FRAMING CHECKLIST

A quick guide to help us frame messages that drive positive change for children, young people and families.

Who is this for?

- This is for everyone who is interested in communicating more effectively about the wellbeing of children, young people and families (particularly communications and policy professionals, advocates, practitioners, content creators).

- This tool is best for people who have already been introduced to the fundamentals of framing, particularly if you are already familiar with the FrameWorks Institute's published work in Australia.

- However, if you're new to framing or would like a refresher, see page 9 for useful links before you dive into this checklist. This is not designed to replace the rich content included in the original research and toolkits.

What will this tool help you do?

- Create messages and communications materials that drive positive change for children, young people and families.

- Edit - and 'frame-check' - existing resources, websites and other messaging.

- Talk about children and families in a productive way, tell your stories more effectively, and shift public narratives.

Where did the Framing Checklist come from?

- This tool has been created as part of the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership's Strategic Framing Initiative.

- It presents a summary of framing strategies, recommendations and concepts from Australian-based research produced by the FrameWorks Institute, commissioned by key partners including Parenting Research Centre, The Kids Research Institute, Emerging Minds, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, and related toolkits regarding children and youth in Australia.

- This complements other framing resources, such as the Framing for Change Learning Hub.

Contents:

One-page framing checklist:

Mindsets – have we… ? (See page 3)
- 'Widened the lens' to counterbalance individualism?
- 'Balanced urgency with efficacy' to counterbalance fatalism?
- 'Highlighted collectivism' to counterbalance 'otherism'?

Telling the story (order matters) – have we… ? (See page 4)
- Started with values?
- Explained causes before mentioning effects?
- Considered using an explanatory metaphor?
- Offered effective solutions throughout (not just in the conclusion)?

Supporting the story – check that… (See page 4)
- Data is used carefully – less is more
- Images and photos show context
- We're not restating myths

Talking about the early years (conception to age 5) – have we… ? (See page 5)
- Led with the value of health and wellbeing?
- Used 'now and in the future' framing?
- Defined the problem and linked to solutions?
- Used the 'fairness' frame?
- Focused on what children need?
- Considered specific tips for talking about pregnancy, mental health and play?

Talking about parenting – have we… ? (See page 6)
- Led with what children need to thrive?
- Avoided words that 'judge' parents?
- Used the Navigating Waters metaphor?
- Emphasised parenting as an important job, rather than a difficult one?

Talking about young people – have we… ? (See page 7)
- Shown adolescence as a time of discovery, opportunity, learning and potential?
- Started with importance of young people's identity formation, and social & emotional development (rather than starting with brain development)
- Explained that structural factors and systems lead to unfairness for youth?
- Used the 'community connections' frame to widen the lens?
- Countered otherism by using 'our/we' and by giving young people agency?
- Shown solutions early and avoided 'crisis' framing?

Useful metaphors – have we… ? (See page 8)
- Used opportunities to introduce tested metaphors such as Navigating Waters, Brain Architecture, Serve and Return, Air Traffic Control, Reward Dial, Resilience Scale, and Adolescence as a Time of Discovery?

Using this page: Once you're familiar with the framing recommendations, consider printing this page and displaying it as a reminder.

Avoiding *unhelpful* mindsets

Below are three common – but *unhelpful* – mindsets that we often encounter in our work with children. Use the tips on the right hand side to help counterbalance these mindsets.

Individualism

This is the sense that 'the world is the way that it is' and issues exist as they do solely as a result of individual choices. Individualistic thinking places responsibility for the state of a person's life squarely on their own shoulders, without recognising the wider context and systemic factors impacting our lives. This can result in blaming behaviours and attitudes, e.g. towards parents or children, or misaligned credit being afforded to people who occupy positions of relative privilege and power.

**To counterbalance individualism...
we can Widen the Lens. Focus on the message that 'what surrounds us shapes us'. Do this by explaining how environments, relationships and supports affect outcomes for children, young people and families, and how these factors interact.**

Fatalism

This is the idea that 'the problems are too complex, too far gone, too hard and will always exist, despite our best efforts'. We tend to tune out when this mindset is activated, as we become overwhelmed with the scale of the problem and unable to grasp viable solutions. People are less likely to support funding and expend effort on a problem that they believe 'can't be fixed'.

