



RAISING MY CHILD TO BE MULTILINGUAL

Guide for parents on multilingualism

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Dear parents,

Many children in our society speak several languages in their day-to-day lives and are growing up in a multilingual environment. For you as parents, this may mean that multiple languages play a role in raising your children.

Parents in this situation often ask themselves what normal language development looks like when learning multiple languages and how they can best support their children.

The purpose of this guide is to help you with questions concerning raising children in a multilingual environment. It provides easy-to-understand background information and offers helpful, general tips for supporting multilingual language development, which can be easily integrated into your family's day-to-day activities.

We hope you find this guide useful.

Your district administrator

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andreas Coenen'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

Dr. Andreas Coenen

How does my child's language develop?



How can I support my child's language development?

- For your child, you are the most important role model when it comes to learning a language. How, what and when they speak – children absorb all of this in the womb and then later mimic it, try it out themselves and develop it.



Fig. 1: Based on language pyramid provided by Hilfswerk



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Parents are a role model for their children when it comes to learning a language!

Tips for general language development

- **Talk to your child** as much as you can in the language you feel most comfortable speaking.
- **Encourage your child** to talk to you a lot and **give them time to speak themselves**. Let them finish their thoughts and do not interrupt them. Television or videos are no replacement for speaking with each other. **There are many opportunities in everyday life** to communicate with your child and to have **conversations** with them.
- **Use short, simple sentences and everyday language** (no “baby talk”!) to talk with your child, and do not speak too quickly. Repeat specific terms that the child does not yet know.
- **Do not laugh at your child when they make a linguistic error**, even if it sounds funny. Do not correct mistakes, but repeat what was said by saying it correctly.
- **Listen to and praise your child!**
- **Read a book with your child** or go to the library with them and let them choose books they find interesting.

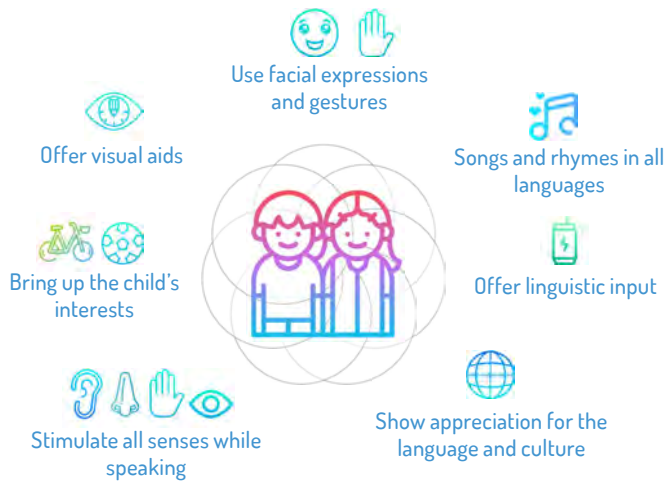


Fig. 2: Language development principles

Is everything fine with my child's language development?

Children growing up in multilingual environments can also have problems with their language development, just like children being raised with one language. These type of problems never occur just because of a multilingual environment. When something goes wrong, there are usually other factors at play, such as hearing disorders or neuropsychological problems.

Possible problems may be identified, for instance, if your child:

- doesn't seem to understand many words, doesn't use their finger to point out things, or doesn't respond to their own name by the time they turn one;
- doesn't try to speak on their own or only understands a few words by the age of two;
- only occasionally forms two-word sentences or is hardly learning any new words by the age of three.

Do you think your child is having problems with their language development? That they don't know enough words, have issues with pronunciation and can't adequately communicate with others in their surroundings?

Ask a paediatrician or family counselling centre for advice.



Who is bilingual/multilingual?

- A child is **multilingual** when they can communicate **in more than one language** in everyday life.
- Growing up to be multilingual offers a child great opportunities.
- **Children's brains can learn multiple languages at the same time without being overwhelmed.** The earlier a child is introduced to a new language, the easier it is for them to learn it.

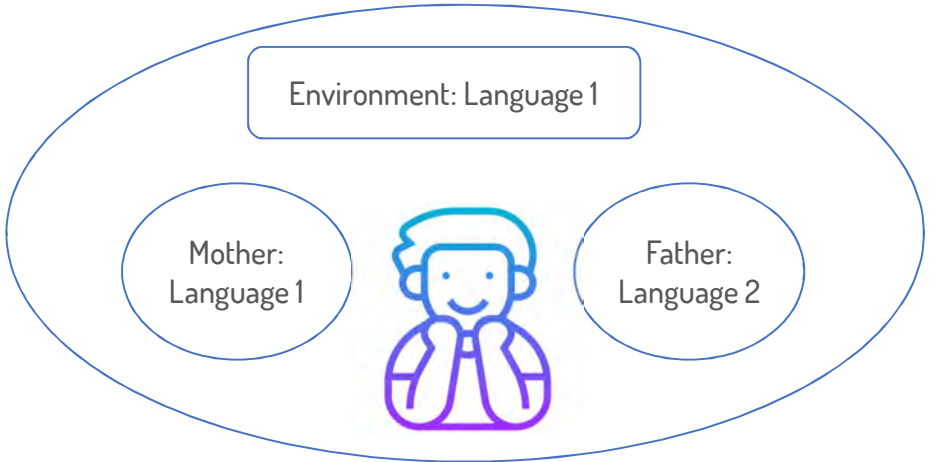
Every child acquires their language in an individual manner.

