

Reframing the *Early Years*

Mini-Toolkit Developed for the
Queensland Framing Champions Group



**Queensland Kids
Partnership**
every child thriving

About this toolkit

- Designed during a June 2024 *Framelab* held for Framing Champions as part of the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership. Minor design updates made in 2026.
- Supports use of 6 framing strategies to drive effective communications about the early years.
- Sharing and using strategies across organisations can create a narrative that helps people see why the early years are so important and builds support for actions and reforms.

Framing & Mindsets

Recap

Framing =

Choices in how we present ideas



How people think/feel/act

Using the right frames can unlock new ways of thinking that increase support for change.

Using the wrong frames risks messages being ignored or even backfiring.

Choices in how we present ideas



Cultural Mindsets

How people think / feel / act

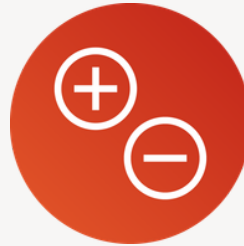
Cultural Mindsets



Implicit understandings, assumptions, and patterns of reasoning that shape thinking **below** the conscious level



Shape how we see the world and act in it



Multiple mindsets - even on the same issue; some open conversations and lead in productive directions; others close it down and are unproductive



Choices we make in HOW we say what we have to say determine which of the multiple mindsets become active and shape how people see the world

Three mindsets that stand in the way of change



Individualism



Fatalism



Other-ism

Three counterbalancing mindsets

Individualism



Contextualism

Fatalism



Pragmatism &
Progress

Other-ism



Collectivism

Challenges & Framing Strategies: **Early Childhood Development**

Challenges

Family bubble + individualism: if family is everything and it's all about parental effort, then education for better choices and holding parents responsible is the answer

Every time we: talk about what parents need to do/improve/seek out as the only answer

Extra blame on some: assumptions about 'some cultures,' often race-based, tap into perceived deservingness, limiting support for public policies

Every time we: talk about children and families without giving them agency, use *they, them*, use *vulnerability* framing, use savior/saved positioning

Limited understanding of how development works: makes it hard to see that early matters and dampens support for solutions that support early

Every time we: leave out the *HOW* of development

Naturalism + over-focus on experiences: puts all the focus on relationships and depresses support for policies that address environments/experiences

Every time we: leave out, don't explain, or don't offer examples of the effect of environments (experiences & exposures), we leave people thinking it's all back to individual choice or that development is just a *natural* process

Always down the line: if effects are always framed as many years later, hard to prioritise early childhood development over *right here-right now* issues

Every time we: talk about future benefits but leave out now

Naturalism + family bubble + genetic determinism = fatalism: sets up thinking that nothing can be done, so why try (or expend resources)

Every time we: lead with love & care, exclusively focus on parents; or are all problems and no solution

6 strategies to navigate these challenges

#1 Use values early to connect with why this matters

- Frame early years/learning as a health issue
- Make it about learning + health
- Flex fairness early

#2 Explain development, make context part of your story, use words *and* images

#3 Clearly define the problem using examples & strategic framing (this is different from how you talk to individual parents)

#4 Lean into solutions—explain them, deploy data, and use examples++

#5 Use now and later framing

#6 Include parents as part of solutions

#1 Use values early to connect with why this matters

Before

The first 2000 days is the critical window for learning. What happens in the early years shapes the developing brain and lifelong trajectories.



What this cues

- One window
- Problem unclear/black box

#1 Use values early to connect with why this matters

Before

The first 2000 days is the critical window for learning. What happens in the early years shapes the developing brain and lifelong trajectories.



After

Supporting child development and learning from conception onwards lays the foundation for health and wellbeing today and throughout life.

But right now, young children in some of our communities aren't getting this support, causing their health to suffer.

*Tip: Bring in health & value of fairness across place/space
Clearly define problem*

#2 Explain development, make context part of your story, use words *and* images

(Task A: Explain contextual contingency)

Before

Raising children is challenging especially for families in deprived communities, but parenting supports can help with managing the tough times and improve parenting skills.



What this cues

- Individualism – context absent
- Family bubble/all about the parents

#2 Explain development, make context part of your story, use words *and* images

(Task A: Explain contextual contingency)

Before

Raising children is challenging especially for families in deprived communities, but parenting supports can help with managing the tough times and improve parenting skills.



After

When young children live in places with polluted air, or where fresh food isn't available in local shops, their health suffers. Traffic-free zones and healthy food programs enable communities to support healthy child development now, and for the future.

*Tip: Use examples to counter individualism by adding context + concrete community solutions
Stretch to connect with collective and future*

#2 Explain development, make context part of your story, use words *and* images

(Task B: Establish and explain that Early Matters)

Before

Decades of science show us that the **first years of life are the most critical**. In these formative years, children learn many of the skills they'll need to **function in society**. Development depends largely on being exposed to a **richly stimulating & nurturing environment**. Despite the best of intentions, **many families struggle to provide** good social and learning opportunities and their children are **disadvantaged as a result**.



What this cues

- Science explanation - cues natural caring
- Blame *those* families

#2 Explain development, make context part of your story, use words *and* images

(Task B: Establish and explain that Early Matters)

Before

Decades of science show us that the **first years of life are the most critical**. In these formative years, children learn many of the skills they'll need to **function in society**. Development depends largely on being exposed to a **richly stimulating & nurturing environment**. Despite the best of intentions, **many families struggle to provide** good social and learning opportunities and their children are **disadvantaged as a result**.

