



Leaders and Manager Meeting

Supporting children learning English as an additional language

A Unique Child, Positive Relationships, Enabling Environments, Learning and Development

The principles of good practice for children learning English are the principles of good practice for all children. Effective practitioners include all children by meeting their needs. However, the skills, knowledge and understanding of children learning English as an additional language (EAL) should not be underestimated. The term EAL recognises the fact that many children learning English in settings in this country are already developing one or more other languages and are adding English to that repertoire.

The importance of home languages

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.

Practitioners have a key role in reassuring parents that maintaining and developing their home language will benefit their children and support their developing skills in English. Bilingualism is an asset; the first language has a significant role in identity, learning and the acquisition of additional languages. Children need to develop strong foundations in the language that is dominant in the home environment, where most children spend most of their time. Home language skills are transferable to new languages and strengthen 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 and should be 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. The best outcome is for children and their families to have the opportunity to become truly bilingual with all the advantages this can bring. Home languages are also vital for maintaining positive family relationships. Parents who cannot share thoughts and ideas with their children will inevitably lose the ability to shape, guide and influence their lives.

About learning English as an additional language

Second language learners will acquire much of their language incidentally through interacting with peers and adults in meaningful contexts.

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. Cognitive challenge can and should be kept appropriately high through the provision of linguistic and contextual support. Language acquisition goes hand in hand with cognitive and academic development, with an inclusive curriculum as the context. Additional visual support is vital for children learning English and using illustration and artefacts will also support and enhance the learning experiences of their monolingual peers.

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. Children will usually understand far more than they can say. Understanding is in advance of spoken language and it is important that children do not feel under pressure to speak until they feel confident. It is essential that adults continue to talk to children with the expectation that they will respond. Adults and children should respond positively and encouragingly to children's non-verbal communication. As they observe, listen and explore the setting, children will be applying the knowledge they already have in their new context. As they start to echo single words and phrases, joining in with repetitive songs and stories, their attempts should be sensitively encouraged and praised.



Leaders and Manager Meeting

Where possible, it is important to seek bilingual support:

For a child who has limited understanding of English, opportunities to use their home language can be like turning on a light in a dark room; the setting and all its possibilities are opened up. Help everyone feel comfortable about hearing and using languages other than English. Working together as a whole staff, and genuinely seeking to improve practice for children and families for whom English is an additional language, requires time and effort in order to examine attitudes and feelings, as well as knowledge about language development and bilingual language development.

Personality plays a great part in language development; some children go through an extended period of silence when entering an unfamiliar language environment; others may continue to speak the language they know best, regardless of who can understand them. Each child must be carefully observed so that, when their situation begins to change, parents and practitioners can support their next steps.

Make sure names are correctly pronounced and spelt.

Enabling Environments

- Have we considered what our setting must sound like and feel like to young children and their families if they cannot understand much of what is being said?
- Do we appreciate how tiring it is to listen to a language we cannot understand for long periods?
- What do we actively do to make families who do not speak English feel truly welcome?

Children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person.

Very young children, especially babies, may be comforted, particularly at rest or sleep times by songs or stories recorded in their home language by their main carer. It may also be helpful to be able to tune in to the home language at other times during a long day of unfamiliar speech sounds. Children sharing the same first language should be encouraged to share that language together in play; this should be facilitated where possible, with the help of parents. Children new to a setting and new to English can be greatly supported by empathetic peers who can act as a 'buddy' to them even if they do not share their home language. This will be supportive for settling in, forming relationships and learning English from their peers.

Respecting Each Other: Every interaction is based on caring professional relationships and respectful acknowledgement of the feelings of children and their families.

Supporting Learning: Warm, trusting relationships with knowledgeable adults support children's learning more effectively than any amount of resources.

Inclusive attitude and ethos set by leaders and managers and required of all practitioners in the setting, an understanding that bilingualism is an asset, genuinely reflective practice and an adherence to the belief that every child matters.

Ensure we genuinely welcome all families and children without prejudice?

Give children space and time; your patience and support, thoughtful provision, and acknowledgement of their skills in their home language will give them the confidence to achieve in English. Children are natural linguists. With your support children learning EAL will have the best foundation for becoming truly bilingual, with all the intellectual and social benefits this brings.

<https://www.naldic.org.uk/Resources/NALDIC/Teaching%20and%20Learning/ealeyfsguidance.pdf>