Anticipate Public Thinking
You Say…They Think

Strategic framing means choosing the communications cues (words, phrases, ideas) that help the public think differently and more productively about your issue. The graphic below lays out how a communicator can strategically reframe a message by identifying the problematic default assumptions that interfere with public understanding of your message.

On the next page, you'll find the You Say…They Think graphic for Early Childhood Development and Leaning in Alamance County. The "You Say" column below gives examples of statements that might activate default, unproductive assumptions about how children develop and learn, as seen in the "They Think" column. Use the "What's Triggered" column to see what assumptions are activated (and how) and learn which reframing strategies can be used to avoid them in the "What Helps" column.

You Say…They Think

Anticipate how messages go astray—and see how to keep them on track.

You Say…	They Think…	What's Triggered in Their Minds?	What Helps…
Because brain development starts so early in life, children need development and learning support in their earliest years to grow into healthy, productive adults. Alamance County needs to devote more community resources toward helping children reach their full potential.	Making sure that children reach their full potential is a job for parents and families. As long as children grow up with good parents who teach them good values, they will do well as adults.	• *Family Bubble:* The belief that parents are solely responsible for children's outcomes. • *Environments Matter:* The understanding that environments contribute to children's wellbeing.	Avoid the *Family Bubble* by including caregivers outside of the family and community resources that support children's development. Flesh out the *Environments Matter* model by talking about specific community-level supports (e.g., schools, neighborhoods, communities) that help kids learn and grow.
Early education programs are an essential part of children's healthy development and prepare them for a lifetime of learning. Exposing kids to quality early learning before kindergarten helps them develop important skills.	Pre-school and day care centers aren't real school; real learning begins in kindergarten. It's mainly babysitting—how could it be that important?	• *Sponge:* The view that children develop passively by absorbing information from the surrounding environment. • *Black Box:* Lacking a detailed understanding of the active processes of development, common reasoning is that children "just develop" naturally.	Replace the assumption that children learn passively by framing development as an active process: • The *Brain Architecture* metaphor helps to communicate that the development process begins early—like the foundation of a house. Early education takes place during a period of intense brain development. • The *Weaving Skills Ropes* metaphor communicates how social, emotional, and cognitive skills actively develop when children have opportunities to practice, combine, and test their skills.

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We want children in Alamance to develop resilience so that they can overcome adversity and contribute to their communities as adults. Exposure to stress, violence, poverty, substance abuse, and other negative factors pose significant challenges in childhood. However, developmental and educational supports can offset these factors.	Resilience isn't something a child can "develop" or learn; you either have it or you don't. If they want to succeed badly enough, even children from bad homes manage to get through hard times. And if they don't experience some stress early on, they won't be able to handle it later in life!	• *Self-Makingness:* Children can rise above difficult circumstances through sheer force of will.	Shift focus to the environmental factors that influence children's outcomes. Remind people that children do not develop social, emotional, and cognitive skills on their own. • The *Toxic Stress* metaphor explains how chronic, severe stress impedes healthy development. • The *Resilience Scale* metaphor explains how multiple factors influence development. Use this metaphor to explain how communities can cultivate resilience by creating positive environments.
We need to update the way our community approaches teaching and learning by looking at the whole education system. We need to find innovative solutions for what isn't working.	The current education system is a disaster, and the main problem is the shortage of teachers. The most important thing we can do to help our kids is put more money toward paying teachers higher salaries.	• *Education System in Crisis:* The outlook that the education system is broken and cannot be fixed. • *Funding=Learning:* When funding is presented as both the cause and the solution to problems in the education system, funding can be equated to learning. This overly narrow way of thinking about the education system constrains thinking about solutions.	Avoid fatalistic thinking. Remind the public that we can update the current system to better meet our goals: • The *Remodeling* metaphor communicates the need for updates in the form of new and creative approaches to learning instead of tearing down the existing system. • Build on the *Funding = Learning model* (this model isn't necessarily bad, it is just narrow). Keep the focus on how to increase young people's access to learning opportunities. Use the *Weaving Skills Ropes* metaphor to explain what allows children to learn. Use the *Charging Stations* metaphor to explain the value of having multiple places where children can plug in to learning opportunities.

You Say…	They Think…	What's Triggered in Their Minds?	What Helps…
We need to devote the limited resources we have to those who have the most severe challenges.	We are creating a culture of dependency! Why should we take badly needed resources away from the people who are working the hardest and give them to those who choose to not take care of themselves and their families?	• *Self-Makingness:* The belief that individuals are responsible for their own outcomes. In this model, personal choices like "not taking care of yourself" is what leads to negative outcomes.	Explain that conditions, not people, impede healthy development. Show how unequal distribution of resources across a community creates disparities in outcomes, which sets all of us back. • The *Prosperity Grid* metaphor moves people away from the idea that children who do not do well lack drive, discipline, and a desire to succeed. Thinking about a grid points to the design and structure of our broader systems (schools, hospitals, community centers, libraries, etc.) that distribute resources evenly. When we can direct effort to the places where the grid is patchy, this allows everyone to connect and benefit from participating in a stronger community.