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Learning a first and second language

How can I help my child do well when learning German?

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Information for parents



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How can I help my child learn the language(s)?

Learning a language is an important step for any child. The voices and language of the parents are associated with a feeling of security. A language communicates the way of thinking and culture in our surrounding area.

Every person has the potential to learn several languages. Some people start with one language and learn one or more at a later stage. Others grow up with a knowledge of more than one language right from the outset. One of the most important conditions for learning a language well is to use it in daily life situations. Children need somebody to communicate with to acquire a knowledge of the language(s) – and this person must know the language well. Children can then recognise the rules of any language from what they hear.

However, it is important to stick to the principle of "one person – one language" or "one place – one language". The child must be able to clearly recognise who is speaking a particular language and where any particular language is spoken. Each person should talk to the child in the language that they know well.

1 Talking to each other

Security and emotional warmth form the basis for a child's healthy development. The first words that a child hears are associated with affection and emotional security. Strong feelings are linked to the language of the mother/father and they are very important for the child's ongoing development and well-being.

Children experience communication from the first day of their lives. Maintain eye contact with your child. He or she must direct their attention at you and the object that you are using. Your child also requires this attention from you.

View your child as your conversation partner. Listen. Respond to your child's questions and suggestions when you play together and he or she shows you something or wants to know something. Name the things that your child shows you. Accompany your joint actions with words and address these words directly to your child.

2 Distinguishing language

Distinguishing the linguistic structures forms the basis for acquiring a language. Children pick up melodies and intonation patterns at a very early stage. Sing for and with your child. Speak using short sentences that are easy to understand. Children love repetition because it helps them recognise how something works. Repeat rhymes, poems and language games as often as possible and tell them stories. You can help them understand the structure of the language by combining language and physical experiences during movement games with rhymes, singing or dance games. The joy that your child experiences in the process reinforces the learning effect. Comment on what you do together. This starts when caring for your child's needs. For example, "We're washing our face, tummy, arms" etc. This helps the child to learn the connection between the language and the actions. Your child can sense or see what is being done and therefore discovers what the language means. Your child hears and recognises words and sentences and recognises typical sentence melodies. It is good to use a higher pitch when speaking to babies and small children and use a melodious language because they can distinguish that better. Speak more slowly and in shorter sentences than with adults. This makes it easier for your child to recognise words and sentences.

3 Tracking down the sounds

All children gurgle in the same way during the first gurgling phase (starts in approx. 2nd/3rd month) and recognise that they can produce sounds at will. Important nerve connections develop at this time.

The second gurgling phase (from approx. 6-8 months onwards) is a very important time when learning a language. Children learn to distinguish and produce sounds and sound connections in the language(s) that surround(s) them. From about six months onwards, children enjoy having a "gurgling dialogue" with you. This makes it easier for them to recognise and produce the sounds in language. family Children's rhymes, stories and books are used later to help children find their way to the words. Encourage your child to join in with short rhymes. They can then practise the pronunciation of the family language(s). Developing the muscles in children's mouths and faces is also important for forming sounds. Make sure that your child chews properly and can close his or her mouth. The child's tongue should be at rest behind their upper teeth. If the tongue is flat in your child's mouth, this can cause difficulties with speaking or misaligned teeth.



A permanently open mouth (breathing through the mouth) indicates a wrong tongue position and leads to frequent infections.

Tongue games and pulling funny faces can support the development of your child's mouth and face muscles. Using a dummy for too long damages the mouth muscles and the position of the child's teeth.

filling cheeks with air
pursing and broadening
lips
sticking your tongue out as
far as your nose or chin
moving your tongue back
and forth quickly and producing a sound like a bell
moving your tongue up and
down with a sound
making your lips tremble
(to produce a noise like a
horse)

You can already stimulate your child to imitate sounds with playful dialogues before they are one year old. Children will first use simplified forms as they try to find the correct pronunciation. They will possibly utter sounds or syllables, mix them up or change them. Children can then speak most sounds correctly by about the time that they are 4. They then only have pronunciation difficulties with difficult words or combinations of sounds.