**To counterbalance fatalism...
we can Balance Urgency with Efficacy (effective solutions). Offer explanations and solutions to activate the constructive values of pragmatism, innovation and optimism. Limit overuse of negative data and crisis language.**

Otherism

This is the idea that the problem lies with an individual or group 'over there' and not with 'us'. It's the tendency to see people in terms of 'us' and 'them' and to attribute negative traits to those perceived as existing 'outside' of our own group. It is often based on stereotypes and has a zero-sum lens on the world i.e. the belief that any more outcomes or resources for one group means less for another. It can also be seen with use of deficit-based language like 'vulnerable' or 'at risk', which positions people or groups as powerless, inferior, or separate from the dominant group.

**To counterbalance 'otherism'...
we can Highlight Collectivism. Encourage understanding of interdependence and collective responsibility by using inclusive pronouns like we/our/us/everyone, avoid labelling subgroups with terms such as 'vulnerable', 'at risk', e.g. instead say 'we can make a difference together'.**

Telling the story – order matters...

- **Start with values.** What's the 'Big Idea' and why does it matter? E.g. *'Prioritising children's health and wellbeing is essential to ensuring a safe, thriving and positive society, now and into the future.'*

- **Explain causes before mentioning effects.** How does it work and what threatens it? Contextualise early and often throughout the message.

- **Consider using an explanatory metaphor.** For instance, we can use the Brain Architecture metaphor to help audiences understand and relate to the issues we're describing. See page 8.

- **Offer effective solutions.** What do we need to do? Give real examples to spark innovation, creative thinking and motivation.

For more information see the FrameWorks Institute's Order Matters.

When using data/statistics

- Before introducing data, start with a clear message, a frame, value or explanation on how the issue we are talking about should work and why (link to the 'big picture').

- Less is more – use data to back up the message; be selective, ensure urgency is conveyed, but not at the cost of triggering overwhelm, fatalism and crisis framing.

- Highlight structures, not 'struggles' – share data that helps people see that we need to fix systems not people e.g. use data to illustrate upstream causes, not individual choices or outcomes.

For more information see the FrameWorks Institute's Framing with Data.

When using images

- Ensure images back up the message, not derail it.

- Where possible, choose natural images showing context and positive connections with others, such as responsive adults; include images of places that provide support.

- Avoid using images of children on their own.

- Ensure pictures about pregnancy show the whole person, not just the pregnant belly.

For more information see the FrameWorks Institute's Framing with Visuals.

When talking about myths and misconceptions

- Focus on what you want people to remember. What is repeated is remembered, so avoid restating the myths or negative statements.

- Instead, centre on the desired positive message and facts that you want the audience to hear and remember.

Talking about the early years (conception to age 5)

Learn more about <u>The Core Story of Early Childhood Development and Learning here</u>.

> ***The Core Story in action (These are words that we are all encouraged to use over and over).***
>
> *"For Australia's children to thrive we need to support their development and learning, from conception onwards. This improves their health and wellbeing, both now and throughout their lives.*
>
> *Right now, some children aren't receiving the support they need. This causes their health and development to suffer.*
>
> *To improve health for every child across the country, we need to demand programs that support the specific needs of each child and each community.*
>
> *This will create a healthier society, both now and in the future."*

5 key themes to keep in mind:

- **Health and wellbeing:** By linking early childhood with health and wellbeing, we broaden thinking and help people to see why early childhood matters. Aim to lead with the frame of 'health and wellbeing' as a benefit to support early childhood development and learning, rather than as a stand-alone concept.

- **Now and in the future:** By showing how support in early childhood gives benefits both *now* and in the *future*, we can strengthen our case and engage audiences. Avoid speaking only of future benefits as it can undermine our ability to value children as they are. Likewise, avoid focusing only on the immediate benefits (especially since human brains already tend to prioritise the short term and 'discount the future').

