

Information for parents

Supporting your child to become bilingual

Connections to *Aistear* and *Síolta*

Aistear

Themes: Well-being, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, Exploring and Thinking

Guidelines for good practice: Learning and developing through interactions (pp.27-51)

Síolta Standards

1: Rights of the Child, C1.1, 1.2, 1.3

5: Interactions, C5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5

Research Digests linked to the above *Standards*

A good foundation in one language is very important for children's development and learning. For babies, toddlers and young children, this is the language (or languages) your child first hears, the language spoken at home by parents and family. Being able to talk with confidence in his/her home language will help your child to learn English. To support your child's language development, **continue to use the language you feel most comfortable with**. The best way to help your child is to talk to him/her as much as possible. The quality of interaction with your child is very important, so take time to talk and listen to your child.

Your child will learn English through interactions, play, daily routines, and songs and books in his/her early childhood setting. This may take some time, and children often go through a **'silent' period** for **several months** in the new setting **before they begin to speak English**. This is normal.

Bilingualism means using two languages, for example, English and French.

Multilingualism means using more than two languages, for example, English, French and Irish.

When your child begins in an early childhood setting, you can support him/her by:

- teaching the adults in the setting **some words in your home language** which your child will recognise, for example, the words for *hello, goodbye, toilet, drink*, and so on.
- helping the adults in the setting to **pronounce your child's name properly**, if necessary.
- sharing simple songs or rhymes** in your home language. You may want to record these so your child can listen to them during the day.
- sharing **children's books** in your home language with the setting.
- taking part in cultural activities** in your child's setting when the children are learning about different countries and cultures in the world, for example, national holidays or New Year celebrations.

You can support your child at home by:

- singing songs and **telling stories** in your home language. Try to find books in your home language and read these to your child regularly.
- listening to your child and giving him/her **time to talk and think**.
- **making comments** and asking questions in your home language during daily activities, for example, *Let's zip up your jacket, it's very cold outside*.
- **playing** with your child and following his/her interests, for example, if your child loves trains build a track and talk about what you do whilst playing, *I'm pushing the train down the track*, or bring your child on a visit to the local train station to explore real carriages and engines.
- **modelling (naming) new words** for your child in your home language, for example, in the bath talk about things floating and sinking, point out the drain or plug, use descriptions such as *wet, soaking, splashing* and so on.
- repeating back what your child says to **fix speech and word errors**, for example, your child says, *I see bu dar*, and you say, *Yes, you see a blue car*. Do not correct your child by saying, *No, it's not a bu dar*.
- **extending** what your child says by adding a new idea or making the sentence longer, for example, your child says, *Washing my hands*, and you say, *You're washing your hands with soap to make them clean*.
- **repeating words** he/she says in English in your home language, to help make the connection between these two words.
- **limiting television** and other electronic devices.

Your positive attitude towards your home language will help your child feel proud to be able to speak more than one language.