4 Word accumulator

Children should be using about 50 words by the time they are 18-24 months old. This is another important stage in their development. Children develop some initial idea of terms. When they speak their first word, they have already heard the language for a year and established connections between the words and their meanings. They can already understand some things well. They have practised producing sounds and combinations of sounds in their family language(s). They now recognise that things have a name that symbolises the object. This name can be used, for example, to obtain the thing that they want. Once they recognise this (understanding of symbols), they speak their first words (usually around their first birthday). These words do not yet sound like the adult version, because children often use simplified forms. They may, for example, omit sounds or syllables. They also use onomatopoeic sounds - e.g. "yum yum" for food or "wow wow" for dog. It will certainly be the same with your language.

Children now point to objects very often. They want to hear you speak the words for them. Sometimes, they actually want the object. Adults then typically ask, "Do you want the bear? Do you want the doll? etc." and children indicate what they mean by their reaction. They also hear what the word for the object is. These "games" are very important because children then learn how people talk to each other.



They discover that adults understand what is meant. Adults attribute meaning to what children say. This is an important motivator for learning a language. Once children have acquired their first words, a rapid process of learning words starts. Children then learn several words every day. Their vocabulary becomes larger very quickly. Children are inquisitive. They ask about the names for things that they use on a daily basis. They establish networks of meanings and associated terms - and attribute properties or activities to the things. Children discover how words can be connected and sometimes form their own new words. "Word networks" (semantic fields) about a wide variety of topics develop in children's minds. They are important if they want to reliably handle words. You should therefore use the words in different connections when dealing with your children.

5 Grammar - child's play?

Once children can use enough words, they start to link them. They learn how words are arranged in sentences. Children recognise which words are connected in a sentence so that some of them change (e.g. the changes in verbs). They become aware of the type of change for words in sentences. Support your child as they start to handle grammar by initially using simple and relatively short sentences. Ensure that children hear different forms of a verb. To ensure that children can conjugate verbs correctly, it is important to hear the different persons in German (ich, du, wir [I, you, we]). Talk about yourself in the first person singular. If you mean the child, use the second person singular. Children then obtain many examples of correctly using verbs. The process of learning grammar partly depends on the language. However, children initially form sentences with two and more words in any language before they tackle complicated sentence constructions. They normally learn more simple structures (e.g. main clauses) and then sentence connections (e.g. subordinate clauses) as well as case markers, if relevant.

Support their actions and children's games with your language. Explain to them what they are doing. Children then obtain examples and also recognise the meaning of what is being said. They recognise how various parts of a sentence depend on each other and obtain examples for conjugating and arranging words in a sentence.

6 Tips for learning a first language

Speak to your child in your language from the first day onwards – in the language that you are most familiar with and that you use to express feelings.

Sing children's songs for and with your child or tell them stories.

Play with your child. Use rhymes and simple movement games with a language accompaniment (short stories in rhyme form).

Tell your child stories.

Listen to your child and respond to their questions.

Use short, easily understood sentences.

Use different verb forms (I, you, he, she, we).

Use different verbs.

Make use of your family language(s) when speaking to your child.

Use children's books, pictures and photos to help develop your child's language skills.

Encourage your child to ask questions.

Learning German as a second language

Starting life at a children's day care centre is always associated with fears for both children and parents. It is, however, much harder for children who speak a different language at home. The fears of separation and confronting something new are compounded by a language that they still do not understand.

However, early childhood is a good time to learn one or more languages. Children learn the second language in a natural setting. They can make use of their "experience" in learning their first language. But this will only work if they are in an environment where they feel secure.

Children need plenty of contact with the new language to learn it. The language models must be high-quality to enable children to successfully learn the second language.

People learn a new language ideally within the context of daily activities. There are many opportunities for this when playing with other children. Children hear the language spoken well by nursery school teachers at day care facili-

ties. Children develop the need to communicate with others when they are with their peers. Children see that it is useful and necessary to learn the second language. They want to communicate with others and are interested in decoding the language. This is an important prerequisite for successfully learning a second language.

