

Language – the gateway to the world

Learning to speak made easy
A guide for parents



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Why is my child asking so many questions?

Why is play important for learning to speak?

Why does my child always want to touch everything?

Does watching television help my child learn to speak?

How much time should I spend with my child?

How is learning to speak connected to physical activity?

What language should I use when I speak with my child at home?

Does my child learn enough German at the day care centre?

Dear Parents,

it is one of the happiest moments for parents to hear their child speak his or her first “real” word, and I am sure you felt exactly the same way. I am sure that, like all other parents, you then followed all of your child’s further attempts at speaking with fascination, dedication and, of course, a feeling of pride.

After all, all children are born with the ability to perceive the sounds and language patterns they pick up in their environment and, later on, to recognise, imitate and apply the rules of their mother tongue. Speech and language are, after all, an important instrument when it comes to exploring the world around us.

Sometimes you may have been surprised by the unusual language your child uses, whereas at other times you may have noticed that your child is imitating your way of speaking or emphasis or that of other people he or she relates to. In any case, children between the ages of one and four need a lot of attention and affection from their parents and the people around them, and they also need adults who like to talk.

We have developed this guide in order to help you support your children in their speech and language development, including in particular information for parents of children growing up bilingually. It will provide you with theoretical and practical information on how to accompany and support your child throughout this unique and exciting process.



Gabriele Müller-Trimbusch
Mayor



Bruno Pfeifle
Head of the Jugendamt

How much time should I spend with my child?

Naturally, you should always spend as much time with your child as possible.



Time spent with your child is never wasted.

Tips:

It is even more important, however, how dedicated you are when spending time with your child and how much attention you can give him or her.

Make a plan: decide when you want to have time for yourself and when you have time to fully give your attention to your child. Daily routines offer excellent opportunities to be close to your child and to show your affection.

Time spent with your child is never wasted.

Make sure your child gets plenty of opportunities to speak, also involve him or her in conversations with siblings and adults.

Talking will be easier when you do things together with your child, e.g. eating, baking, cooking, doing the dishes, cleaning, going shopping, going for a walk, taking the tram, driving in your car, watching television, tucking your child in at night, etc.



Children need to feel that they are loved.

It is always an achievement for your child when he or she learns something new.

You should always show your approval and respect for his or her achievements.

If you happen to have no time, tell your child that you haven't got time at the moment and explain to him or her why you cannot listen at the moment. Your child will understand. At the same time, however, your child needs to know when he or she can expect to have your attention back. Children do not like being put off indefinitely, it makes them feel insecure.

Make sure you keep your promises!

Experts on the subject:

When children learn to speak, what they need most of all is the love and attention of their parents.

Children always need to feel sure of their parents' affection. They need to feel that they are loved.

It will give them the security they need in order to develop a strong self-confidence.

Children's self-confidence improves when they feel that they are being taken seriously. Every day provides you with

plenty of opportunities to involve your child in a conversation.

However, children also have to learn that there are occasions when they must not disturb you, e.g. when you are on the telephone or working from home. They have to learn that there are situations which demand for peace and quiet.

My child is asking hundreds of questions. What should I do?

Answer in short and simple sentences.

Small children soon find out that they can explore the world around them by asking questions. As soon as they discover something new, they will ask, "What's that?"



Tips:

Asking many questions is part of certain stages of your child's development. It is your child's way of exploring the world, while at the same time it is important for learning new words. Questions are essential for speech and language development!

Simple answers will do! Don't be afraid to admit that there are some things you do not know.

When looking for answers, work together with your child. You may, for instance, ask older children or adults.

You should ask questions, too, such as "How could we find that out?" or "Who else could we ask?" Very often picture books help answer questions and prompt conversations.



Around the age of three or four your child enters into the second phase of asking questions

Experts on the subject:

Children learn by exploring the world around them.

Ask the carer at your day care centre for suitable literature or pay a visit to your local library. You may also find good buys on high quality books for children at car boot sales or bazaars. In this phase children want to know everything in detail. Sometimes, this can be very tiring for adults. If you get tired of your child asking too many questions, simply turn the tables and start asking questions yourself, like e.g. **“What do you mean...?”**

By the age of around two or three children discover that it is possible to explore the world around them by asking questions. As soon as they discover something new, they ask, “What’s that?” The child realises that every thing has its own name. This is an important time in a child’s life which profoundly shapes their curiosity and eagerness to discover the world.