Some children require a little more time.

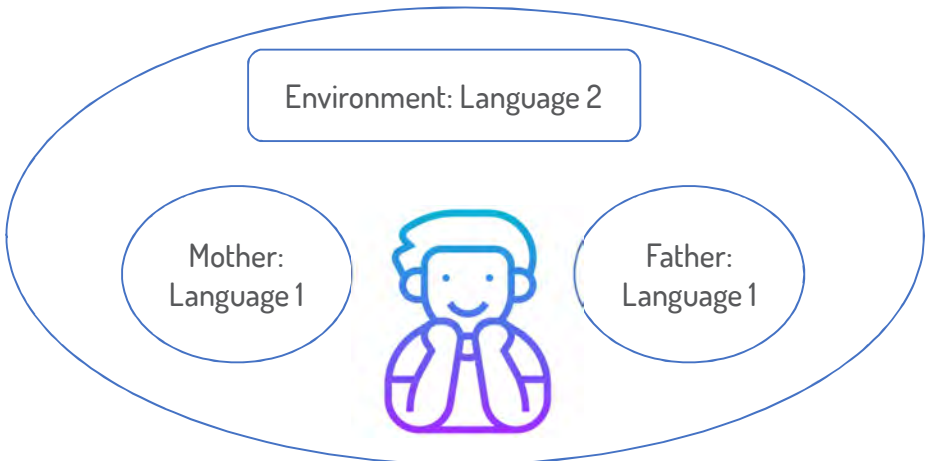
Give your child time and be patient!

How does my child learn multiple languages?

- Simultaneously (simultaneous language acquisition) if they learn two or more languages from birth.



- Successively (successive language acquisition) if they learn a second or third language from the age of three. In this case, the second or third language is acquired after the first language.





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What can happen?

Watch out! Mixing languages

- **Children mix up and confuse their languages.** It's not uncommon for children who are learning a new language to make certain errors at the beginning. These mistakes often show that the children are on the right path to learning German.

Refusal to speak a language

- Some families report phases in which their children only want to speak German and refuse to speak the language used in the family. This is not a reason for concern.
- Keep speaking your language with your child. Your child can still develop their language by listening and will surely speak it again later.

Late language emergence

- In the case of multilingualism, it is normal for a child to start speaking between 14 and 16 months of age.

One language will be stronger! – the dominant language

- Simultaneous language development will occur if the languages are similar and both used on a frequent basis.
- If the languages are very different from each other, then the languages will develop differently: a stronger language and a weaker language.



What's important when learning multiple languages?

A LOT OF EXPOSURE to the languages!

- As **EARLY** as possible.
- As **OFTEN** as possible.

Provide **LOTS OF INPUT!**

- Create opportunities to speak on a daily basis.
- Visit your home country or travel abroad.
- Organise parties and meet up with native speakers who have a very good command of the languages.
- Attend playgroups or children's parties where the children speak the same language with each other.



How can I support my child's multilingualism?

- **Talk to your child in your own mother tongue.** As a mother or father, always speak to your child in the language that is best for reassuring, comforting, and showing affection.
- **Define clear 'language rules' if multiple languages exist within the family.** Do not randomly change and use the languages spoken in the family: It is important for your child to be able to associate a certain language with specific situations or a specific person, for instance, Turkish with the mother, German with the father.
- **Give your child frequent opportunities to experience and use their second language early on.** Learning the second language is easier under real-life conditions – on the playground, with friends at home or in the nursery.
- **Regular day-care attendance helps to learn German!** If your child cannot yet speak German by the time they enter day care, keep speaking to them in your native tongue. This will help your child to fully acquire their first language. At the same time, give your child enough opportunities to play with German-speaking children outside of day care so that they can learn German well.
- **Frequently read to your child in both languages!** Obtain books in the respective languages.
- **Convey a positive attitude toward your child about speaking multiple languages:** Your child can do something that others can't; it gives them an advantage.
- **Look for offers in your area!** The more contact your child has to a language, the better they will learn it.
- **Select good electronic media such as TV, DVDs, CDs, radio, tablets and smartphones** and thus also the internet. How long children use these is very important.

Multilingual groups for parents and children



Griffbereit

- A family education programme for parents and their children between the ages of 0 and 3.
- Promotion of multilingualism through child-friendly activities.



Rucksack KiTa

- A family education programme for parents and their children between the ages of 4 and 6 and who are attending day care.
- Parallel promotion of the language spoken in the family and the language spoken in the surrounding environment.

For further information, contact the Municipal Integration Centre of the District of Viersen on 02162 39-1961 or send an email to felicia.bot-jurca@kreis-viersen.de.

Literature

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