1 Phases in learning German as a second language

Children start learning a second language at very different times. This usually happens when they start something like nursery school. Children face the need to communicate in a different language. This is initially very frustrating. They have so far learnt to use language to make themselves understood. They have been able to communicate their needs. However, their linguistic abilities have developed

to a very different degree, depending on their age. We are therefore deliberately not mentioning any age to describe the process of learning German as a second language. Children, who learn German aged about 2-4, go through similar steps as those learning their native language. The speed, with which children go through these stages, varies greatly from one child to another. It depends on the child's overall development and the conditions where he or she comes in contact with the German language. It has proved beneficial if children spend at least 4 hours in a German language setting. However, it is also important for children to feel at home in their new environment. They need time to become familiar with their setting, the other children and the language.

You can support your child when they learn a second language by encouraging them. Knowing more than one language is a huge advantage for children's ongoing development in many ways.

Developing skills in German as a second language (in line with Adler's KomMig model, 2011)

The skill development model for learning German as a second language for children with a migrant background

reveals different learning phases. Skills,

which a child learns in one phase, are perfected during the next phases. The model is suitable for observing how children learn a second language when they are aged 1-6.

Phase A

Becoming familiar with the language and the people

Learning to distinguish the new language

This phase is crucial for children. Before they can speak German, they must learn to hear it. They hear the typicallanguage melody and register the intonation patterns. Children can gradually hear and recognise individual words in the flow of speech. They understand expressions that people often repeat (for example, Guten Tag. Auf Wiedersehen. Wir gehen in den Garten etc. [Hello. Good-bye. We're going in the garden]). Action songs, movement games and rhymes are very important at this time. They help children to better decode the linguistic structures of German. By observation, they can recognise what they need to do and therefore become involved in the game.

Children need a lot of non-verbal support during this phase (facial expressions, gestures, voice). They can then speculate in the direct situation what the words mean.

It is important during this phase that the children feel at home in the group of children. Nursery teachers and children in the group support the child

by indicating how he or she can find their way around. They become familiar with rituals and rooms. Children are given an opportunity to contribute songs, games and rhymes in their native language.

This phase, when children cannot yet speak, may take a fairly long time. They will only learn to speak when they can distinguish the German language and recognise individual words.

Many children initially do not dare to speak in a foreign language and wait until they feel more sure of themselves.

Phase B

First words in German

The child now recognises individual words in the flow of speech. Some words become signal words, because they are always associated with the same actions (e.g. Toilette, Hände waschen, Tisch decken, anziehen.... [going to the toilet, washing hands, laying the table, getting dressed ...]). Children try to speak their first words (e.g. trinken, bitte, guten Tag, Auto ... [drink, please, hello, car ...]).

The child understands the expressions that are repeated every day. Comprehension is still tied to the specific situation. The child needs a great deal of non-verbal support to understand requests in German. Children recognise that all the terms, which they already know, have a name in the new language too. They will gradually memorise the words for them. This very much depends on what is important

for the child, i.e. being able to communicate with others in a game or during everyday actions. To understand things, they need support through the situation, facial expressions and gestures. Children will also use facial expressions and gestures to make themselves understood.

Phase C.

Expanding vocabulary

Children need a minimum vocabulary to communicate in German. This must contain both descriptions of objects (nouns) and words for activities (verbs). It is important for children to always learn the right article for a noun. This is a difficult process for all those learning German as a second language. Using verbs is important for children to be better equipped to express their needs. Verbs also play an important role in sentences. Children can now recognise individual words much better. They understand what is meant in everyday situations. Their active vocabulary becomes larger. They describe objects near to them and know the words that are important for daily activities. They imitate some expressions from everyday life without being able to understand every individual word. Children start to link words together.

Pronunciation difficulties in German may occur, depending on their native language and their age when they start learning German. Children can normally overcome them with time, as they do in their native language.

Phase D

Learning grammar

This phase is closely linked to phase C. Once children already recognise the meaning of various words, they will try to string them together to make some sense.

