

How LENA Programs Align with the Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework

LENA[®]

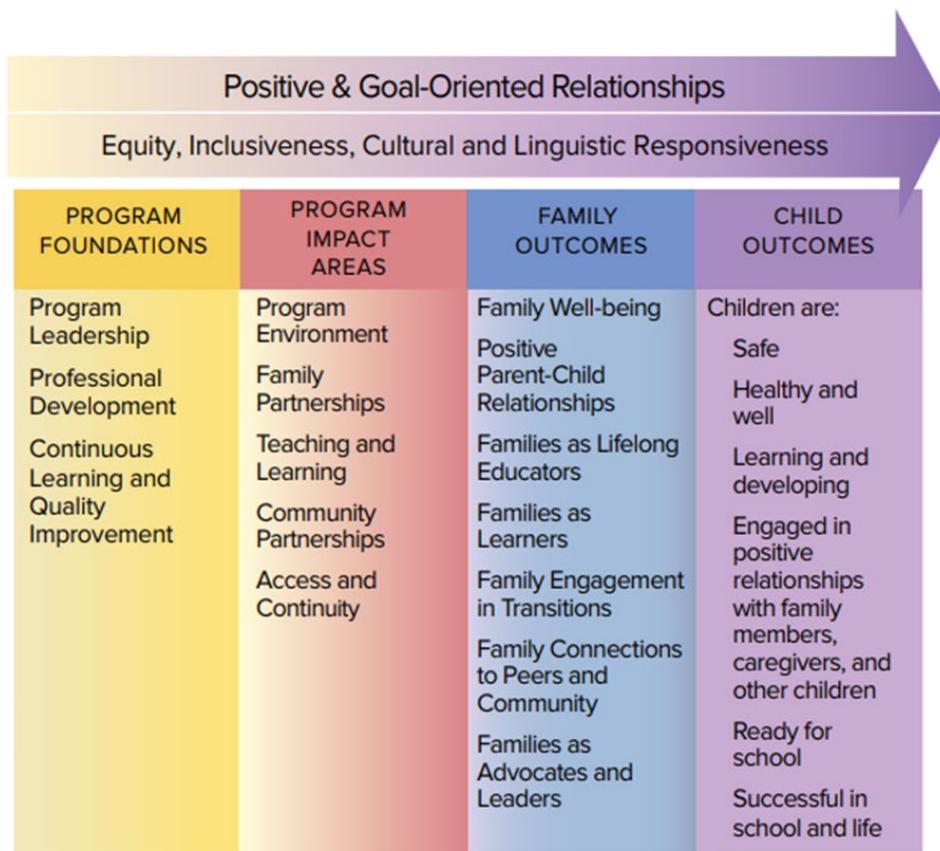
Building brains through early talk

Revised Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework

Across the country, LENA is working with Head Start programs to support their parent, family, and community engagement efforts. LENA has developed technology-enabled programming that can be used by Head Start programs to increase the amount of interactive talk that parents and other family members have with children before they turn three. The science is clear that the amount of interactive talk a child experiences in their early years supports healthy development. Together with LENA, Head Start programs are making measurable improvements in their children’s outcomes at the age when it matters most.

The publication of a revised Parent, Family, and Community Engagement (PFCE) Framework, highlighted in **Figure 1**, is a clear indication of the importance that the Office of Head Start places on family engagement. Like the original framework, the new one supports “collaboration among families and Head Start and Early Head Start programs, staff and community service providers to promote positive, enduring outcomes for children and families.” Equity, inclusiveness, cultural and linguistic responsiveness, and positive-goal-oriented relationships serve as key drivers supporting these outcomes.

Figure 1. Revised Head Start Parent, Family, and Community Engagement Framework



from <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/pdf/pfce-framework.pdf>

LENA’s work with Head Start programs aligns well with the new Framework. LENA programs combine evidence-based feedback with practical techniques and coaching in a two-way partnership with parents and other adults to increase interactive talk that’s an essential ingredient to brain development. LENA’s strategy is to help Head Start program staff meet parents and other caregivers (including teachers) where they are and engage them as positive conversational partners. Through a collaborative partnership with Head Start programs, LENA offers replicable, high-impact programs specifically designed for parents and teachers, all with a laser focus on boosting interactive talk during this critical time of child development. The ways in which LENA works with Head Start programs include:

LENA START[®]

LENA Start: a group program serving families who have children aged birth to 32 months. The three-month program of weekly sessions includes a fully integrated curriculum (in English and Spanish) and focuses on increasing interactive talk through practical Talking Tips™ (see *Appendix A*), shared book reading, and objective “talk pedometer” feedback that emphasizes conversational turn taking. This program specifically aligns with parents as “lifelong educators” of their children, an important outcome identified within the PFCE framework.

