in good-quality jobs, with improved earnings, flexibility and security for low-income working families.

**Explainer:** More than half of all people in poverty are in a working family – 56% compared to 39% 20 years ago. In-work poverty must be seen as a critical issue for our economy and given high priority by economic policy-makers. People working in the hospitality or retail sector are particularly likely to be in poverty. Workers need more security, better training and opportunities to progress, particularly in part-time jobs.

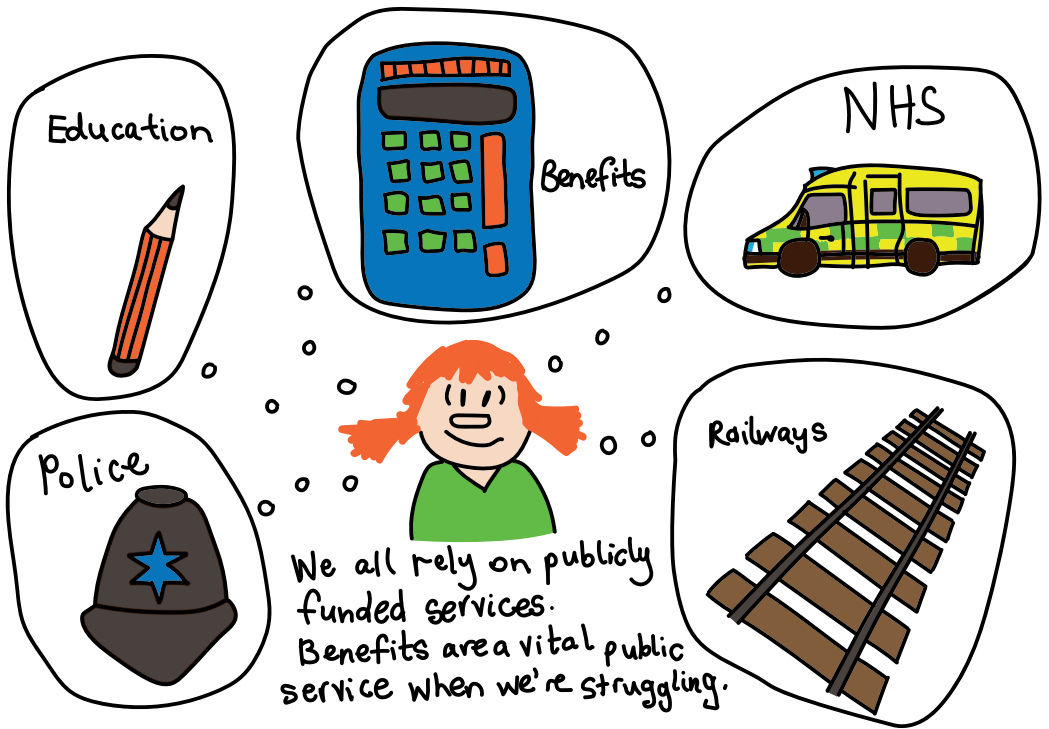
While the proportion of people in employment has risen consistently for six years, weak local economies in some parts of the country have led to higher unemployment than in the UK as a whole. This needs to change or progress will stall. In addition, employment among disabled people and carers is still low, and this can only improve if people are given the support they need to be able to work, if and when they can.

## Talking about social security

**Your headline message:** Social security is an essential public service. It should provide the anchor that we all need in tough times and should stop us getting swept into poverty. The current system needs to be redesigned, with sustained investment to ensure it gives adequate support and offers a better service for people using it.

**Explainer:** Sometimes our income might be too low to cover our core living costs because of, for instance, unemployment, low pay or insecure work, or reduced because of unexpected life events (like relationship breakdown or sudden illness) or higher costs. If this happens, it is only right that we should be able to depend on social security to prevent us from getting swept into poverty.

Spending on benefits has been falling since 2012/13, adding to the factors that tighten poverty's grip and restrict people's options and opportunities. The benefits freeze is the largest single reason for this: since 2016, benefits have not been increased, while prices have risen in the shops.