Children now need to recognise the rules in German for forming sentences and changing words in sentences. This is a process that takes a fairly long time. It is the same for children who only learn one language.

The following milestones are important:

1 — Main clauses

Children must recognise that the conjugated verb always comes in second position in a main clause in German. They also need to recognise that the subject determines the form of the verb. Verbs are conjugated according to fixed rules (ich gehe, du gehst etc. [I go, you go ...]). The difficulty here is that verbs that are frequently used are also irregular. Children need to learn these forms using examples.

During this phase, it is important for children to hear clear examples from

skilled speakers (e.g. nursery teachers).

Questions with an interrogative particle ('w' questions: was, warum, wie... [what, why etc.]) help children recognise these structures. If children can correctly ask questions themselves, they have recognised the rule about the position of verbs (for example: Wer spielt mit mir? [Who's going to play with me?]).

2 — Case markers

Once children have fathomed the mystery of main clauses, they direct their attention to case markers. Case markers can only be learnt if children know the grammatical gender of the noun in question. This is often difficult for people learning German.

It is important that the children memorise the right article for the noun. This has to be learnt on an individual basis. There is no logical rule that can be deduced.

Children learning German as their native language are able to use the correct case marker from the age of about 3½ onwards. So do not expect children learning a second language to be able to do this earlier. Children must acquire a deeper understanding of the relationships between the verb and the object and prepositions, their meanings and functions. Here is one example: "Ich lege den Stift auf den Tisch" (I lay the pencil on the table [accusative]), but "Der Stift liegt auf dem Tisch" (The pencil is on the table [dative]). Some prepositions always require a particular case - while it depends on the sense of the sentence or the verb for others. as in the example above.

This means that children need a fairly advanced understanding of the language and a knowledge of prepositions as well as the gender of nouns.

3 — Subordinate clauses

Children now need to recognise that the conjugated verb goes at the end if a sentence starts with an introductory word (weil, wenn, darum, dass... [because, if, that...]). This rule differs from the one for main clauses. This sometimes means that children do not immediately and correctly recognise the correct place for the verb. Children may overgeneralise one of the two rules. This depends on the quality of the German that they hear, but also on the degree to which they can master their first language and its rules. Children, who are particularly good in their native language, may initially apply its grammatical rules to German. However, this is only a temporary phase and can be corrected through adequate contact with German.

These three main stages in developing grammar often occur side by side in children who start learning German at a later stage (after the age of 3). Nursery teachers should first concentrate on main clause structures to teach children the correct grammar and only focus on subordinate clauses and case markers later.

This chapter has been restricted to the main aspects of developing grammar. Children also learn other special features of the language, which they can easily cope with if they hear enough good examples and they are often allowed to speak.

Phase E

Expanding linguistic skills

Children are at about the same level as their peers after about 1-11/2 years. Their vocabulary in both languages has grown enormously. They can normally communicate without any major problems. It is now important to give children some self-confidence so that they can actively contribute to the group of children. It makes sense to learn the basic vocabulary required in the first class to prepare children for school. This makes it easier for children to start writing the language. Less important features, like the child's so-called "accent", are not a shortcoming and differ widely on an individual basis. They will also use the wrong article at times, even if they have coped very well with learning German. This is completely normal and adults, who have learnt German as a second language, do the same.

2 Tips for handling the second language

Show your child that you understand their fears.

Show your child that it is not a problem if they cannot cope with the new language yet. That will soon change.

Give your child the confidence that they can learn the new language and make it clear that they have enough time to do so. Encourage your child to speak German at nursery school and in other situations.

Carry on speaking the child's family language(s). Speak to your child in your language as normal. He or she will then feel safe and emotionally secure.

Children can make a clear distinction between speaking German at nursery school and their family language at home. Each person speaks to the child in the language that they know best. This is the teachers at the nursery school, who speak German, and the language(s) is/are used at home. Children can then decide which language they want to speak. They may then sometimes speak German at home. Show the child that you understand or, if not, make that clear too. Give your child the opportunity to grow up with more than one language and speak to your child in your language. Accept the fact, however, that they will mix up the languages at the beginning

or opt for one of the languages as the favourite one. Show your child that you are interested in what is happening at the nursery school. Your child should be proud of learning another language.

