

# How does my child learn German? How does my child learn two languages?

Dear Parents,

Many parents are troubled by one question or another. We would like to give you some help and advice as to how you can help your child develop their language skills.

## **Children can learn different languages well.**

If your child grows up with two languages, it opens up many opportunities for their future. Research has shown that children could learn several languages if they are encouraged. The mother tongue plays a very important role here:

### **A good grasp of the mother tongue is the foundation for learning a second or several different languages.**

It is through the mother tongue that children learn how a language is “built up”. Try to speak in just one language for a certain amount of time. This distinction will give your child some direction. Talking and playing in your own language does not hinder the way your child listens to or learns German. It takes many years before a child is able to use a language accurately.

For some children there are times in which they only want to speak one language, for example, just German. In this case they might answer you in German, even if you address them in the language the family uses. This is absolutely normal. Nevertheless you should continue to use that language. The child learns through listening and will return to speaking in that language later.

Everyday family life is important for language development as children learn their first language in this environment.

### **Listen to your child, answer their questions and encourage them to keep on talking.**

It is not possible to train language; it develops, and this is especially true of small children who listen and talk each and every day, for example, whilst playing, eating, during a conversation or whilst looking at a picture book.

### **It is very important that parents – no matter in which language – listen to their children and talk to them a lot. Simply by talking, a child learns how to express themselves and vocalise their ideas and wishes.**

If possible, you should try to answer all of your child's questions. Sometimes, parents think that they know their children well enough to anticipate their every wish without their children actually expressing them. So that your child can successfully acquire a new language, it is of great importance that you encourage your child to speak, in order to give them the confidence to help them to express their own wishes and thoughts.

There are certain activities which successfully help children to develop their linguistic abilities. Above all this includes reading aloud, telling stories, looking at picture books, singing and saying rhymes.

**Make sure that there are books/picture books and audio-CDs available at home. Television alone will not suffice.**

Television makes children passive viewers and listeners. However, learning a new language is an **active** process. Instead of giving the TV the role of language teacher, parents with small children in particular should look at a picture book with them every day. If you don't have any picture books in your own language at home and you cannot borrow them, there is a solution: There are many German picture books that have little or no text. So you could talk about the pictures in **your own** language with your child and invent a story together. If you speak German well, you could switch between your family language and German. Sometimes, children have a book that they want to look at and listen to again and again. By doing this, children get a feel for language.

Children like stories. When children are told stories by the people they love, their language skills develop. In this way they learn to understand stories and to narrate them themselves. This is an important skill for school. Songs, finger games and rhymes also support the development of the child's linguistic abilities. At the same time it is great fun for the children!

**Create situations in which your child can practise the German language.**

When a child is familiar with and trusts their surroundings, when they feel good and as if they belong there, they will learn the German language more easily and naturally. Your child will learn German everywhere, not just at home or at school. Make use of your surroundings, for example sports clubs, play areas, libraries, swimming pools etc.

**Be a role model for your child.**

Children imitate their parents' behaviour before anybody else. Because of this, you should demonstrate to your child how to live with two languages.

This means: learning German yourself, making German friends and doing exactly what you would expect from your child.

With this in mind, we would like to wish you and your child all the best.

Diese Informationen wurden erstellt in Anlehnung an  
„Wie lernt mein Kind zwei Sprachen, Deutsch und die Familiensprache“  
Dr. Michaela Ulich, Staatsinstitut für Frühpädagogik (IFP), München

**This is what you can do for your child's linguistic development:**

**Listen to your children,  
answer their questions  
and encourage them to  
keep on speaking.**

**A good grasp of the  
mother tongue is very  
important for your child!**

**Be a role model for your  
child!**

**Create opportunities in  
which your children can  
use the German  
language (sports clubs,  
libraries, play areas  
etc.)**

**TV alone is not enough!  
Make sure there are  
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cassettes available at  
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