

Speech Ability from the Word Go – Factsheet U7

Advice on dealing with a multilingual family environment

Dear Parent!

Speech development will be the main focus of your child's development in the first two years – your child will not be developing faster in any other area.

In the following, we will be looking at some ways you can help your child develop speech and deal with different languages.

If your child has almost only grown up with your family language so far

- **Keep using your family language with your child.**

Soon, your child will have good command of his or her first language, putting your child into an excellent position to learn a second language.

- **Take frequent opportunities to expose your child to German.**

Take your child to a German-speaking playgroup at least once a week; if you can take your child to a regular day-care centre, so much the better – children usually learn German very quickly there.

- **Don't worry if your child makes a lot of mistakes in German at first.**

This is perfectly normal. As your child's German skills improve, so will pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar.

If your child has been growing up in a multilingual environment

- **Don't worry if your child mixes up languages.**

Multilingual children very often mix up their languages, at first substituting words and grammatical constructions of which the child does not yet have perfect command in the one language with those of the other. Later, they will usually only mix up languages – or switch – when amongst people that also all speak both languages. This shows that your child is very good at dealing with more than one language.

- **If neither language is German, you should expose your child to German at this point.**

Your child will find it easiest to learn German together with German-speaking children, so it would be a very good idea to get your child into a day-care centre or playgroup early to give your child a chance to learn German every day.

Is your child speaking too little?

Children learn language at varying speeds. Some children have a vocabulary of a hundred to two hundred words, and can already form simple sentences at the same time as others can still only say a few words – regardless of whether

your child has been growing up in a monolingual or multilingual environment.

Your child should be able to say at least fifty words at twenty-four months; however, this might take a little longer for children learning more than one language, which is perfectly normal. Talk to your paediatrician if you're worried about your child's speech development; your paediatrician will be able to find out whether your child has hearing problems and help you in further steps.

What your child can already do

From the twenty-fourth month

Say at least fifty words

Form simple sentences such as:

„Baby go bo-bo“

How you can help your child's speech development

- **Finish off incomplete sentences from your child.**

Children make a lot of mistakes when they start to form sentences. That is perfectly normal. You can help your child by completing incomplete sentences in the way they should be – that will make your child happy and motivated while hearing the right sentence.

Here are two examples:

Picking up on a child's expression and repeating the sentence.

Child: „Car.“ **Parent:** „Yes, a car. The car's going.“

Indirectly correct mistakes by repeating a good sentence.

Child: „Cor goin'.“ **Parent:** „Right, the car's going.“

Remember not to demand that your child repeat the sentence, and avoid criticism.

- **Pass on the joy of speech to your child.**

Children especially enjoy finger games and movement songs such as „This is straight and that is crooked“.

- **Look at picture books with your child, and have your child tell you what's on the page.**

Books without words are particularly good for multilingual families.

- **Children need direct contact to parents and other children to learn to speak.**

Watching TV is not enough to learn a language.