

The Multilingual Family

How can we support our child in learning two or more languages?



Important Tips for Parents

The majority of people are multilingual. Children can easily learn two or more languages. The earlier a child learns a new language, the easier it is for him. The ability to speak several languages has a very positive effect on a child's educational and career development. Parents can help their child to learn languages well. Therefore, it is important that both parents decide on a consistent language concept together.

Which language(s) should we speak with our child?

- 1.** Every family has to find their own way to deal with these different languages.
- 2.** Decide together with your husband/wife about who will speak which languages with your child.
- 3.** Speak the language of "your heart" with your child: the language that you think in and express your feelings in, for instance, the language that you speak when comforting your child.
- 4.** Speak this/these language(s) regularly with your child.
- 5.** You can speak other languages outside of your family or when you have guests at home. For instance, you can speak German with the pre-school/day care teachers.
- 6.** Your child must speak and understand German well in order to be successful at school, therefore it is important that your child has early exposure to the German language: for example at the day care center, while playing with friends, at the sport's club, or on the playground
- 7.** Show your child that you find all languages nice and that both your native language and German are important to your family.

Children can learn several languages at the same time without a problem. The younger the child, the easier it is to learn two or more languages simultaneously. Children between the ages of 3 to 4 years old can learn a second language without difficulty. It is important though, that the child has regular and sufficient exposure to this language.

Attending pre-school is sufficient for a child to learn German well, but in order to have good results, it is important that your child be there regularly (5 days a week). He should spend at least four hours there each time. It is important that your child goes to day care or pre-school at by the age of 3 to speak German with the day care staff and other children.

Multilingualism is not the cause of problems in learning languages. If your child has problems learning your native language, then consult your pediatrician (children's doctor). By the age of 2 a child should be able to speak more than 50 words and build small sentences.

It is normal for a child to mix the languages up. Children who learn two or more languages at the same time often mix the languages up. If they don't know a word in one language, they take the word from the other language. They often pronounce some words differently or use an incorrect grammar.

Example: Sleepst du in your bed?





Once the children can speak both languages well, they stop mixing them up. Be careful yourself, to always speak just one language with your child and not to speak a mix of both. If your child mixes words from the other language in his sentence, be careful to always use the correct word of that language consistently in your answer.

Example:

Child: *Mama give me auto.*

Mother: *Here is the car.*

Even if they themselves don't speak such good German, parents can still help their children in learning German.

It is very essential that your child hears you speaking German to other people. This way, he will learn from you that it is important to speak the language of the country that you live in. If you can speak

German very well, then you can have "German hours", for instance, reading a book together in German or cooking together with a German recipe.

Only watching television isn't enough to learn a language. Children mostly just notice the images that they see on television, but don't really listen well. The spoken language goes by too quickly and the TV doesn't pace itself to your child's level or needs when he has something to ask or to say. Children can only learn to speak when someone speaks with him, for instance while eating, dressing, playing, or reading.

When your child watches TV, talk with him about the show he is watching. That way he will better understand what he sees.

Looking at books helps in learning languages. Look at picture books with your child often. That is a good way for him to learn new words and sentences. Give him time to tell about what he sees. He should practice speaking with this activity. You can use picture books either in your native language or in German.

Show your child that both your native language and German are important to you. You are the role model for your child! If you speak both your native language and German, then your child will be interested in learning both languages. Even if your German isn't so good, you can speak it while shopping or with the teachers at the day care center.

There are children that speak only German and not their parent's language. This happens often with children whose parents speak German well and who have many German-speaking friends. That's normal. It is important that you continue speaking your native language consistently and regularly with your child. Your child will hear the words and be aware of them. He can then later learn this language more easily when, for instance, visiting your homeland or when playing with children who speak this language.

Don't insist that he speak in your language. Pressure or punishment blocks the learning process.