## Talking about housing

**Your headline message:** We all need somewhere to live – somewhere to call home – so it’s unacceptable that many of us are shut out of having a secure, affordable home. We need to increase the amount of low-cost housing available for families on low incomes, and increase support for people with high housing costs. We also need to address the sense of insecurity felt by many people living in the private rented sector.

**Explainer:** Housing costs have risen since 2000/01 for households on low incomes who rent in the private and social rented sectors, while a raft of changes to social security policy have been underway since around 2010, making housing less affordable.

The growing number of households in the expensive private rented sector is part of the picture of rising poverty levels. The number of families with children in poverty living in the private rented sector grew rapidly from 2005/06 to 2015/16. Meanwhile, the social housing sector has continued to shrink, and social sector rents have become less affordable over the longer term.

## Talking about disability and caring

**Your headline message:** In a society that believes in compassion and justice, it's simply wrong that being disabled or being a carer puts you at a higher risk of poverty. The social security system needs sustained investment to offer better support to disabled people and carers, alongside improving access to work.

**Explainer:** Nearly half of the 14 million people in poverty are affected by disability. Around 4 million people – that's 31% of the 13 million people with disabilities in the UK – lived in poverty in 2017/18, and another 3 million non-disabled people in poverty lived in a household where someone was disabled.

Carers are more likely to be living in poverty too. There were nearly 4.5 million informal adult carers in the UK in 2017/18 – around 7% of the population – and nearly a quarter (more than a million people) were living in poverty.



## Talking about families

**Your headline message:** Childcare and transport should unlock opportunities and enable parents to work, but instead, many parents on low incomes are constrained by a lack of affordable, flexible childcare and the cost and availability of transport, which restrict the hours they can work and their access to suitable jobs.

**Explainer:** Families get locked in poverty by a combination of factors – the availability and costs of childcare, transport and housing; the limitations of the current social security system; and restrained access to good-quality, flexible and secure work.

Poverty rates have risen for children in the last five years. Seven in ten children in poverty are now in a working family, because working families are being pulled into poverty by falling income from benefits and rising housing costs.

The risk of poverty for lone parents is almost twice as high as for any other family type. Lone parents on low incomes have spoken of insecurity across many aspects of their lives: ‘dehumanising’ work, feeling trapped ‘in a never-ending circle’ by the benefits system, and feeling ‘stuck’ in unaffordable or insecure housing with ‘no alternative’.

# What works, and what doesn't

Certain words and phrases work better than others when talking about poverty. We need to keep using these words and phrases to tell our stories.

<b>What works?</b>	<b>Watch out for</b>
Leading with shared values of compassion and justice.	Leading with the economic benefits of reducing poverty.
Choosing messengers who embody these values.	Overtly politicised language.
Showing how the economy restricts people's choices and can lead to poverty.	Focusing on describing the problem and its prevalence and missing out the explanation of how it works.
Leading with poverty.	Opening with benefits as the issue.
Highlighting how we all rely on public services day-to-day – especially those who are struggling.	Unintentionally leading people to condemn public services at a general level.
Showing the real causes and systemic solutions when telling a person's story.	Heartfelt individual stories that don't show the wider context, why this is happening and how it can be fixed, or stories that narrowly frame the causes and solutions to poverty at an individual level.

<b>What works?</b>	<b>Watch out for</b>
Enabling people to see that changes to systems are possible by talking about redesigning our economy.	Talking about the economy or system without explaining how it works and can be redesigned.
Using shared values and metaphors to frame facts and statistics.	Naked numbers: facts that don't help people to know what the numbers are saying and understand the context.
Connecting illustrations of poverty with this narrative and poverty's wider causes and solutions.	Presenting poverty's impacts as standalone issues.

## Read the full report and summary

[www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20](http://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2019-20)

## Need more information about how to use framing?

Contact: [TalkingAboutPoverty@jrf.org.uk](mailto:TalkingAboutPoverty@jrf.org.uk)