



The Big Picture

Talking Points

A Strategic Approach to Reframing Early Childhood Development and Learning in Alamance County

These talking points are guidelines for incorporating frame elements, such as values and metaphors—into communications about improving outcomes for kids in Alamance. Frame elements help communicators explain why Alamance needs to support learning and early childhood development, what environmental factors shape children’s outcomes, and how the community can promote healthy childhood development across the region.

The numbered guidelines lay out recommendations for communication about children’s wellbeing. Each guideline is followed by a set of talking points that expresses its central ideas. These guidelines are a road map for framing messages about development and learning; use them verbatim—or use your creativity to adapt them to your needs.

1. Use intrinsic values like **Happiness** and **Social Responsibility** early on to establish why children’s issues are important to the entire community and are a shared responsibility.

These sample talking points explain why supporting development and learning matters:

- When we support children’s happiness, we support the happiness of our whole community.
- Committing resources to early education programs gives children opportunities to bond with other kids, teachers, parents and community members.
- We have a moral responsibility as a community to support all children.
- If we want kids to develop the skills they need to do well in life, we need to put our community resources toward educational programs and developmental supports.

2. Fill in the public's incomplete understanding of how children develop and learn with explanatory metaphors. Use the **Brain Architecture** metaphor to explain the process of development. This metaphor conveys that children's brains are built over time. It helps people understand that children's brains develop from their earliest days and continue to grow as they get older.

These sample talking points use *Brain Architecture* to explain how the brain develops:

- You can't build a structure without a solid foundation and quality materials. It's the same with our kids' wellbeing. It's never too early to start building strong brains.
- Brain development is like a construction project. We need to make sure our children are in environments that support their developmental needs. The early years are an especially intense period of brain development, so let's get it right.
- Healthy childhood development is the foundation of children's cognitive, social, and emotional growth.

3. Use the **Serve and Return** metaphor to explain how responsive, back-and-forth interactions between children and caregivers are critical to the brain-building project.

These sample talking points use *Serve and Return* to explain how interactive experiences build brains:

- When kids babble or make facial expressions, adults help them learn and develop by responding in kind. These simple everyday actions build strong brains.
- Each back-and-forth exchange between young children and caring adults helps form and strengthen neural pathways in the brain. These interactions have a significant and lasting effect on all the development and learning that follows.

4. Use the **Toxic Stress** metaphor to explain the value of community interventions in cases of adversity and broad-scale promotion of access to developmental and learning resources. **Toxic Stress** conveys that chronic and severe exposure to stress can negatively impact children's development. This kind of stress is different than normal or more tolerable forms of stress.

These sample talking points use *Toxic Stress* to explain the developmental impact of adversity:

- There is a clear distinction between normal, everyday stress and stress caused by adverse

experiences.

- Adverse experiences cause “toxic” stress. This kind of severe, chronic stress can undermine brain and biological development.
- This can lead to lifelong difficulties in learning, memory, and self-regulation.
- Responsive caregiving moderates toxic stress. All children need care from a responsive, loving adult.
- Early adversity can lead to lifelong difficulties in learning, memory, and self-regulation.

5. Use the **Prosperity Grid** metaphor to convey that surrounding kids with healthy environments and community resources protects them from toxic stress. This metaphor compares social services to an electrical grid that children and families can “plug into” to get the supports they need.

These sample talking points use *Prosperity Grid* to explain the importance of healthy environments and access to resources:

- Our community is like an electrical grid. It has resources that children and families can plug into to learn and grow.
- Alamance County has a lot of great resources. We have libraries, schools, community centers, hospitals, and museums.
- But not everyone has access to these resources. We need to ensure that all children and families in our county can plug into the resources they need to thrive.
- If we do, our children will be stronger—and our community will be, too.
- Resources should flow evenly throughout grid so that all community members can benefit from what Alamance has to offer.

6. Help the public see how environments impact children’s outcomes. Use the **Resilience Scale** metaphor to explain the effect of both positive and negative factors. Avoid the **Family Bubble** trap—the belief that parents are solely responsible for children’s outcomes—and focus on the ways entire communities help children develop.

These sample talking points use *Resilience Scale* to explain how resilience works:

- Children’s resilience is like a scale that can tip to one side or the other. Communities can create

and promote resiliency by stacking up positive factors on one side of the scale and removing negative ones from the other side.

- Positive factors include access to health care, early learning opportunities, and supportive communities.
- Negative factors are neglect, abuse, severe poverty, and other adverse experiences.
- When we stack children's scales with positive factors, the scale tips—and children grow more resilient.

7. Avoid the “education in crisis” frame. Use the **Remodeling** metaphor to compare policy changes in the education system to remodeling a house. This conveys that change is necessary, possible, and desirable.

These sample talking points use *Remodeling* to explain how education systems can be improved:

- Making changes to our education system is like a remodeling project. Right now, our education system is like an older house that is in need of some repair.
- If we draw up a plan to remodel our education system and complete each item step by step, we can design a more modern and effective system.
- Remodeling the system means making big and small changes. This means figuring out what is working and what isn't working--and identifying where we can make improvements to improve our education system.

8. Finally, always point to specific, actionable steps that we can take to promote children's development and learning.