

Speech Ability from the Word Go – Factsheet U8/U9

Advice on dealing with a multilingual family environment

Dear Parent!

Your child has been going to day care for quite some time now, and has had an opportunity to become familiar with German. However, your child might still not be speaking much German. The following tips should help your child learn more German.

If your child is four and only speaks a little German

- **Your child should go to the day-care centre regularly – every day – and make friends with German children.**

Your child will have many opportunities to practise German, so give your child encouragement if he or she wants to meet German-speaking children in the afternoon, or go to a sports club. German children will be especially good role models for your child to learn German from.

- **Take part in parent evenings and other events at your day-care centre.**

This will give you a good opportunity to meet German families, and also to chat to other multilingual families.

- **We urgently recommend that you take a German course yourself if your German skills are still weak – then you can learn German together with your child.**

If your child is five and only speaks a little German

Your child will be at school enrolment age soon, and it will be very important for your child to have good speaking and listening skills in German by then. Your child's learning opportunities at school will depend on his or her German skills.

- **If your child has only had a little exposure to German so far, going to day-care centre will not be enough on its own.**

We recommend that your child take a remedial course in German as well.

- **Help your child gain more independence.**

Ask your child to do easy chores around where you live, such as buy-

ing bread from the bakers – this will help your child practise using German.

If your child finds it difficult to learn German

The reason might be that your child has not had enough exposure to German so far. A specific remedial course in your day-care centre or a German course might help your child polish up on German. However, if your child is also showing difficulties in his or her native language, you really should talk to a paediatrician about this. Your paediatrician will take any tests needed to decide whether there is a speech development disorder involved. Speech development disorders occur at

the same rates in multilingual children as they do in monolinguals – around six to ten percent of preschool children have them. Multilingualism doesn't cause speech development disorders. In this case, special remedial courses in your day-care centre will not be enough – the best idea would be speech therapy, and you should begin with it soon.

What your child can already do

Your child can already form complex sentences with main clauses and sub-clauses, and use all the basic structures of his or her native language.

How you can help your child's speech development

- **Use opportunities for conversation together with your child.**

Read to your child in your native language and in German, and then talk to your child about what you've read and the pictures in the book. Ask your child about the story and explain things in the story that your child asks about.

- **Your child will also enjoy listening to stories on CD and singing together in both languages, while helping improve your child's speech skills.**

- **Use play situations such as building with building blocks, dolls or the like to get together and talk with your child.**

Talk about the things that you are doing together with your child and slip into various roles in a game. Rule games can also help your child develop speech, such as memory games to train longer sentences – "Rhinos, they live in Africa" and "Polar bears, they live at the North Pole." They don't go together.

- **Your child will still make mistakes – even in his or her native language – especially in difficult grammatical constructions and complicated words.**

That's perfectly normal. If you say the sentence again the right way without explicitly correcting your child, you'll be giving your child the best way to learn the word or construction.

Child: „In the circus we sittin' in chairs.“

Parent: „Oh, you sat on the chairs, and what happened next?“

- **Use longer sentences with your child and extend what your child has said with new information.**

Child: „The fire brigade went fast.“

Parent: „Right! I bet there was a house on fire, and the fire brigade had to go and put it out!“