LENA GROW™

LENA Grow: a professional development program for Head Start teachers that works to measure and improve the interactive talk environment of Early Head Start classrooms. Teachers receive strength-based coaching, coupled with evidence-based feedback on talk in their classrooms. Short coaching sessions over a three to four months sequence help teachers integrate interactive talk into daily routines.

LENA HOME™

LENA Home: a home-visiting adaptation of LENA Start. During the three to six-month program, home visitors meet individually with parents/family members every week or every other week. The tailored coaching supports (in English and Spanish) are designed to integrate easily into existing programming and curricula, and they provide a focus on increasing interactive talk through practical Talking Tips, shared book reading, and objective “talk pedometer” feedback that emphasizes conversational turn taking.

Much more detail is available on these programs and the LENA technology, in general, at www.LENA.org or by reaching out via email at info@lena.org.

How LENA Grow, LENA Start, and LENA Home Align with the PFCE Framework

LENA programs support the PFCE Framework in several significant ways, primarily associated with both family engagement outcomes and child outcomes. LENA programming also supports strategies to strengthen both program foundations and program impact areas.

The detailed information in the following pages illustrates that LENA programming is remarkably cross-cutting in its alignment with the framework. This perspective begins with the key drivers of Positive & Goal Oriented Relationships and Equity, Inclusiveness, and Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness.

Positive & Goal Oriented Relationships

Positive and goal-oriented relationships are built over time through an interactive process and on a foundation of mutual respect. Two-way communication and a strengths-based mindset are key tenants. At a fundamental level, LENA programming is strongly aligned in this regard. One of LENA Foundation's long-held core beliefs is that parents and caregivers are the "secret sauce" for achieving better outcomes for children. This core belief is woven into the LENA feedback reports and the associated program supports, and includes all of the child's conversational partners, such as all family members and, as applicable, child care teachers.

Equity, Inclusiveness, Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness

Equity, Inclusiveness, Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness is at the heart of building relationships with families. Programs must strive to build and maintain authentic interactions that are meaningful to those who participate in them. At its core, the LENA technology and associated programming supports this in two key ways:

- LENA is compatible with *all language*. There is great power in conversations with infants and toddlers which is why the focus of LENA Start, LENA Home, and LENA Grow is to foster more conversational turn taking. The nature of those turns (e.g., how they are achieved, what language, what subject, etc.) can and should vary widely. LENA doesn't tell people what to say or how to say it.
- LENA generates insight supporting *all children*. LENA feedback is fundamentally at the individual child level, providing great insight for families and Head Start program partners. Diverse family structures and environments can produce a wide range of initial levels of interactive talk. Relative growth in interactive talk is the primary goal, not achieving a particular level. For the LENA Grow program, rather than having only one or two children complete each LENA Day, most or all children in the room take part. This builds a natural and important equity lens for the teacher, enabling them to understand and value each child's language experience.

The following tables summarize the alignment of LENA programs to PFCE Outcomes. **Table 1** addresses the PFCE Family outcomes and **Table 2** addresses overarching program foundations and impact areas. The domains or dimensions that are aligned for a specific model are indicated with a letter entry (S for LENA Start, H for LENA Home, and G for LENA Grow). A bold letter indicates the program in question is particularly well aligned for that dimension.

Table 1. Alignment of LENA Programs with PFCE Framework Family Outcomes

PFCE Family Outcomes						
Family Well-Being	Positive Parent-Child Relationships	Families as Lifelong Educators	Families as Learners	Family Engagement in Transitions	Family Connections to Peers and Community	Families as Advocates and Leaders
S, H, G	S, H, G	S, H, G	S, H, G	S, H, G	S, H, G	S, H, G

S – alignment for LENA Start; H – alignment for LENA Home; G –alignment for LENA Grow

S – strong alignment, LENA Start; **H – strong** alignment, LENA Home; **G – strong** alignment, LENA Grow

Table 2. Alignment of LENA Programs with PFCE Framework Program Foundations and Impact Areas

Program Foundations				Program Impact Areas			
Leadership	Professional Development	CLQI	Program Environment	Family Partnerships	Teaching and Learning	Community Partnerships	Access and Continuity
S, H, G	S, H, G	S, H, G	S, H, G	S, H, G	S, H, G	S, H, G	S, H, G

S – alignment for LENA Start; H – alignment for LENA Home; G –alignment for LENA Grow

S – strong alignment, LENA Start; **H – strong** alignment, LENA Home; **G – strong** alignment, LENA Grow

Following are specific illustrative examples of this alignment.

