



Early Learning and School Readiness: Language and Literacy Development Tip Sheet

For Early Head Start/Head Start (EHS/HS); Refugee Resettlement; Migrant and Seasonal Head Start (MSHS);
Early Care and Education Providers

All providers can support families to build a strong, positive relationship with their child, with in a stimulating and culture-filled environment, that will contribute to the child's healthy brain development. This Language and Literacy Tip Sheet corresponds to page 22 and 23 of the [Raising Young Children in a New Country: Supporting Early Learning and Healthy Development Handbook](#).

Conversation Starters: (or staff, families, and partners can design program-specific questions)

- Tell me about the stories you heard as a child. Did you have any favorite books?
- How do you use your home language with your child?
- Does your child currently communicate or share his/her thoughts with you in your home language? If yes, how?
- What do you notice about your child's listening and talking skills? Is she/he using more words in your home language? In English? Does she/he switch language depending on the topic or circumstance?



Cultural Considerations:

- Families may welcome information related to children learning two or more languages. Some families may incorrectly assume that they may slow down a child's English development if they also speak to their children in their home language.
- Some families may be unfamiliar with language-building strategies (e.g., extended back and forth talking, or playing with children on their level). This may be particularly noticeable if these types of interactions are not cultural norms between parents and children.
- Some family members may be illiterate in their home language(s). Literacy activities during family engagement opportunities, especially those that may involve reading and writing, should be assessed for usefulness before introducing them to families.
- Stories about the family and their history may be the way parents transmit cultural and linguistic knowledge to their children. Discussing this with families may reveal a rich communication between parents and children.



Remember to Mention:

- In the U.S., literacy is considered to include the following skills: vocabulary, communication, knowledge of the alphabet, print awareness (basic rules for written English), print motivation (interest in books), and phonological awareness (rhyming, sounds in words).
- Warm, nurturing, and responsive relationships support learning. When children feel safe and comfortable, they are more likely to take risks in using language.
- Children learn language individually, and they learn at their own pace during communicative exchanges (e.g., talking and using gestures) and routine activities (feeding, bathing, getting dressed, playing, etc.).
- Maintaining the home language helps children to develop a cultural identity and maintains important connections to family and cultural roots.
- Children need exposure, experience, and support in both their home and school languages. This will strengthen their language development, stimulate cognitive development, and maintain the value of both languages in order to prevent language loss.

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Remember to Mention:

- Code-switching (mixing languages) is normal for young dual language learners and does not mean that children are confused about language. Children should not be scolded for code switching. Let them know that you understand them regardless of the language they choose to use.
- Families can create audio recordings of traditional songs, rhymes, and stories or join circle time to sing songs in their home language(s). This participation will support teachers and caregivers to incorporate the home language into the school setting.
- If there are concerns about a child's language or literacy development, consult with a local early childhood professional to schedule a screening and assessment. Screenings and assessments should be conducted in both the home language and in English. Both languages need to be measured to gain a clear understanding of a child's knowledge of language and its application.

Applicable Head Start Program Performance Standards:

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/standards/hsppps/1304>

45 CFR 1304.21 (a)(1)(i)(iii)

45 CFR 1304.21 (a)(4)(i)(ii)(iii)(iv)

45 CFR 1304.40 (e)(1)(3)

Resources on ECKLC:

Early Head Start National Resource Center

- **Early Essentials: Webisode 9: Language Development.** https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/comp/program-design/ee-orientation-3.html?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=EHSNRC+E-blast+Early+Essentials+Webisode+9+-+June&utm_content=EHSNRC+E-blast+Early+Essentials+Webisode+9+-+June+CID_60e8c1c8fb4534a24f4f26e0f8b4b33c&utm_source=CM%20Eblast&utm_term=Webisode%209
- **News You Can Use: Foundations of School Readiness: Language and Literacy.** <https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/ehsnrc/school-readiness/nycusrnlanglit.htm>

National Center on Cultural and Linguistic Responsiveness

- **Bilingual Infant/Toddler Environments: Supporting Language and Learning in Our Youngest Children: A Guide for Migrant & Seasonal Head Start Programs.** http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/Dual%20Language%20Learners/ecd/language_development/BilingualInfant.htm
- **The Importance of Home Language Series.** <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/cultural-linguistic/home-language.html>

National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning

- **Language Development Domain**
<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/practice/curricula/LangDev.html>
- **Literacy Knowledge & Skills Domain**
<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/practice/curricula/LKandS.html>



Early Learning and School Readiness: Language and Literacy Development Tip Sheet *(cont'd)*

Resources on ECKLC: *(cont'd)*

National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning *(cont'd)*

Tips for Families:

- **Engaging Children in Conversations: Family Time with Books** <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/docs/engaging-conversation-family-tips-books.pdf>
- **Engaging Children in Conversations: Talking**
<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/docs/engaging-conversation-family-tips-talking.pdf>

Activities with Families:

- **Engaging Children in Conversations: Talk about Language Together**
<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/teaching/docs/engaging-conversation-act-fam.pdf>

National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement

- **Tips for Parents: Children's Reading Voyage.**
<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/family/for-families/Everyday%20Parenting/Parents%20as%20Teachers/3TipsforParents.htm>

Office of Head Start

- **Office of Head Start Tribal Language Report 2012.**
<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/states/aian/tlr>

