

Speech Ability from the Word Go – Factsheet U6

Advice on dealing with a multilingual family environment

Dear Parent!

So your child is now one year old and has learned to turn over, sit, and crawl, and will soon be embarking on its first steps. A lot has happened in the speech department, too – your child understands individual words and even understands when you ask it to do simple things. Your child can make a variety of noises, can babble, and may already be trying to say real words.

In the following, we'll be giving you some ideas on how to deal with a multilingual environment together with some important tips on how to help your child develop speech.

If your child starts with your native language only

- **Keep on talking to your child in the language you know best.**

It's really important for your child to have the best role models to learn to speak from. The greater your child's vocabulary in your native language, the easier it will be for your child to take to German as a second language.

- **Take every opportunity for your child to listen to German.**

The earlier you expose your child to German, the easier it will be for your child to take to German.

Learning from other children is literally child's play, so it would be an excellent idea for your child to go to a playgroup, mums and toddlers, or PE group.

- **Early playgroup or day-care centre attendance is the best way of learning German.**

If your child is growing up with more than one language

- **It's important for both parents to keep using their own native language each when talking to their child.**

Usually, children speak earlier with the language they hear most; that is perfectly normal. It's still important for each of you to keep on using your own native language to avoid confusing the child.

- **Don't worry if your child mixes up languages.**

You'll quite often hear children mixing up languages – for example, saying "bread" in German and "butter" in English. That's no cause for worry – it's even a sign of superior language skills. Repeat both words in your own language without demanding that your child repeat the words.

- **It's really important to make sure your child is exposed to German if neither parent speaks it.**

Appreciating both the native language and German

Show your child that you're proud of your native language, but also the importance of learning the national language of the country you live in. How much your child takes to a language – and how well language skills develop – will largely depend on how much your child appreciates the language and actively uses it. For example, if you go shopping in German but use your native language inside your family, your child will appreciate both languages as perfectly normal from the beginning.

What your child can already do

Age ten to fourteen months

Understand individual words and simple requests, say the first words, gradually increase vocabulary (the first words may come a little later if learning more than one language)

From the eighteenth month of age

Spurt in learning words, forming the first constructions

How you can help your child's speech development

- **Often name objects and activities.**

Your child will have to hear a word often from you before being able to understand and later say it.

Example:

Name the objects your child takes out of the toy box while you are playing together:

(„Look, there's a dog.“ „Oh, you've got a car.“).

- **Speak slowly, clearly, and emphasise the important word in the sentence.**

You'll make it easier for your child to understand new words and remember them. Soon, your child will start trying to say these words without needing encouragement.

- **Give positive feedback to your child's attempts to talk even if the words don't come out right.**

Fun with speaking is a vital ingredient in starting to develop speech, so it's perfectly fine for your child to use baby language like "bow-wow". Give positive reinforcement and offer the word to your child. „Yes, that's a dog, it goes 'bow-wow'.“

- **Start looking at simple picture books with your child.**

Point to things in the book and name them, but leave your child time to look and name the things your child is pointing to.