Around the age of three or four children enter into the second phase of asking questions. Now your child wants to know why things are the way they are. Your child will ask you about the names of things that he or she doesn’t know. In doing so, your child learns the meaning behind terms and improves his or her vocabulary.

Why does my child always want to touch everything?

Children literally want to “grasp” things, to understand them by touching them.

By doing that, children learn new words and, at the same time, put them into context.

Give your child plenty of opportunities to “grasp” things, e.g. playing with water.



Tips:

It is not enough to simply repeat a new word to your child.

Example: In order to learn the word “orange” your child needs to touch an orange, smell it, and taste its sweet juice.

Give your child plenty of opportunities to “grasp” things, e.g.

- when baking or cooking: If your child helps you bake or cook, he or she will learn a lot about the attributes of the ingredients.
- when playing with water, sand, pebbles, soap or Plasticine.
- Materials such as cardboard, cork, paper rolls, etc. are also interesting toys for your child.
- Don't make a fuss over dirty clothes. Allow your children to get dirty when they're exploring.



Don't make a fuss over dirty clothes.

Experts on the subject:

Make sure your child discovers and uses all its senses.

Draw your child's attention to things he or she can see, hear, smell, taste or touch, by saying things like, "Your hat is really soft, have a feel!", or "Listen, can you hear that lovely music?"

"Picking up things and grasping them" – Children learn new words by observing and exploring things at play.

Children don't just learn by listening. They will remember words better when they have discovered them using their different senses.

Children have to see things, to touch and feel them, smell them and taste them.

Why is play important for learning to speak?

Children talk when they are playing, even when they are playing alone. They can practice words and terms they have picked up.



Children learn to speak playfully.

Tips:

Playing together gives children the opportunity to talk to other children.

They negotiate the rules of their games or assign roles. That way children are able to determine or understand their current role and situation.

Children like to play "house". Such games may get noisy sometimes, especially when it comes to assigning the roles of father, mother, and children. Let them go ahead.

Children love to dress up for their role plays. Old hats, scarves, shoes, cloths, clothes, and any other hotchpotch you might find can come in useful for such games.

Household items such as pots, cartons, mugs or clothes pins are also popular toys.

Blankets and sheets are ideal for building caves and hide-outs.

Children also love to play with wooden building blocks, Lego or Playmobil.



*Roleplays may get noisy!
Let them go ahead.*

Experts on the subject:

Every child should have a toy box at home containing such toys.

Children also like to do jigsaws and play board games or cards with you. Through card games such as "UNO" your child will learn the numbers as you play.

A toy cupboard or shelf where toys and board games are stored is just as important for your children as a wardrobe.

Playing is immensely important for children. For the children themselves it is a serious and important business.

Playful observation, exploration and investigation promote the development of new skills.

Play improves your child's passive and active language skills and vocabulary.

When children invent and think up things for themselves, it inspires their imagination and encourages them to speak.

Does watching television help my child learn to speak?

Watching television more than two or three hours a week hampers speech development in children aged 0 to 5.



Conversations during meals are excellent speaking exercises.

Tips:

Watching television or having the television on in the background during meals puts a major strain on small children. Conversations during meals are good speaking exercises. Eating together and talking at the table are enormously important for your child's language development.

So, switch off the TV and use meals to talk with your child about his or her day.

When watching TV, make sure your child only watches programmes suitable for his or her age. We can definitely recommend the children's channel KiKa or programmes such as "Die Sendung mit der Maus" (on ARD).

Don't just sit your child down in front of the television. Always ask which programme he or she wants to watch. Use a television guide to choose a programme together.

The best thing to do is to watch TV together with your child and then talk about what you have been watching.



In order to learn to speak a language, it is not enough for children to merely listen to it. They also need to be able to understand the meaning of what has been said.

Experts on the subject:

Only high quality films for children will promote your child's speech and language development.

When watching TV, ask your child questions such as, "What did you like about the film?" or "What was the film about?" Films on tape or DVD are more suitable for children than programmes on children's TV which are continuously interrupted by commercial breaks. TV ads are a real problem as your child will not be able to follow their complicated messages or even the speed of their speaker.

This confuses and frustrates children and has a negative impact on their development.

The most significant period for the development of speech and language is between the ages of two and four. Children who often watch TV at that age will have a very difficult start at school.

