

Speech Ability from the Word Go – Factsheets U3 – U5

Advice on dealing with a multilingual family environment

Dear Parent!

First, our congratulations on your new arrival!

You speak German and/or other languages to give your baby the opportunity of growing up in several languages. We're sure you've already thought about which language would be better to use with your baby.

In the following, we'll be giving you a few tips as to how best to deal with a multilingual environment.

Multilingualism as an opportunity

Growing up with more than one language is not uncommon, but everyday life for most people on this planet.

Learning more than one language will greatly enrich your child's life – small children can especially easily learn more than one language without undue burden. Speech development disorders are no more common in multilingual children than in monolinguals; some multilingual children reach speech development milestones somewhat later than their monolingual friends, but usually catch up quickly.

How should you talk to your baby?

- **Feel free to speak to your baby using only the language you speak best, even if that isn't German.**

Starting with only one language other than German at first and learning German later as a second language does not usually pose any problems for children.

- **If you as parents have different native languages, we recommend that you each speak to your baby in your native language.**

Your baby will quickly realise that there's a "mum" language and a "dad" language, and will be in an excellent position to start learning both languages at the same time. Make it easier for your baby to learn your language by talking, joking, singing and comforting your baby in your native language.

- **Listening to German early on is important.**

It will be very important for your child to develop sound German skills later on to fit in and succeed at school, and your child will need the opportunity to hear German often earlier on and use it later.

Contact with German-speaking adults and children – such as at playgroup or mums and toddlers – will be especially helpful in letting your child learn German.

child appreciates the importance of each language. Show your child that you're proud of your native language, but also how important it is to be good at the language of the country you're living in. If your own German could be better, we would thoroughly recommend that you take a German course yourself in the very near future – your child will only develop good multilingual skills by appreciating and actively using both languages.

Appreciating both German and native language

How well your child takes to a language depends very much on how much your

What your baby can already do

Babies are little language experts from the start – they can hear language from birth; they can recognise their mother's voice and want to hear her native language most of all. Developing speech also includes screaming, laughing and making other noises. Baby babble is an important step towards forming actual words, and begins at around six months.

How you can support your baby in developing speech

- **Babble and talk to your baby.**

Happy, playful interaction is essential for your baby in the first year. Talk together often with your baby – even if your baby can't yet articulate any words. Imitate the noises your baby makes, and wait to see how your child reacts. You can develop real "conversations" with your baby, though naturally without real words.

- **Eye contact, repetition and proper emphasis.**

Look at your child while talking. Talk slowly, using simple sentences. Repeating important words while giving them special emphasis will help your baby learn these words.

- **Give names to things that interest your baby.**

Watch your baby and put names to things that interest him or her, or point something out and name it as soon as your baby looks at it. Situations where you're alone with your child are especially good for this exercise – situations such as bathing, laying your baby to sleep, changing nappies or playing.

- **We especially recommend switching off your radio or TV when you talk to your baby.**

This will let your baby concentrate on you and your voice. That will make it easier for your baby to develop speech.