

Language Modeling With Dual Language Learning Toddlers



One- and two-year-old children can learn more than one language if they have sustained, ongoing, engaging experiences that use each language. Dual language learners need to interact frequently in each language in order to optimally develop their language skills.

Which language should I use with a young child if I don't speak the language her family uses at home?



- ▶ Speak primarily your own strongest language. Modeling the language you know very well provides even the youngest child with a deeper, fuller language experience.
- ▶ Learn and use some important words, phrases, songs, and/or rhymes in children's home languages. Children's families can help you learn special and meaningful words in their home language. When you use these words, you are not only speaking in the language children understand, you are demonstrating that you value them—their identity and language. Plan to use their home language at important times, especially during transitional times, such as naptime, and to comfort them when they are upset.

How do I talk to a toddler who does not understand what I say?

Toddlers already have some experience listening and "talking"—babbling, making sounds, speaking words, or more. They are expecting that you will talk with them but will quickly learn that they do not understand what you are saying. Toddlers will, over time, begin to understand the meaning of the sounds you make. In addition, you can intentionally support toddlers who are new to English by:



- ▶ Developing warm relationships with children, even without language, by attending closely to their needs, cuddling with them, looking at what they show you, involving them in your activities, and so on.

- ▶ Encourage children’s attempts to speak, whether they babble, speak to you in a home language that you do not understand, or pronounce words in unusual ways.
 - ▶ Accept all utterances as creative attempts to talk to you, and do not correct them.
 - ▶ Repeat what toddlers says back to them, with your best guess at what they mean.
 - ▶ Expand on what toddlers say by adding a new word or two (e.g., “Milk,” says Zuzka. “Here is your yummy milk,” says her caregiver).
- ▶ Use important English words frequently—such as “diaper,” “milk,” “snack,” and “outside”—while the children are paying attention to the meaning of the word.
 - ▶ For example, while diapering, you might say, “Oh, this diaper is dirty! I’m going to take this diaper off and give you a new diaper. Here. Hold this new diaper for me. Yes, the diaper is so soft. My turn for the diaper! I’m going to put the old diaper in the bin.”
- ▶ Sometimes pair a word you know in the home language with a word in English (e.g., “Here is your *pañal*. Your diaper!”). Your goal in doing this is to help the child see a connection between the two words, *not* to translate what you say into another language.

How do I help toddlers practice their languages?

Dual language learners are learning the sounds associated with two different languages! They need lots of practice hearing and using the sounds of their languages.

- ▶ **Use and play** with the sounds of language
 - ▶ Rhyme, sing, and chant together
 - ▶ Make up silly rhymes and nonsense words, like “yogurt, pogurt, nogurt!”
- ▶ **Engage** in many one-on-one “conversations” with each child
 - ▶ Encourage all toddlers’ attempts to talk by responding with interest and continuing the “conversation” by repeating what you think they are saying, adding words to what they say, or asking a question
 - ▶ Talk with a child about something they seem very interested in, asking questions, and responding positively to their responses to you



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