

Tip Sheets

Infants and Toddlers: Strategies for Supporting Dual Language Learners



When an infant is born they have the capacity to learn any language. In fact, young children can learn several languages at a time.

When working with children who are dual language learners, it is critical to keep in mind that learning English is much easier when a young child has a strong foundation in the language that is spoken at home. This means that it is important for early care and education professionals to encourage families to continue to use their native language in the home.

Research has shown that babies raised in bilingual environments have better self-control, a skill that is necessary for school readiness and success. Other research, (Petersen, Bates, & Staples, 2015), has indicated that children who are bilingual are better able to:

- Understand math concepts
- Solve word problems
- Use logical thinking
- Focus attention
- Make decisions
- Remember concepts

It is critical to never assume that a language difference indicates a language deficit. In fact, the very opposite may be true. Early care and education professionals can support infants and toddlers who are dual language learners in the same ways they support the speech and language development of other children in their programs.

Strategies to Support Communication Skills of Dual Language Learners

- Tell stories and sing songs related to the child's native culture. (Families and your local librarian can be priceless resources).
- Invite family members to visit the program to share folktales, stories, rhymes and songs.
- Ensure that books in the child's native language are available to explore and read.
- Learn some basic words in the child's native language such as a greeting and how to say goodbye.

Additional Resources

Talking is Teaching

<http://talkingisteaching.org>

Too Small to Fail

<http://toosmall.org/community/resources>

Zero to Three

<http://www.zerotothree.org>

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