- **Define the problem:** By showing that not all Australian children have what they need to thrive, we help people recognise the problem.

- **Call for fairness:** By calling for fairness we tap into shared values and show why it matters that every child needs the opportunity to thrive 'no matter where they live'.

- **What children need:** By talking about supporting every child and the community 'according to their needs' we build support for targeted solutions, without 'othering' particular groups. People respond negatively to one-size-fits-all approaches.

Talking about pregnancy

- **Make it about the benefits of support in pregnancy:** For example we can say, *'Babies and children thrive when their parents are supported. This support is vital even before conception, as well as during pregnancy and in the earliest days'*. Use language like *'from conception onwards'*.

- **Show that it's society's role to support pregnant people and their families:** People often believe that prenatal development is the sole responsibility of the pregnant person; which can be isolating and stigmatising.

Talking about child mental health

- **Virtuous circle:** Show that good physical and mental health supports learning and development – and vice versa.

- **Describe mental health in terms of resilience and ability to cope with problems, both big and small:** These terms feel tangible, positive and important. They're qualities we want all children to have.

- **Show that interaction builds skills and mental health:** Many people don't know that simple back-and-forth interactions with caregivers drive development. They're vital to help children thrive in the early years, and beyond.

- **Explain how mental health has many different influences:** By showing that environments, experiences, genetics and skills all play a part, we can help broaden minds on an issue that can be stigmatising.

- **Talk about a wide range of public policies and programmes:** This shows that there are lots of different ways we can boost wellbeing.

Talking about play

- **Show how play supports early development:** It helps build brains and boost skills.

- **Explain that some children don't have access to the same opportunities to play:** This shows that some are missing out, due to factors such as where they live.

- **Show how concrete solutions can solve the problem:** Describe services, policies and initiatives that give children the opportunities they need to develop and learn through play.

- **Use everyday language:** Talk about play using natural words, rather than technical terms. For example, 'playing a game with rules, such as dodgeball' instead of 'structured play'.

Talking about parenting

- **Shift the 'big idea' to 'supporting child development'** (i.e. what children needs, rather than how to improve parenting) – lead with health and wellbeing.

- **Avoid language that inadvertently evaluates parents or parenting.** Avoid talking about good or effective parenting.

- **Use the Navigating Waters metaphor** to help people see that parenting is affected by context, and is not completely natural and innate.

- **Prime with the Navigating Waters metaphor** before introducing parenting skills.

- **Don't normalise parenting struggles,** as it only makes them seem natural and insurmountable. Emphasise parenting as an important job, rather than a hard one.

- **Explain brain and biological development** to show how parenting shapes childhood development. Use Brain Architecture and Serve and Return metaphors. (See page 8)

For more information see the Parenting Research Centre's Reframing Parenting toolkit.

Talking about our young people

For more detail, see the Reframing Youth Issues Mini-Toolkit.

#1 Stress that adolescence is a time of discovery, opportunity, learning and potential

Example: *'In early adolescence, we develop skills to make our own decisions and become more resilient. There needs to be space for positive engagement with friends and supportive adults if we want everyone to have the opportunity to develop these skills.'* Avoid reinforcing adolescence as a time of danger, difficulties, being easily influenced, and making poor decision.

#2 Explain structural factors that lead to disparities and remind your audience that systems are designed by people and can be redesigned

Example: *'One impact of the history of underinvesting in some communities is that schools in these communities tend to have less funding and fewer resources. This is one reason why adolescents from under-served groups may have lower high school graduation rates than their peers.'*

#3 Start with the importance of young people's identity formation, and social and emotional development, rather than starting with the brain

Example: *'The changes occurring between puberty and the mid-20s create a period of intense learning about who we are and who we want to be. These changes are related to particular ways that the brain is developing during this time.'*

#4 Use the 'community connections' frame to widen the lens. Show that communities play a role in supporting healthy young people, and young people play a role in creating healthy communities.

