

## **Why it is important for young children to maintain and develop their first language: Support and guidance for parents and Early Years practitioners**

### **Some concerns that parents might have:**

#### **I speak another language at home, should I speak to my child in English?**

It is important that you speak to your child in the language that you know best. This helps to lay strong foundations for learning any language and gives your baby or young child the best start for talking.

Children all over the world learn more than one language quite naturally, it is a real advantage to be able to do this.

It is much easier for your child to learn English when he/she is secure in his/her mother tongue.

#### **How will my child learn English if I don't teach him/her?**

To learn any new language well your child needs a strong foundation in the language you speak at home. This gives them knowledge about how language works which will help them to learn the new language.

Any language is learned best from a native speaker.

It will help your child to learn English well if:

- you give them a strong foundation in your home language;
- they learn English from a native speaker of English.

The best thing you can do to help your child's talking is to spend time talking and playing with your child, speaking your mother tongue.

#### **I am worried that my child won't be able to speak English when they start school.**

You can give your child a really good start by sending them to a local nursery or toddler group. Your child will then have a model of English from adults and from other children, which is very important.

However, even if children do not know any English when they start school, they do better in English later on if they have well developed skills in their home language.

## Can my child learn English from the television?

The TV can be useful for some things. Children's programmes are entertaining, may teach children songs, or help them see places and things that they don't usually see. Children may also pick up an occasional English word from the TV.

TV will not 'teach' your child English, and more importantly, it will not teach your child to talk in any language because it cannot hold a conversation. There is value in watching programmes together, but there is no substitute for talking together with your child, that is how they will learn a language.

Remember, home languages are important; of course you want your child/ren to learn English, and they will, from school and other social situations. They will learn better if they have a strong foundation in their home language. Let them learn English from English speakers and their home language at home with you. If your child has the opportunity to use home language at nursery or school that will help them even more - it does not mean that your child is not doing well, it means that your child's teacher recognises and values the importance of your home language.

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