After

Young children develop and learn through the **everyday back-and-forth of responsive relationships and skill-building activities** like playing and reading together - **in community spaces and at home**. Communities with parks to play in and strong child health services provide **beacons of support** for child **health** and wellbeing.

*Tips: Show how interactions & positive experiences build skills
Bring in how environments support development*

#3 Clearly define the problem using examples & *strategic framing*

Before

Australia is facing a crisis at its childcare centres with **severe staffing** shortages putting the **safety** of children and babies at risk.



What this cues

- Fuzzy problem definition
- Fatalism++
- Childcare = safety

#3 Clearly define the problem using examples & *strategic framing*

Before

Australia is facing a crisis at its childcare centres with **severe staffing** shortages putting the **safety** of children and babies at risk.



After

Early childhood development & learning improves young children's health.

Childcare is a crucial place in our communities, supporting development, learning and health. However, some young children **are unable to access childcare, because of where they live**. It's only fair that young children can access quality childcare. We must **make sure services have what they need to operate, to support children's development**.

*Tips: Feature unevenness of support across place
Explain how this impacts health and wellbeing*

#4 Lean into solutions—explain them, deploy data, and use examples + +

Before

In Queensland we know that **some children** are disproportionately experiencing inequities. For example, Aboriginal children, **those** with disabilities, and **those** in remote and regional communities.



What this cues

- Fatalism
- Otherism

#4 Lean into solutions—explain them, deploy data, and use examples + +

Before

In Queensland we know that **some children** are disproportionately experiencing inequities. For example, Aboriginal children, **those** with disabilities, and **those** in remote and regional communities.

After

Children thrive when our policies, programs, and systems **support all families and communities according to their needs**. **Strong support helps** families navigate life's storms, like loss of a job or housing stress. **We must make support available** to children and families in all places **so that all children can thrive today and in the future**.

*Tips: Go strong and early on solutions
Use examples that show how solutions work
& what they do
Feature solutions data*

#5 Use now and later framing

Before

Experiences in the early years **last a lifetime, determining** relationships, health, employment and wellbeing. What happens early in life is important. This is why **investing** in the early years is critical.



What this cues

- Fatalism
- Must be more pressing needs

#5 Use now and later framing

Before

Experiences in the early years **last a lifetime, determining** relationships, health, employment and wellbeing. What happens early in life is important. This is why **investing** in the early years is critical.



After

Our children's health matters **now and into the future**. Supporting children's early development and learning builds brains and bodies, creating **health and wellbeing today and for the years ahead**.

Tips: Make it matter for children and families right here/right now AND for society down the line

#6 Include parents in solutions

Before

We are creating opportunities for children to learn by investing in evidenced-based early childhood education and care trials and pilots for **vulnerable and First Nations cohorts.**



What this cues

- Othering
- Lack of agency

#6 Include parents in solutions

Before

We are creating opportunities for children to learn by investing in evidenced-based early childhood education and care trials and pilots for **vulnerable and First Nations cohorts**.



After

Supporting young children's learning and development improves health and wellbeing. **Families told us** they need programs in communities that are missing out. By **working together with parents**, we make sure that children can benefit from early health and development opportunities.

Tips: Give agency to families, countering 'otherism' by including them as partners and advocates for children's wellbeing



Move from this



To this

Struggles of parenting, data on problems		What surrounds us shapes us + solutions that work
Calling out disparities, 'those' groups (often race based)		Fairness: how unevenness between places creates inequality
Brain development		How supporting learning & development improves health & wellbeing
Focus on love, care & happiness		Explaining how development works & is supported
Focusing on investment for future benefit		Now and later

RESOURCES

Core Story for Early Childhood Development & Learning Toolkit

www.thekids.org.au/projects/HPER/core-story/

Reframing Parenting Toolkit

www.parentingrc.org.au/tools/reframing-parenting/

Reframing Children's Mental Health a Communication Toolkit

www.emergingminds.com.au/our-work/reframing-childrens-mental-health/

Framing Fundamentals

www.frameworksinstitute.org/framing-fundamentals/

Webinar: Shifting Mindsets to Address Disadvantage: Words that Work to Influence Change for Children and Young people

www.youtube.com/@ThrivingQldKids

Measuring Early Childhood Mindsets in Australia Project

www.frameworksinstitute.org/what-we-do/key-initiatives/measuring-early-childhood-mindsets-in-australia/

Reframing Youth Issues: Mini-Toolkit Developed for the Queensland Framing Champions Group

www.tqkp.org.au/resources/reframing-youth-issues-mini-toolkit/

Framing Checklist (Queensland Kids Partnership)

www.tqkp.org.au/resources/framing-checklist/

For more information visit the:

Framing for Change Learning Hub

The Learning Hub has been collated by the Queensland Kids Partnership Framing Initiative as a central repository of framing research reports, toolkits, guides, webinars and examples - to support all of our work with children, families and communities.



www.tqkp.org.au/framing-for-change-learning-hub/

Reframing the Early Years:

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This toolkit was designed and written by the FrameWorks Institute, a nonprofit that conducts social science research to understand and solve important communications challenges. FrameWorks' research on framing communications about child, youth and family policy was conducted in partnership with the Queensland Kids Partnership and Queensland Family and Child Commission.



If you are communicating to drive positive change for children, young people and families you have permission to use the elements and ideas in this toolkit for your purposes. All other rights are reserved by the FrameWorks Institute, according to these Terms of Use. FrameWorks Institute. (2024). Reframing the Early Years Mini-Toolkit Developed for the Queensland Framing Champions Group.

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