In order to learn to speak a language, it is not enough for children to merely listen to the speech sounds of a language. They also need to be able to understand the meaning of what is being said.

How is learning to speak connected to physical activity?

Physical activity and a child's speech and language development cannot be separated.

Tips:

Physical activity is extremely important for children. The more active children are, the better they get to know their body and their environment. Lack of physical activity will slow down your child's speech and language development.

Make sure your child gets to

- balance on low walls,
- climb, jump, go on the swings (e.g. at the playground, in the park or in the forest),
- try out lots of different things (children don't hurt themselves as often as you may think),
- walk a lot (e.g. walk to the day care centre or take your child with you when you run errands).



Create opportunities for your child to be physically active at home.

Experts on the subject:

Even in your house or flat you can create an environment which encourages your child: use old mattresses for your child to jump on, build a slide down the bed, hang a swing between door posts, put up a hammock, etc.

Physical activity promotes speech development. Physical activity is important for children.

Children have a natural urge to move. While moving, they process and come to terms with their encounters, feelings and experiences.

As children get more skilled in their movements, e.g. when running, playing ball, climbing or balancing, they also learn to control the movements of their mouth and tongue more accurately.

How can I practice speaking with my child?

The best exercise is:
to talk with your child about everything
he or she sees or does during the course of a day.



Take time to talk about every-day experiences.

Tips:

Let your child tell his or her story.
Create a pleasant atmosphere and make sure your child enjoys the experience.

Take time to talk about every-day experiences.

Make sure your child gets a proper chance to tell you about his or her experiences and thoughts.

Try and get some variation into your language. This will improve your child's vocabulary. Use different words with the same meaning, such as nice, lovely, pretty.

If your child uses a word he or she cannot pronounce, simply repeat it. Example: "Mommy ,puter." — "Yes, your mommy is at the computer."

Be patient. If there is something you don't understand, ask.



Try to remember your own childhood and teach your child nursery rhymes, sayings, songs, or counting-out rhymes.

Experts on the subject:

Language is supposed to inspire your child's imagination. Try to remember your own childhood and teach your child nursery rhymes, sayings, songs, or counting-out rhymes.

Look at picture books together, read out stories, or tell stories from your own childhood. Playing and talking with your child will liven up your child's language and make it more varied.

For children, talking should be fun.

Experience shows that stubborn, one-sided speech and language training for pre-school aged children does not have the desired effect. Children have a natural inclination towards learning, and they learn best when they are playing and having fun. Funny verses and rhymes train their memory and have a positive effect on their ability to learn.

The melody or rhythm of a song helps children pronounce even long words. Pictures inspire them to invent stories. They are indispensable as they impart knowledge, inspire children's imagination, and help them express their experiences verbally.

What language should I use when I speak with my child at home?

Use your mother tongue when talking to your child.

Being able to speak your mother tongue well is an important prerequisite for learning German.



Tips:

Your mother tongue is the language closest to your heart. Your child needs to learn it in order to be able to talk to your family and friends and simply to feel at home. The same applies to dialects.

Use every opportunity to speak to your child in your mother tongue or the language you feel most comfortable with.

Even when speaking your mother tongue or dialect, you should use a wide range of vocabulary.

Associate your mother tongue with everything connected to your country of origin and its culture.

Your child will learn a lot about you and your country of origin from stories, songs or children's games from your country.

Help your child make German friends at the day care centre, the playground, or on a sports team.



Allow your child to invite friends to your home.

Experts on the subject:

Your mother tongue and German – it is important to learn both languages.

Allow your child to bring home friends and visit friends at their home. That way your child will get to know different families and their customs. **Approach your German neighbours or German parents at the day care centre.**

It is just as important that you as a parent learn German. Get together with other parents at your day care centre and suggest that the Elternseminar (Tel. 216-68 67) offer a German language course.

Being able to speak your mother tongue well is important in order to learn German. It is easier to express your feelings in your mother tongue, and it contributes considerably to the development of your child's personality.

If more than one language is used at home, parents should establish clear rules as to when

a particular language is spoken. Define and stick to fundamental rules such as: one person – one language, or: one particular situation – one language. When learning more than one language at the same time, children should always be clear about which language is being used. That way they will learn to distinguish between different languages.

Does my child learn enough German at the day care centre?

If you speak your mother tongue at home, your child will learn German outside the family.

It is important for your child to be allowed to speak his or her mother tongue at the day care centre.