Family Outcomes

Family outcomes comprise seven elements that research shows promote positive child outcomes. LENA’s programs positively impact all of these elements:

Family Well Being: “Families are safe, healthy, have opportunities for educational advancement and economic mobility, and have access to physical and mental health services, housing and food assistance, and other family support services.”

- All LENA programs provide a wonderful educational opportunity for families and, just as importantly, a channel of outreach to, and two-way communication with, families. The programming is a good opportunity to build a relationship with a family or group of families, and Head Start partners can develop family awareness of the range of available services.
- Recruitment efforts, including parent and family information sessions, typically span beyond one program. Exploring the needs and desires of each family is key to those conversations.
- A parent survey conducted at the beginning and end of LENA Start yields insights into parent perceptions of self-efficacy and confidence, knowledge of child development, and the degree to which they feel more connected to their peers and community.

Positive Parent-Child Relationships: "Beginning with transitions to parenthood, parents and families develop warm relationships that nurture their child's health, development, and learning."

- By encouraging increased interactive talk, LENA Start and LENA Home foster meaningful, reciprocal relationships between parent and child in a manner that is both culturally receptive and responsive. The Talking Tips focus on increasing interactive talk and promote stronger social-emotional development between adult caregivers and the child.
- LENA Start and LENA Home engage parents as equal partners in learning about their child while acknowledging parents' premier role as their child's first and most important teacher.
- LENA Grow promotes engagement and two-way communication between the teacher and parent through parent reports, Talking Tips, and Conversation Starters posters that are shared and discussed.

Families as Lifelong Educators: "Parents and families observe, guide, promote, and participate in the everyday learning of their children at home, at school, and in their communities."

- LENA Start and LENA Home encourage parents to engage and interact with their children as part of the foundation for interactions around early learning.
- Parents share tips on everyday learning practices with program staff and, in the case of LENA Start, peer families.
- Facilitators are encouraged to incorporate additional local resources that support children's learning and development, such as libraries and museums.
- Parent and family outreach is built into LENA Grow through parent/family reports, Talking Tips, and Conversation Starters posters that are shared and discussed.

Families as Learners: "Parents and families learn about their child's personality, development, and learning style. They also advance their own learning interests through education, training, and other experiences that support their parenting, careers, and life goals."

- All LENA programs share (and put into context) with families the science and related evidence behind the importance of interactive talk and responsive caregiving in the earliest years.
- LENA Start and LENA Home help parents learn more about their child's learning, development and behavior. Both programs have a specific focus on shared-reading which supports family literacy activities between parents and children.
- Families gain experience and skill interpreting feedback reports. This is especially emphasized in LENA Start and LENA Home, but also included in LENA Grow.
- All LENA programs include access to and use of the Developmental Snapshot tool, which serves as a child language skill progress monitor, but also a formative assessment educating parents on key language milestones in the first three years. LENA Start parents receive follow-up opportunities to complete the Snapshot and track their child's language-related skills at six-month intervals.

Family Engagement in Transitions: "Parents and families encourage and advocate for their child's learning and development as they transition to new learning environments within and between, Early Head Start, Head Start, early childhood services, early elementary grades, and beyond."

- The LENA reports on conversational turns are a primary source of data that can be shared by parents and Head Start partners as children transition (e.g., from EHS to HS, from an infant room to a toddler room, etc.). All LENA programs include access to and use of the Developmental Snapshot tool, which serves as a

child language skill progress monitor, but also a formative assessment educating parents on key language milestones in the first three years. LENA Start parents receive follow-up opportunities to complete the Snapshot and track their child’s language-related skills at six-month intervals.