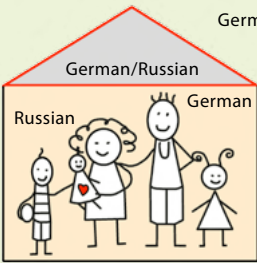
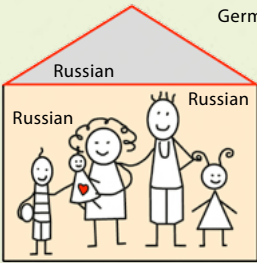
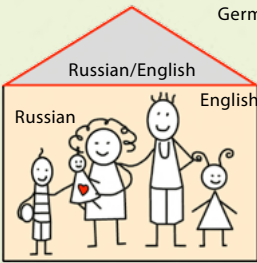
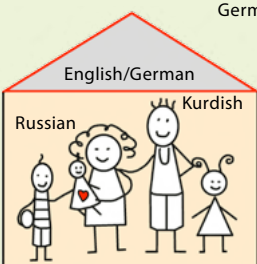
Language Concepts for Multilingual Families

Who speaks which language with the child?

A child can more easily learn two or more languages when the family works with a set structure for the use of languages. It must be clear to the child which language Mommy speaks and which language Daddy speaks. And which language will be spoken when the whole family is together (the "family language")? And does Mommy or Daddy speak our native language or German with me outside of the home?

If you can speak good German, then you may certainly speak German with your child outside of the home. If your German is not so good, then just speak your native language with your child outside when away from home. But do try to speak German as often as possible with German native speakers. That way you learn to speak better German – and your child will too!

Examples of functional family language structures

 <p>German</p> <p>German/Russian</p> <p>Russian</p> <p>German</p>	<p>One person – one language</p> <p>Mother speaks Russian, father speaks German</p> <p>Outside the home: The language of the country (German)</p> <p>Family language: Native language of parents (example: Russian or German)</p>
 <p>German</p> <p>Russian</p> <p>Russian</p> <p>Russian</p>	<p>One language at home One language outside of the home</p> <p>Mother and father speak Russian.</p> <p>Outside of the home: Language of the country (German)</p> <p>Family language: Native language of parents (Russian)</p>
 <p>German</p> <p>Russian/English</p> <p>Russian</p> <p>English</p>	<p>Two languages at home Another language outside of the home</p> <p>Mother speaks Russian, father speaks English.</p> <p>Outside the home: The language of the country (German)</p> <p>Family language: Native language of parents (Russian or English)</p>
 <p>German</p> <p>English/German</p> <p>Russian</p> <p>Kurdish</p>	<p>Three languages at home One language in the area</p> <p>Mother speaks Russian, father speaks Kurdish.</p> <p>Outside the home: The language of the country (German)</p> <p>Family language: Another language than the native language of the parents (English) or the language of the country (German)</p>

Every family must find their own solutions for using languages at home. The advice in this brochure works for many families and should help you to feel less unsure about dealing with your own multilingual situation at home.

If you have any additional questions, feel free to contact us. We will be glad to advise you further. (phone: +49 6221 6516410).

ZEL Heidelberg offers regular workshops for parents on the topics of multilingualism (multilingual families), learning languages and language support topics. We can gladly offer these workshops at schools, pre-schools and day care centers. In addition, we also offer vocational training on multilingual topics.

For more information see:
www.zel-heidelberg.de

Additional literature on this topic:

In German

Abdelilah-Bauer, Barbara (2012): Zweisprachig aufwachsen: Herausforderung und Chance für Kinder, Eltern und Erzieher. C.H.Beck Verlag; Edition: 2.

Villis- Leist, Anja (2008): Elternratgeber Zweisprachigkeit - Informationen & Tipps zur zweisprachigen Entwicklung und Erziehung von Kindern. Stauffenburg Verlag.

In English

Baker, Colin (2014): A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism. Channel View Publications Ltd; Auflage: 4.

Bourgogne, Annika (2013): Be Bilingual - Practical Ideas for Multilingual Families. (eBook)



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