Tips:

When registering your child at a day care centre, address the topic of languages and tell the staff which language(s) you speak at home.

The carers will be interested in how your child's mother tongue has developed so far.

Accompany your child to the day care centre at the beginning to help him or her adapt more easily. That way your child will feel safer in a new environment and find it easier to open up to a new

language. Ask at your day care centre what concept they use to promote and develop language skills. It is important for your child to be allowed to speak his or her mother tongue at the day care centre. It will give your child the feeling that his or her skills in his or her mother tongue are given recognition. The safer children feel at their day care centre, the more they will want to participate verbally, too.

Experts opinion:

Children who join a day care centre at the age of three have enough time to learn German as a second language before they go to school. In order to do so, they need to be able to speak their mother tongue well. Many day care centres put a special emphasis on language development and promotion.

How you can assist your child's speech and language development

Look at your child when speaking. Always listen carefully, even if it may take a bit longer sometimes.



Talk to your child about what you are doing at the moment.

Don't anticipate your child's every wish, but encourage him or her to express it.

Example: Your child points at a bottle of sparkling water. Ask your child, "Are you thirsty? What would you like to drink? Water or juice?"

Inspire your child to speak by describing to your child what you (or your child) are doing at the moment.

Example: "Look what I've got here, an apple. It is a nice, red one. Would you like to hold the apple? Would you like me

to cut it up into small pieces for you? There you go, I've cut it up for you."

If your child pronounces something incorrectly, simply repeat the word pronouncing it correctly.

Do not force your child to repeat it again.

Example: Your child takes a step forward and says "Sue". You may say, "I see, you would like me to tie your shoe laces?"

Use simple language when

talking to your child. Do not, however, use babytalk, as you are acting as a role model for your child.

Example: Don't say, "It's a toot toot!" but rather, "The train goes toot toot."

Give your children a chance to answer the questions other people ask themselves, even if you may be tempted to help out. Be patient. Children can be very creative in the way they express things if you give them enough time.

Recommended Reading

Even very small children want you to read out books to them and to look at the books themselves.



From age 2

Kleine Tiergeschichten zum Vorlesen

Henriette Wich,
Ellermann, 2005
ISBN 3-7707-3964-7

Montag, Dienstag... Hexentag

Rosemarie Künzler-Behncke,
Ravensburger Buchverlag,
Otto Maier, 2002
ISBN 3-473-31063-8

From age 3

Zehn grüne Heringe

Wolf Erlbruch,
Hanser, 2001
ISBN 3-446.20035-5

From age 4

Sieben freche Hexen

Ingrid Uebe,
ars edition, 2005
ISBN 3-7607-1409-9

Nein! Ich bin nicht müde und ich geh nicht schlafen

Lauren Child,
Carlson, 2004
ISBN 3-551-51608.1

From age 5

Von Drachen, Rittern und Piraten

Cornelia Funke, James Krüss
und viele andere,
Esslinger Verlag Schreiber,
2005
ISBN 3-480-22109-2

From age 6

Till Wiesentroll

Ulrike Kuckero,
Thienemann Verlag, 2005



*Reading out stories and telling tales
is one of the most efficient ways of
assisting language development.*

Books in Turkish language

Gökkusagi Baligi

Markus Pfister,
Der Regenbogenfisch
Nord-Süd-Verlag, 1998
ISBN 3-314-00664-0

Laura'nin yildizi

Klaus Baumgart,
Lauras Stern
Baumhaus-Verlag, 1999
ISBN 3-8315-0004-5

Books in Russian language

Freunde

Helme Heine,
Middelhauve, 1999
ISBN 3-7876-9601-6

Schneewittchen

ISBN 5-353-00027-7

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Information for Parents

TV channels showing non-violent and ad-free programmes

- KI.KA - Der Kinderkanal,
- Arte

Flimmo - Bayrische Landeszentrale für Neue Medien

Helps you choose programmes suitable for children. Go to www.flimmo.de for free information, or pay a visit to your Bürgeramt (Public Services Office) or Jugendamt (Youth Welfare Department)

Linda Clark, Catherine Ireland Sprechen lernen, lernen durch sprechen

Kidsworld, Beust Verlag, München 1998

Elke Burkhardt-Montanari Wie Kinder mehrsprachig aufwachsen

Verband binationaler Familien und Partnerschaften, iaf e.V., Verlag Brandes & Apsel, Frankfurt a. M., 2001

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