- In many cases, LENA program data is shared with new learning environments as the children age. This could be through partnership with the local school district but also within networks of child care providers, as facilitated through the professional development / coaching organization. These data could be both the parent/family feedback reports (LENA Start and LENA Home), individual child reports (LENA Grow), and the Snapshot parent/caregiver reports (all programs).

Family Connections to Peers and Community: “Parents and families form connections with peers, mentors, and other community members in formal or informal social networks. These networks are supportive and educational. They honor and are inclusive of families’ home language and culture, and they enhance families’ social wellbeing and community life.”

- Through LENA Start, parents develop relationships with their peers through weekly educational sessions. LENA Start is designed to create a safe and respectful environment where parents can learn from each other and ask for the kinds of information that they find helpful as individuals and members of a group.
- LENA Grow’s parent reports strengthen connections and community with families and child care providers. LENA Grow also offers several additional opportunities for child care providers and teachers to involve parents.

Families as Advocates and Leaders: “Parents and families advocate for their children and play leadership roles in Head Start and Early Head Start. They participate in decision-making, policy development, and organizing activities in communities and states to improve children’s safety, health, development, and learning experiences.”

- Parents and caregivers become ambassadors and directly support recruitment of other parents to LENA Start and LENA Home (and even facilitation of LENA Start sessions, as an example).
- Parents are equipped with information to share with other parents on the importance of interactive talk and positive parent-child relationships. This applies in LENA Start and LENA Home, especially. LENA Grow builds these skills through parent reports, but also by encouraging suggestions from parents and families for culturally responsive books and other materials to fold into highlighted talking tips and conversation starters.
- Parent and family focus groups are encouraged to build two-way communication channels and gather feedback and recommendations. Information is folded into program improvements and local adaptation, especially as it pertains to cultural and linguistic responsiveness.
- An example of this domain in action: a LENA Home parent turned community outreach and parent recruitment specialist testified at a state legislative hearing.

Child Learning Outcomes

These are addressed in a separate document titled *How LENA Programs Map to Head Start’s Early Learning Outcomes*.

Program Foundations

The Office of Head Start recognizes that solid Program Foundations are needed if PFCE is to be both authentic and lasting. Program Foundations dimensions comprise Leadership, Professional Development, and Continuous

Learning and Quality Improvement (CLQI for short). When the foundations of Leadership, Professional Development, and Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement are integrated and synergistic, better family and child outcomes can be realized and sustained.

Leadership: Leaders set the vision and expectations, model practices, monitoring activities across the dimensions of Program Foundations. Leaders need to attend to all of the Program Foundations and Program Impact Areas so they can make changes when needed to ensure that they are mutually reinforcing. Leaders advocate for the inclusion of diverse family voices at all levels.

- All LENA programs (LENA Start, LENA Home, LENA Grow) provide a wealth of data to support leadership insight into how many families join the program, how many are actively participating, and how many are completing the sequence. Various impact/effectiveness measures, relating to both parent and child achievement, are included in semi-annual data summaries that are shared and discussed.
- When program leadership and parent leaders are engaged through an understanding of the science and related evidence behind the importance of interactive talk and responsive caregiving in the earliest years, leadership monitors recruitment take-up rate and graduation or completion rates to provide the evidence that things are going well.
- LENA Grow offers a particularly important equity lens for leaders through its child-level and room-level data. LENA Grow measures the amount of talk exposure and interaction for every child in a room. Program directors can assess the degree to which children are receiving equitable exposure, building awareness of personal biases and supporting appropriate adjustments.
- LENA's talk pedometer technology has a primary focus on interactive talk through its conversational turns measure. Program supports are in both English and Spanish language. LENA, and the turns measure in particular, do not know what is being said (phoneme and syllable processing versus word meaning). Thus, turns count no matter what is being said or how the turns are produced. This means leaders can continue to leverage LENA as they build relationships with immigrant family groups and communities, for example.

Professional Development: PFCE professional development is important for all staff, regardless of staff role. Professional development plans can be aligned with both continuous learning and improvement data as well as family and community feedback. These plans include training, ongoing supports (such as coaching, supervision, recognition of challenges, and successes), and information about career options. Communities of learners are more likely to co-design and co-lead training to strengthen family and community partnerships.

