

# Supporting children and families with English as an additional language



**The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have the right to have their voices heard and a right to use their own language. (1989, Article 30)**

In recent years there has been a rise in the number of children entering early years settings for whom English is an additional language. Some of these children may be bilingual or multilingual learners. The Early Years Foundation Stage is a critical stage in children's language development. The early years of life are the optimum time for any child to learn a second language and to become properly bilingual.

Starting a new setting or school is an important milestone in any child's life but imagine what it would be like if you had recently arrived in a new country or if your home language was not the predominant language spoken. Following on from the Feature Focus on 'Transitions'; Do we as practitioners take time to view our setting through the eyes of a child? How do we ensure that *all* children and families feel welcome and valued?

Good practice settings actively engage parents and families as equal partners in supporting children to achieve their potential despite the challenges that may arise.

## **EYFS legal requirements:**

1.8. For children whose home language is not English, providers must take reasonable steps to provide opportunities for children to develop and use their home language in play and learning, supporting their language development at home.

Providers must also ensure that children have sufficient opportunities to learn and reach a good standard in English language during the EYFS, ensuring children are ready to benefit from the opportunities available to them when they begin Year 1.

When assessing communication, language and literacy skills, practitioners must assess children's skills in English. If a child does not have a strong grasp of English language, practitioners must explore the child's skills in the home language with parents/and or carers, to establish whether there is cause for concern about language delay



### Reflecting on practice and provision:

#### Consider the information you gather from parents prior to the child starting the setting:

- Do you ask what languages are spoken at home? By whom and how often?
- Do you ask what languages the child predominately speaks at home?
- Do you gather key words and phrases for staff to learn and use with children through daily practice?
- Do you find out about the family background, religion and diet in addition to the child's likes and dislikes?

#### Consider your settling in procedures:

- Are they flexible to support the unique needs of each child and family?
- Do they include home visits or stay and play sessions to support positive relationships and attachments?
- Do parents fully understand these procedures?
- How do you support parents with EAL?

#### Consider the quality of your learning environment:

- Does it enable children to thrive and make good progress?
- Are all children's languages valued and promoted?
- Do displays, resources and routines reflect the diversity of the children attending and the wider society?

#### Consider the quality of the relationships between key people, children and parents:

- Are children's and parent's voices heard and acted upon?
- Are there opportunities for ongoing dialogue? How do you overcome any language barriers that may exist?
- Do you operate buddy systems for children and parents, matching parents/carers who share the same language?
- Do you plan social gatherings for parents to help promote positive relationships?

#### Top Tips:

- Check children's and family names are spelt and pronounced correctly

- Set up photograph albums and key word books for children to share at home and in the setting
- Build on children's experiences, interests and learning styles
- Celebrate significant events in children's lives
- Use ICT resources to enhance children's understanding for example, sound buttons or talking photograph albums for parents to record key phrases in their home language
- Provide opportunities for children to consolidate language - perhaps focus on half a dozen songs over a period of time before gradually introducing new ones. Print off copies in English and home languages to promote continuity and singing at home
- Provide dual language books, props and song/rhyme cards for sharing. Involve parents and older siblings in the production of these
- During small/large group times the sitting position is very important to ensure children can access practitioner's facial expressions and peer actions. Ensure experiences are multi sensory
- Provide a range of meaningful opportunities to engage in speaking and listening activities. (Phase One Letters and Sounds will help strengthen provision for children with EAL)
- Display visual schedules to depict daily routines for example, snack time, hand washing
- Utilise the linguistic diversity of staff, children, parents and the local community to support with translation in meetings and of key documents (newsletters, policies)
- Reassure parents that speaking in their home language while at home will support their child's learning
- Ensure all staff are knowledgeable in language acquisition in particular the stages children learn additional languages. Be sensitive and patient to children's silent periods and early attempts at communicating



#### Further reading:

- DSCF. (2007) Supporting children learning English as an additional language. Guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage, Primary National Strategy
- DfE. (2012) Statutory Framework for the Early years Foundation Stage

- Crosse, K. (2007) Introducing English as an additional language to young children. A Practical handbook. Sage
- Drury, R. (2006) Young bilingual children Learning at Home and School, Trentham Books
- Nutbrown, C. And Clough, P. (2006) Inclusion in the Early Years, Sage
- Siraj-Blatchford, I. and Clarke, P. (2000) Supporting Identity, Diversity and Language in the Early Years, Open University Press
- Talk to your baby [www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk](http://www.talktoyourbaby.org.uk), National Literacy Trust. Handouts for parents in different languages
- The National Subject Association for EAL [www.naldic.org.uk](http://www.naldic.org.uk) Articles and useful resources around EYFS and supporting children with EAL



**‘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 confers.’**

Supporting children learning English as an additional language, DSCF 2007, p18.



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