

Supporting young children with English as an additional language (EAL)



Background

Most children with EAL already have an established home language with:

- a set of sounds and sound groupings
- intonation patterns
- a script or alphabet
- a set of sound-symbol relationships
- vocabulary and grammar
- non-verbal signals

They will be:

- aware of rules about social conventions and language
- able to relate to people and express feelings and emotions

They may have to learn:

- a new set of sounds and sound groupings
- new intonation patterns
- a new script or alphabet
- a new set of sound-symbol relationships
- new vocabulary
- new grammar
- new non-verbal signals
- new rules about social conventions and language
- to relate to people and express feelings and emotions in a new language

Parent partnership

When parents and practitioners work together, it has a positive impact on children's learning and development

Strategies to encourage home-school partnerships:

- Create a welcoming environment that values all families in the setting/school.
- Develop ways of communicating with families with EAL e.g. through other family members or other members of the different communities where possible.
- Make opportunities for staff to be available to talk to parents/carers, listening and valuing what they have to say.
- Make home visits (if possible) including sharing information around the family's linguistic, religious and cultural needs.
- Record children's first language background and skills on admission to the setting/school.
- Record cultural and religious information on admission e.g. diet, care routines, festivals and customs.
- Reassure parents that it is important to continue to use their first language at home to build a strong linguistic base on which to build English as an additional language
- Share children's progress with the parents and encourage parents to contribute to their child's learning and development record.
- Invite parents in to share their stories and experiences, and to help with activities including labelling resources in their own languages.
- Share and encourage contributions to policy development and implementation.
- Establish a translation service for the main languages: for newsletters, general information stories and tapes.
- Support parents to access information about children's services that are available to them e.g. Children's Centres.
- Support parents to be better informed about opportunities that are available for their own learning.
- Give a clear message about when and why mother tongue is being used and explicitly encourage the use of the child's first language

Positive relationships

Warm and trusting relationships with a Key Person are vital to a child's development in all areas as children need to feel safe and secure emotionally, to enable effective learning to take place

Strategies to promote relationships that enable children's effective learning

- The Key Person to be involved in the initial first meeting with parents to begin the process of true parent partnership that includes sharing of information about the child

- Ensure quality interactions take place between the Key Person and their group of EAL children on a daily basis as this has the potential to make a real difference to the children's learning and development

Play

Children's self initiated play provides an ideal opportunity for practitioners to get to know, interact with the children and develop their language.

Strategies to use in play situations

- Stay alongside children, listening and observing, and join in as a play partner
- Guide children during play by demonstrating an alternative idea, approach or resource, to stimulate children's thinking further as this will ensure that thinking demands, or cognitive levels, remain high and that expectations are not lowered simply because the practitioner and the child do not share the same language
- Organise and encourage peer interaction, during episodes of play, with English speaking children as well as with children with same first language.

Language learning and development

- Promoting and supporting the continued development and use of first language for learning enables children to access learning opportunities within the EYFS and beyond through their full language repertoire.
- Cognitive challenge can and should be kept appropriately high through the provision of linguistic and contextual support.
- Language acquisition goes hand in hand with cognitive and academic development, with an inclusive curriculum as the context.

Strategies to support language development

- Build on children's experiences of language at home and in the wider community by providing a range of opportunities to use their home language(s), so that their developing use of English and other languages support one another
- Learn some key words, phrases and gestures in the child's first language(s) including greetings
- Use body language/tone of voice to give clues to the children.
- Use signing to support language development with consistent gestures
- Allow children some time to listen before they respond
- Continue to talk to children even if they don't respond in words. A child may go through a silent phase, which is not a passive stage as learning will be taking place
- Build on all children's responses, interpreting non-verbal actions/gestures as proper turns in conversations, and provide a spoken English translation of these
- Be sensitive to contexts which enable children to respond to or participate, and to contexts in which children can listen without having to respond

- Include children with EAL in small groups with English speaking children
- Reduce background noise to help children to be focused and provide activities which help develop listening skills
- Use varied questions, language conventions such as please and thank you, idiomatic language, language in context
- Engage in songs and rhymes with plenty of repetition as they are often learnt quickly and are a good source of language
- Develop visual resources e.g. key ring of photo prompts for routines and every day choices of activities
- Model, rephrase and extend children's language rather than focusing on mistakes
- Support children in joining in with the full range of activities including routines e.g. sharing out fruit at snack time
- Plan specific opportunities for children to engage in guided dialogue with adults and peers, particularly ensuring good English language models
- Be mindful that the conversational fluency of children learning EAL may mask potential misunderstandings in more challenging or formal situations
- Consciously provide opportunities to work on speech, sounds and grammar to help children learning EAL master e.g. word endings, tenses, personal pronouns and indefinite articles which may not occur in the child's first language
- Model the use of English by providing a running commentary and by talking through children's actions and ideas
- Provide opportunities for joining in choral responses, responding in turn-taking discussions which repeat patterns of language, and listening to the interactions of other children
- Plan for the consistent inclusion of children with EAL in small group activities which promote communication with peers. This is particularly important for children in the silent or non verbal period
- Use daily routines and related language as important opportunities for revisiting and embedding language

Assessment and planning

It is important to assess the English language development of children with EAL to ensure their learning needs are planned for and that they make good progress. Tracking their progress will identify children who may need further support and who may have additional learning difficulties

Strategies to develop assessment and tracking of children's English language development

- Assess children's progress in English through observation, recording their non-verbal gestures, body language and speech.
- Use [Identifying Children who are Learning English as an Additional Language\(EAL\) and who may also have Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities \(LDD\)](#) to plan adult support for each stage.
- Track children's English language development and use to inform planning.
- Develop systematic monitoring and rigorous tracking of EAL children using EAL observation sheets, tracking sheets and assessment systems to ensure

their development is being monitored and to identify those at risk of underachievement

- In partnership with Yr 1 teachers, track the progress of children as they enter KS1
- Ensure consistent and embedded assessment for learning is being used in FS and Yr1

The physical environment

The environment both indoors and outdoors plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning.

Strategies to promote an enabling environment

Ensure:

- it is welcoming to all children and families
- it gives the children opportunities to make independent choices
- has a visual timetable to use with the children to support them in knowing what is coming next
- it includes provision of dual language books
- it has props and puppets accessible for story telling as well as story tapes for children to listen to
- it is a print rich environment including resources and working areas clearly labelled (with words and pictures)
- it includes play and learning resources that positively reflect the children's cultural and linguistic identity:
 1. books and posters,
 2. labels (parents can be involved in this process),
 3. community language newspapers and food packets displaying a variety of scripts to support language awareness
 4. role play resources that represent the children's experience at home including cooking utensils and food from different cultures dolls with different skin tones and different hair textures, puzzles depicting community diversity etc
 5. songs, rhymes and music from different cultures.

Additional resources

- [Supporting children learning English as an additional language: Guidance for practitioners in the Early Years Foundation Stage](#) - Primary National Strategy.
- [Supporting bilingual children in the Early Years](#) – National Association for Language Development in the Curriculum (NALDIC)
- [Identifying Children who are Learning English as an Additional Language\(EAL\) and who may also have Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities \(LDD\)](#) - OCC