- All LENA programs (LENA Start, LENA Home, LENA Grow) provide professional development opportunities for staff of Head Start and other community partners, including parent leaders. LENA encourages partners to cast a wide net when gathering stakeholders to introductory webinars and onsite trainings on the science and related evidence behind the importance of interactive talk and responsive caregiving in the earliest years.
- The creation of two-way communication with families is encouraged throughout the respective programming sequences.
- Ongoing professional development is offered to our Head Start partners through regular Lunch & Learn webinars hosted by LENA staff with participation of Head Start and other community partners from around the country. These create a "community of practice" and provide opportunities for idea sharing, problem solving, and connection points. These also feed into LENA's enhancement of both program elements and training.

- LENA programs are data rich by design: providing objective feedback on interactive talk. Whether in peer learning communities (as in LENA Start and often in LENA Grow) or in a 1:1 setting (LENA Home), skills in data interpretation and reflection are developed by both staff and families.
- LENA provides regular program performance summaries for staff that quantify impact but also provide insight into the feedback from parents and teachers. Together, these further promote the use and synthesis of data to support recognition and informed decision-making.

Continuous Learning and Quality Improvement: CLQI reflects a “commitment to use data to improve family engagement practices on a continuous basis.” Leaders and managers build support and capacity for this work among staff, families, and community partners. Program leaders seek out opportunities to use their program data to inform local and state planning and policy decisions. They monitor their own progress toward PFCE outcomes and periodically refine plans and actions.

- LENA programs are data rich and offer built-in fidelity of implementation and effectiveness measures. These data can feed into continuous learning and quality improvement efforts of each partner organization: what’s working, how well, with which families, which preferred language, age of child, and so forth.
- Participants complete evaluations at the end of each sequence, and this feedback informs learning and prioritized improvements.
- Parent surveys are completed by LENA Start families and provide insights into the degree to which community engagement is enhanced.
- Through a cloud-based platform and supportive performance summaries, Head Start partners are well informed about program status and performance. The key dashboard metrics support ongoing adjustment to improve quality.

Program Impact Areas

The Office of Head Start has defined service activities, called Program Impact Areas, that are known to have the greatest impact and influence on family outcomes. The Program Foundations must work together in order to achieve the desired outcomes in the Program Impact Areas.

Program Environment: Features of the physical setting that affect interactions with children and relationships with families and staff. These environments make families feel welcome and promote children’s wellbeing, learning and development.

- Session framework/structure increasingly emphasize discussion to allow families to contribute insights into cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds and traditions and how those impact interactive talk in different settings.
- LENA operates in all languages, allowing families with multiple household languages and dual language learners to participate.
- LENA measures have no insight into what is being said or how it is said, ensuring privacy along with family and community buy in.
- Books provided to parents (LENA Start and LENA Home) and used by teachers (LENA Grow) are selected to be appropriate for low-levels of literacy and can be selected by partners to best fit the cultural and ethnic diversity of families.

- LENA Grow offers a particularly important equity lens for leaders and teachers alike through its child-level and room-level data. Each child’s individual language experience is valued, no matter their identity (cultural, ethnic, etc.).
- Families see that program partners are investing in the earliest years with a strength-based mindset. Parents and families are valued and respected as their child’s first and most important teachers.
- LENA Start provides a fun and welcoming setting for parents and families to build peer networks and social capital.
- LENA Grow integrates several elements (parent reports, Talking Tips, and Conversation Starters posters) that are shared to build more robust two-way communication and engagement with families.

Family Partnerships: Robust and reciprocal relationships are built through frames of respect and value. Program staff engage in enduring two-way communication with families to understand goals (both child and family level). Opportunities are fostered to enable for parents to contribute their skills and strengths to the programming.

LENA Programming supports two-way communication between staff and families. Here are some examples:

- Reflection and goal setting are key to each session (across all program models), with an emphasis on a strength-based approach, especially in report review and interpretation.
- Parents, primary caregivers, and families are the child’s first and most important teachers. LENA puts data directly into parents’ and caregivers’ hands empowering them not just with information but practical steps to be their child’s best teacher. This is a point emphasized in all LENA Programming.
- Community partners are explicitly selected based on the fact that they have an established track record of trusting relationships built with families.
- Participants complete evaluation questionnaires at the end of each program, and this feedback is provided to both local partners and LENA and informs learning and prioritized improvements.
- LENA programs include the Developmental Snapshot tool, which serves as a child language skill progress monitor, but also a formative assessment educating parents on key language milestones in the first three years.