 Carry on speaking your child's
family language(s). It/they will
give your child security and
positive feelings.
 Speak to your child in the lan-
guage that you can use per-
fectly.
 Children need to clearly recog-
nise who speaks a particular
language. Stick to one language
when speaking to your child.
The principle is: one person –
one language or one place –
one language – e.g. German is
spoken at nursery school and
- ·
the family language(s) at home.
Ensure that your child has
enough opportunities to com-
municate in German (4-6 hours
per day are good).
 Encourage your child to speak
German.
 Mixing up the languages is per-
fectly normal at times when
learning two languages.
 Cultivate all your child's lan-
guages and give them the op-
portunities to communicate in
these languages.

Let your child decide when he or she wishes to speak a particular language.

 Make sure that you and your child understand how valuable it is to speak more than one language.

And something else:

Do not worry: being bilingual does not cause any problems with language development. Children who grow up with several languages have a higher linguistic awareness and are more flexible in their thinking.

If, however, stagnation and difficulties occur, they normally occur in both (all the) languages. Inadequate linguistic skills in one of the languages may be caused by too little contact with the language or in the lack of quality of what children hear. Talk to your nursery school teachers. Speech therapists or paediatricians can help you too.



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Important development stages when learning a first and a second language

Learning a first language often takes place at an individual speed, but the major steps are similar.

Please therefore view the time details as a rough guideline.

You will find some important information summarised in the tables below.

Development stages when learning the first language (family language)

	Approx. age	What is important to note?	Support from parents
First steps in the language		The child watches you while you are speaking and is very attentive to the language. The child turns their head towards the source of any noise. The child responds positively to well-known voices. The mother's voice in particular soothes the child. The child responds positively to children's songs and starts to gurgle (2nd/3rd month)	Make eye contact with your child and speak to him or her. Use children's rhymes, short stories in rhyme form and children's songs when speaking to your child.
Gurgling (2nd gurgling phase)	Starts at approx. 6 – 8 months	The child increasingly gurgles sounds and sound sequences that are similar to the child's native language. The melody of the gurgling monologues is increasingly similar to the speech melody in the native language. Please note: If your child stops gurgling, they may have a problem with their hearing. The best thing is to consult your paediatrician.	Encourage your child to gurgle. Answer your child or dialogue with gurgling. Continue to use children's rhymes, short stories in rhyme form and children's songs when speaking to your child. Explain to your child what you are doing at the moment. Ask questions such as, "Where is?"
50 word threshold	18 – 24 months	Children speak their first word at the age of about 1. Children should be using at least 50 words by their second birthday. The pronunciation of some sounds is still unclear. Simplified forms, replacements or omissions occur. Please note: If your child is already 2 and only speaks a few words or none at all, please seek advice from your paediatrician or	Read aloud from picture books during the first year and look at them together with your child. Sing a lot with your child. Play with your child. Respond to questions, name things that your child is interested in. Ask your child, "Where is", "What is?" etc.
20		speech therapist.	

Vocabu- lary spurt (many new words)	18-24 months onwards	Once your child speaks 50 words or more, their active vocabulary starts to become much bigger and several words are added every day. Children can cope with most of the sounds by the time they are 3 or 3½. Mistakes and simplified forms may still be used for difficult sounds and combinations of sounds. Please note: If no vocabulary spurt starts after your child has mastered about 50 words or if your child only learns new words very slowly, seek advice from an expert.	Talk to your child about what he or she is doing. Give your child small tasks to do and show him or her how delighted you are when they are completed. Respond to what your child would like to tell you. The structure of words becomes clear through children's rhymes.
Grammar	Starts at 18/24 months	Children learn how to link together words at age 2-3. They have to recognise the rules in their native language from what they hear. Children can understand more and more interconnections from the age of 3½ onwards. They improve their grammar. They can usually express themselves with correct grammar from the age of about 4 onwards. Please note: If your child makes many or unusual mistakes in sentence structure and is unable to correct them after some time, an expert (speech therapist) should conduct a test at the latest at the age of 3-4. This test should take place in the child's native language or preferred language, if possible.	Speak to your child in simple, clearly structured sentences at first. Use games to show the order of the words in the sentence. Games in a circle, counting rhymes or first games with rules help children to understand languages and develop grammar. You know best what is required in your language. Set your child a good example.