Example: *'Supporting adolescents to engage with the world around them leads to healthier and more vibrant communities for all of us - now and in the future.'*

#5 Counter otherism with: **pronouns** (use more 'we/our' and avoid 'they/them/those'); **word choice** (avoid 'vulnerable'); talking about **what we all need** to thrive; and showing that young people have **abilities and agency**.

Example: *'During adolescence, we explore the world around us, mapping out the terrain so we can find our path to adulthood. This is a time of trial and error as we pursue new experiences and different ways of expressing ourselves.'*

#6 Show solutions early and avoid 'crisis' framing. Balance urgency/sense of the problem with efficacy/concrete solutions.

Useful metaphors

Our human brains love metaphors and stories. Look for opportunities to use the following metaphors, which are known to be effective when explaining the importance of supporting children and families.

Navigating Waters. For healthy development, children need life to be on an even keel. But for families experiencing poverty and stress, raising children is like sailing in rough waters. Helping parents with counselling, quality care and financial support makes sure that they have the lighthouses and safe harbours that they need to navigate any rough waters.

Brain Architecture. Brain development is like building a house. The basic structure of the brain is built through a process that starts before birth and continues through childhood and adolescence. This provides a strong foundation for now and in the future.

Serve and Return. Babies and children develop through back-and-forth interactions with primary caregivers, like in a game of tennis. Scientists now know that the interactive influences of genes and experience shape the developing brain. The active ingredient is the 'Serve and Return' relationships that babies have with their parents and other caregivers in their communities.

Airport Traffic Control. Much like the air traffic control system at an airport helps planes on different runways land and take off safely, executive function skills help our brains prioritise tasks, filter distractions and control impulses.

Resilience Scale. The Resilience Scale metaphor uses the visual of a balance beam or see-saw to demonstrate how negative experiences and adversity can be counterbalanced by positive experiences and supports. Individuals' resilience can be built by increasing their skills and abilities (e.g. developing executive functioning or practicing 'serve and return' interactions), thereby shifting the fulcrum (the tipping point) of the scale toward more positive outcomes.

Adolescence as a Time of Discovery. During adolescence, we explore the world around us, mapping out the terrain so we can find our path to adulthood. This is a time of trial and error as we pursue new experiences and different ways of expressing ourselves. That's why we need to create environments where all adolescents have freedom and safety to take positive risks and discover who they are and what they want for their future.

Learn more about the metaphors in the Framing for Change Learning Hub - Section 6: Tested Metaphors.

Find out more...

If you're new to framing - or need a refresher - the **Framing for Change Learning Hub** is a great place to start. You'll find lots of simple guides, toolkits, and practical examples to support your use of this Framing Checklist.

Direct links to toolkits

In particular, we recommend visiting (or revisiting) the resources and toolkits below.

These draw on research by the FrameWorks Institute on Australian attitudes to children, young people and parenting, and on shared cultural values. They present a range of suggested frames and communication strategies that can drive productive dialogue and mindset shifts to help create the conditions for Australia's children thrive – now and in the future.

You can find all these resources and more in our Framing for Change Learning Hub - Section 2: Australian Framing Reports & Research:

- *The Core Story for Early Childhood Development and Learning*, The Kids Research Institute
- *Reframing Parenting,* Parenting Research Centre
- *Reframing Children's Mental Health,* Emerging Minds
- *Framing Child Development and Care in Australia,* Murdoch Children's Research Institute
- *Reframing The Early Years - Mini-Toolkit,* Developed in Queensland
- *Reframing Youth Issues - Mini-Toolkit,* Developed in Queensland

This Framing Checklist was created for the Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership's Framing Initiative, which is jointly led by the Queensland Family and Child Commission in collaboration with the State Library Queensland, Children's Health Queensland, Department of Education, Raising Children Network, together with Queensland agencies and not-for-profit organisations. The aim of the initiative is to shift how the public - including decision makers, practitioners, parents and caregivers - understand and support 'what matters' and 'what works' for children, by enabling broad use of evidence-based framing.