Tonal Patterns reinforce the tonality of the song by breaking it into small parts which a child's brain can easily digest. "Digesting" tonal patterns seems to help the brain find the patterns in the music and decode the tonal elements of a song.

It helps to think of a tonality in terms of solfege, or the Do Re Mi Fa Sol La Ti Do that we use to sing a scale. So, if a song is in D minor (usually this will be the first and last accompanying chord in the song if you cannot tell from the key signature), then we want to reinforce the D minor tonality. The TONIC of the D minor song would be the D minor chord. So, D F A or do mi sol are the notes that make up the tonic. You could combine any two or three of these together into a tonal pattern. You model the pattern and the children echo if able and willing.

Next, you will model an ATONIC pattern. This simply means, not tonic. So, in the case of a D minor song, at least one of the notes should NOT be a D F or A, or do mi sol.

Then, you will present another TONIC pattern, usually different from the first one.

Finally, you will present a Step-Diatonic pattern (especially important for the babies). In this pattern you want to end on the resting tone, or tonic. For a D minor song, the resting tone is D. For a C Major Song, the resting tone is C. For a A minor song, the resting tone is A. etc. Diatonic is our standard 8 note scale. Step diatonic means that you take one step movements in the scale and in our case end on the resting tone. So for D minor, you could sing, F E D, mi re do. or D E D do re do. As long as you end on the resting tone and take one-step movements in the scale. Also you should slur the notes together in this last pattern only.

All these patterns should be sung on Ba or Bum or La or some other simple vocable. Do not use the names of notes or solfege with the children yet.

Be careful to sing in the correct tonality of the song! Remember, if the song is in a minor tonality, your Mi will be half a step lower than if the song were in a Major tonality. In other words, in C major, Mi is an E, but in C minor Mi would be an E-flat.* We do not suggest attempting to create tonal patterns for unusual tonalities unless you have a good understanding of the theory behind these tonalities. Many of these have examples on the CD which can be imitated.
Practice figuring out Tonal Patterns:

1. Sing a song with the CD or using the written music.
2. Sing the scale of the song’s tonality: Do Re Mi Fa Sol La Ti Do  Remember that the Do will be whatever the key of the song is.
3. Create a Tonic Pattern using a combination of two notes: Do Mi or Sol.
4. Create an Atonic Pattern using at least one note that is NOT Do Mi or Sol.
5. Create another Tonic Pattern.
6. Create a Step Diatonic pattern that ends on the resting tone, Do. When in doubt, use Mi Re Do.
7. Sing all four patterns providing some “answering” time in between but use vocables like “bum” instead of the solfege.
8. This final result is what you will use with the children.

If this still seems beyond your understanding of music theory, do not fear! For now, just practice echoing the patterns on the CD with the children when listening to the CD. (You don't want to use the CD very much during your formal music time. You should be singing a cappella as much as possible in your lessons unless otherwise indicated.) The rhythm patterns are more intuitive for most people. These are the "ba ba ba's" on the CD that are usually practiced after a spoken rhyme. You can make them up after any song or rhyme, practicing rhythms line by line with echo patterns that relate to the tempo and meter from the song or rhyme you just sang. You can put more effort into rhythm patterns and simply incorporate any tonal patterns you’ve memorized from the CDs.

Remember, if any particular element of the curriculum seems beyond your current knowledge, it is fine to move forward without that element. You will still do more for your children and their musical growth than you were before! We put plenty of content in so all families with different backgrounds in music can move forward and grow in music as a family.

* For our purposes we continue to use the resting tone as Do in minor tonalities. This makes the tonal pattern process simpler for most users.