Teaching and Learning: Families and staff collaboratively promote positive children learning, development, and school readiness outcomes. Families are embraced as partners and children’s first and most important teachers. Two-way communication between staff and families strengthen programming, and the robust community partner network opens doors to other learning opportunities for families.

- LENA programs are parent- or family-facing (LENA Start, LENA Home) and engage families as equal partners in their children’s learning and development.
- LENA Grow integrates several elements (parent reports, Talking Tips, and Conversation Starters posters) that are shared to build more robust two-way communication and engagement with families.
- LENA programs focus on interactive talk and positive parent-child relationships in the earliest years as an essential element to entering school ready for success.
- Participating parents and families learn and come to embrace that no matter their level of education, they serve a vital role as educators in the home.
- Parents come together as a peer learning community in LENA Start, discussing their experiences and sharing insights. The social capital that is built over the session sequence through this structure is significant and is one of the reasons LENA Start has achieved an impressive completion (graduation) rate

of more than 75%. LENA Grow also can be implemented in a peer learning community with teachers. As with LENA Start, social capital is built, and peer sharing and discussion enhances the learning experience.

- Most implementations leverage parents and caregivers as advocates to support future recruitment and in many cases as facilitators/coordinators.

Community Partnerships: Collaborative relationships are built to support improved child and family outcomes. A broad net is cast (e.g., libraries, school districts, health centers, local businesses). A robust partnership network is better able to respond to families' interests and evolving needs and support families through transitions.

- Parents and caregivers become ambassadors for recruitment (and even facilitation of LENA Start sessions, as an example).
- LENA and Head Start staff regularly engage families to determine the best way to get the word out about the program and other community services. During the program cycle, each participant is made aware of other services and opportunities that are available to them.
- LENA programs are generally three to four months in duration and can be woven into a broader sequence of supports for families.

Access and Continuity: Eligibility, recruitment, selection, enrollment, and attendance (ERSEA) are thoughtfully established and regularly refined, factoring family, staff, and community input and data.

- Parents and caregivers become ambassadors for recruitment (and even facilitation of LENA Start sessions, as an example).
- LENA and Head Start staff regularly engage families to determine the best way to get the word out about the program and other community services. During the program cycle, each participant is made aware of other services and opportunities that are available to them.
- Monthly meetings with parents and families (socializations) can readily feed into LENA Home and LENA Start. LENA has developed content to support educational information nights for parents and families. Parents/families with interest can then sign up to participate in the program that best fits their circumstance.
- LENA programming is supportive of ERSEA strategies and workflows. For example, families on a wait list for other services or programs can participate in the three to four-month duration LENA Start or LENA Home program. The program offered, again, depends on the family's circumstances.

Appendix A: The 14 Talking Tips™

Quality interactions are clearly crucial to early brain development and later life outcomes. Parents, caregivers, and teachers are vital conversational partners for children, and they need to be both aware of what the science indicates but also learn the skills to act on the science. While the essential skill of interactive talk with infants and toddlers may be natural for some adults, it is much less so for others. That's why LENA has created 14 simple, scientifically-motivated Talking Tips that can be easily used during daily routines. The unique aspect of the 14 Talking Tips is their laser focus on increasing adult-child connections, derived from a small set of evidence-based "active ingredients" for promoting interactive talk. "The frequent and daily use of the 14 Talking Tips, to the extent that it becomes habitual, is the key to accelerating the early language acquisition process" ([Warren, 2015, p.5](#)).

What are they?

- LENA examined a number of different research-based curricula and guidance and compiled a list of 14 tips for promoting caregiver-child interaction.
- They are not meant to be exhaustive, but numerous enough to provide options for adult conversational partners.
- The Talking Tips are grounded in research, but simple and flexible enough to be used in different settings and during everyday routines.
- Some overlap with others, and some are a little unexpected (like "touch, hug, hold" which helps spawn more talk through attachment, social emotional health)

What ages do they target?

- They are designed to work with both infants and toddlers and even older children.

What is their research basis?

- The two evidence-based "active ingredients" are creating joint attention and recasting. Read more about these [here](#).

Do people like them?

- Over the years, the feedback from parents and caregivers has been overwhelmingly positive --- they say the Talking Tips are practical and helpful.

Are they culturally sensitive?

- The Talking Tips promote cultural and linguistic responsiveness as they can be integrated into any routine regardless of culture. Further, they do not tell people what to say, they simply help the adult and child connect through language.