

How To Support Your Child When They Speak Two Languages

Bilingualism is a real asset, and the first language has a continuing and significant role in identity, learning and the acquisition of additional languages.

- Speaking two languages has intellectual advantages
- Children need to develop strong foundations the language spoken at home, where most children spend most of their time.
- Home language skills are transferable to new languages and strengthen your children's understanding of language use.
- Developing and maintaining a home language as the foundation for knowledge about language will support the development of English is encouraged.
- Insistence on an English-only approach to language learning in the home is likely to result in a fragmented development where the child is denied the opportunity to develop proficiency in either language.
- Understanding is always in advance of spoken language and it is important that children do not feel under pressure to speak until they feel confident. It is, however, essential that adults continue to talk to children with the expectation that they will respond.
- Children will usually understand far more than they can say.

So when supporting children who speak more than one language, it's important to remember:

- The importance of building on their existing knowledge about language (from their home language).
- English should not replace the home language; it will be learned in addition to the language skills already learned and being developed within the language community at home.
- Children may become conversationally fluent in a new language in two or three years but may take five or more years to catch up with monolingual peers in cognitive and academic language.

Stages and Phases when speaking an additional language in a Nursery

1. Continued use of home language. Your child may expect that they will be understood at nursery, just the same as at home, when they use their home language(s). This stage may not last long although that is dependent on what messages they receive about the use of languages other than English, i.e. are they valued positively? It is very important to keep using the home language in the setting.
2. Many children go through a 'silent phase' when learning a new language; this may last for several months but is not usually a cause for concern and is not a passive stage as learning will be taking place. Your child will be tuning into:
 - a) the sounds of English and
 - b) how things work in the new context, i.e. the rules and expectations.They may 'rehearse' English silently to themselves and may try out on their own.
3. As they gain confidence they may begin to try out the language with others when then they need to communicate something.

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4. Repetition and language play; Use of formulaic speech, routines and single words and phrases. Children begin to use 'chunks' of language as ready-made phrases in routine situations, e.g. 'my turn'
5. More complex English or productive language use; Children build on and extend the use of single words and chunks of English to produce more complex language. They are beginning to be able to communicate their intent more clearly.

Children may not necessarily move from one stage to the next. They might overlap.

Children in the early stages of English will often move between their home language(s) and English. This is called '**code-switching**' and will decrease over time as children hear English modelled and as they begin to internalize the language structures and vocabulary.

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