



Children's
Environmental
Health
Network

CRAFT YOUR ADVOCACY STORY WITH

S.P.I.N.E

**FIVE PROMPTS TO TURN LIVED MOMENTS
INTO POLICY-MOVING NARRATIVES**



Created: July 2025

WHAT IS S.P.I.N.E.?

Stories move people to action, especially when they carry structure, clarity, and power.

S.P.I.N.E. is a tool to help advocates build stories that don't just raise awareness, but reassign responsibility and invite action. Whether you're preparing to speak, write, testify, or post—SPINE helps you build a story that sticks, mobilizes, and matters.

LETTER	ELEMENT	WHAT IT STANDS FOR	SOME STARTER PROMPTS
S	Stakes	Who's at risk & what's at stake? What's being lost or harmed?	Whose lungs, water, time, or future is on the line?
P	Power	Who or what is causing the harm? Who has the power to change it?	Which policy, agency, company, or budget line is driving or could fix this?
I	Ideal future	North Star Vision. The world we are advocating for.	What capability or condition should be guaranteed? What does a safe, just world feel like?
N	Next move	One clear action item	What's the one thing we want people to do right now? (e.g., sign, fund, vote, call, show up)
E	Evidence	One data point or lived expertise to ground our truth	What's the proof that this is mine or someone else's reality? This could be data or lived expertise

SPINE STORY STARTER TEMPLATES

01 Here's my **[Evidence]**. Because of this **[Stakes]**.
[Power] keeps it that way.
Because I know every child deserves **[Ideal future]**.
Today, I'm asking that you **[Next move]**.

02 Because **[policy/system/industry]** is doing **[specific harm]**,
my/our **[body/child/community/land]** is **[what's at stake]**.

I know every child deserves **[capability/North Star]**.
So today, I ask that you **[action/next move]**.

Here's the proof: **[data or lived experience]**.

03 Here's proof that: **[data point / lived expertise]**.

Because **[policy/industry/person]** is doing **[specific harm]**,
my/our **[employees / child / patients]** are **[embodied stakes]**.

We know every **[human]** deserves **[North Star capability]**.
So we're **[specific action / demand]**.

Join us by **[action/next move]**.

SAMPLES STORIES USING THE SPINE STORY STRUCTURE

01

It is 105 degrees in D.C., and 88 degrees in Ohio. The weather is uncomfortably hot for me and my colleague **[Evidence]**.

Because of this, our bodies are getting sicker, and utility bills are rising. Something is wrong in our society **[Stakes]**.

[Power] Industrial excess, both past and present, is what keeps our environment and health this way.

Because I know all our children deserve air that won't poison their future **[Ideal future]**

Today, I'm asking that you please sign SB252 and help lead our society away from toxic chemicals and toward renewable energy **[Next move]**.

02

Hello Congresswoman,

My name is Haleemah.

Here's proof that Black children in the U.S. are nearly five times more likely to be hospitalized for asthma than white children **[Evidence]**.

Because our regulatory agencies continue to permit petrochemical facilities near schools and homes **[Power]**, our babies are breathing air that keeps ER visits on the calendar **[Stakes]**.

We know every child deserves a future where clean air isn't a privilege—it's policy **[Ideal Future]**.

So we're calling on the EPA and your fellow state leaders to end loopholes that allow polluters to cluster in Black and Brown neighborhoods.

Join us by voting NO on SB 704 to protect our babies' health from fossil fuel expansion **[Next move]**.

Thank you.

TELL YOUR STORY

TEMPLATE 01

Here's my **[Evidence]**. Because of this **[Stakes]**.

[Power] keeps it that way.

Because I know every child deserves **[Ideal future]**.

Today, I'm asking that you **[Next move]**.

	ELEMENT	WHAT IT STANDS FOR	FILL IN RESPONSE
S	Stakes	Who's at risk & what's at stake What's being lost or harmed? e.g kids, women, water.	
P	Power	Who or what is causing the harm? Who has the power to change it? e.g policy, institution, company.	
I	Ideal future	North Star Vision. (e.g. what world are we advocating for?)	
N	Next move	What's the one thing we want people to do right now? (e.g., sign, fund, vote, call, show up)	
E	Evidence	What's the proof that this is mine or someone else's reality? This could be data or lived expertise	

Complete your story:

Here's my _____

Because of this _____

_____ keeps it that way.

Because I know every child deserves _____

Today, I'm asking that you _____

TELL YOUR STORY

TEMPLATE 02 Because [**policy/system/industry**] is doing [**specific harm**], my/our [**body/child/community/land**] is [**what's at stake**]. I know every child deserves [**capability/North Star**]. So today, I ask that you [**action/next move**]. Here's the proof: [**data or lived experience**].

	ELEMENT	WHAT IT STANDS FOR	FILL IN RESPONSE
S	Stakes	Who's at risk & what's at stake What's being lost or harmed? e.g kids, women, water.	
P	Power	Who or what is causing the harm? Who has the power to change it? e.g policy, institution, company.	
I	Ideal future	North Star Vision. (e.g. what world are we advocating for?)	
N	Next move	What's the one thing we want people to do right now? (e.g., sign, fund, vote, call, show up)	
E	Evidence	What's the proof that this is mine or someone else's reality? This could be data or lived expertise	

Complete your story:

Because _____ is doing _____,

my/our _____ is _____.

I know every child deserves _____.

So today, I ask that you _____.

Here's the proof: _____.

TELL YOUR STORY

TEMPLATE 03

Here's proof that: **[data point / lived expertise]**.
 Because **[policy/industry/person]** is doing **[specific harm]**,
 my/our **[employees / child /patients]** are **[embodied stakes]**.
 We know every **[human]** deserves **[North Star capability]**.
 So we're **[specific action / demand]**.
 Join us by **[action/next move]**.

	ELEMENT	WHAT IT STANDS FOR	FILL IN RESPONSE
S	Stakes	Who's at risk & what's at stake What's being lost or harmed? e.g kids, women, water.	
P	Power	Who or what is causing the harm? Who has the power to change it? e.g policy, institution, company.	
I	Ideal future	North Star Vision. (e.g. what world are we advocating for?)	
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E	Evidence	What's the proof that this is mine or someone else's reality? This could be data or lived expertise	

Complete your story:

Here's proof that: _____

Because _____ is doing _____,

my/our _____ are _____.

We know every _____ deserves _____.

So we're _____.

Join us by _____.

PLEASE NOTE

The famous “Story Spine” narrative exercise was created by author and story-coach Kenn Adams, for theatrical storytelling, in 1991. It follows this one-sentence pattern:

Once upon a time there was _____. Every day, _____. But one day _____. Because of that, _____. Because of that, _____. Until finally _____. And ever since then _____.

The word SPINE as a metaphor for narrative backbone was adapted and reimagined by Haleemah Atobiloye in 2025 to meet the needs of social movement storytelling, particularly for environmental justice and public health advocacy.

The result is the S.P.I.N.E Advocacy Story Structure, designed to help advocates, organizers, and communities turn lived realities into collective action.

Here’s how this structure works:

*Here’s my [**Evidence**]. Because of this [**Stakes**],
[**Power**] keeps it that way.
Because I know every child deserves [**Ideal future**].
So today I ask that you [**Next move**].*

QUESTIONS OR FEEDBACK? CONTACT:

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