Learning a second language depends on many different factors, for example, the age when the child starts to have contact with German, the need to communicate in this language, the intensity and quality of the contact that the child has with German, how long the child has already had close contact with German, the child's personality, the attitude to the new language and other family and social conditions.

Development stages when learning German as a second language

	Approx.	What is important to	Support from parents
Distinguishing the language		Children must be aware of the language and learn to structure things, they need to be able to recognise individual repeated words. A child normally communicates in a non-verbal manner.	Encourage your child to sing the songs at nursery school and do the same as the other children in games. Encourage your child that he or she will soon understand more. Encourage your child to look for a friend who can show them everything and help them.
Acquiring words		A child speaks its first words. He or she has recognised that there is a different description for everything in each language.	Encourage your child to use their new language skills. Show that you understand if your child is unhappy if he or she does not yet understand everything and cannot say a great deal yet.
Expanding vocabulary and connecting words		A child can use suitable words in various everyday situations. He or she has not only learnt nouns, but verbs and other types of words too. A child now understands statements related to everyday situations. He or she often responds to signal words. He or she can already talk about actions that recur frequently and connect words with	Encourage your child to continue using their language skills in the new language. Give your child plenty of opportunities to speak German (nursery school, playground, shopping).
22		each other.	

Main clauses	From 2/2½ up- wards	The child can now form short sentences, where the conjugated verb is in the right place. He or she starts to conjugate verbs correctly. The child can start to communicate with peers in games and actions in German. He or she understands what is meant in the relevant situation.	Encourage contact with children who speak your language and those who speak German. Show your child how proud you are that he or she can communicate in two (or more) languages.
Subordi- nate clauses and cases	From 3/3½ up- wards	The child can now speak longer and more complex sentences. He or she increasingly starts to use the right cases. He or she understands what is meant beyond certain actions too. The child's skills in German are comparable to those of his or her peers. The vocabulary is appropriate to the child's age in the first and second language.	Encourage your child to use both (all the) languages and offer opportunities for this (friends to play with, books etc.).

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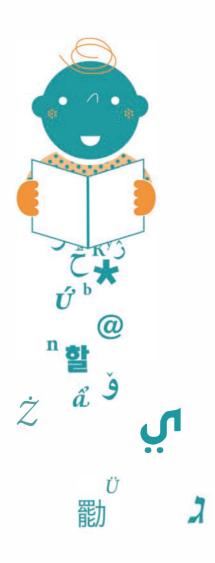
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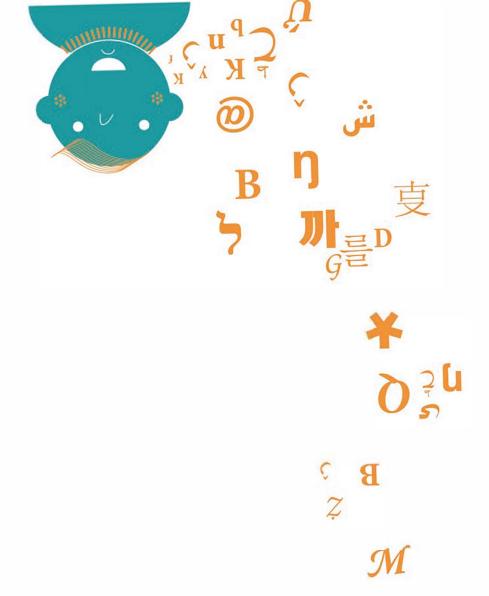
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