

# Language is important – get it right!

Advice for parents when their child is growing up with multiple languages

## **Language is the key**

to friends, fellowship, school, knowledge and quality of life.

Let your child start early, learning Norwegian in kindergarten, if possible from the age of one.

Use your mother tongue at home!

This will be important for the child's development!

## **3.**

### **Can your child learn two languages at the same time?**

Yes, children around the world learn more than two languages without developing language problems. Multilingual children develop language in the same way as others do. Modern research shows that we learn languages better and faster in childhood (Bialystok, 2001), and that children can learn two or more languages simultaneously. Most people become bilingual or multilingual, which is an important resource for the community, as well as for the individual.

## **4.**

### **Mother tongue and Norwegian**

Each child must be allowed to develop language at their own pace. Children are different. Some learn a new language quickly, while others need time, and can have a silent period where they observe what is happening around them. This can last up to six months, in some cases longer.

Children often understand more than they can express. Research shows that the child learns the second language faster (here: Norwegian) if it at the same time has a well-developed mother tongue. The languages work as a support for each other. Research also shows that children learn Norwegian best in kindergarten.

### **Which language should the parents use if they have two different mother tongues?**

It is recommended that the parents speak their own mother tongue to the child. If there are two languages in the family, they should all use their mother tongue. This makes it easier for the child to connect one language to the mother and one to the father. When the family is gathered, one can choose the language that feels most natural. It is not good to mix different languages in the same sentence!

## **5.**

### **What should you expect of children who are learning more than one language?**

The child communicates long before their first word. It is therefore important to talk to the child, even if it does not answer back with words.

Like other children, most multilingual children will say their first words when they are about one year. By the age of two, most can combine two words to make a sentence. This is the same development as seen in children who are learning only one language.

Occasionally, multilingual children will mix grammar, or use words from both languages in the same sentence. This is normal, and may happen because the children are not yet distinguishing between the different languages, or they lack words in either language. Thus, the children use

their complete language skills.

Since we like to use different languages in different contexts, it is not unusual that multilingual children tell about what happened in kindergarten in one language and tell about other things in their mother tongue.

Some use one language with their parents, and another with friends.

A guideline may be that it takes approximately 2 years to learn an "everyday language", and from 5 to 7 years to learn a "school language". Having said that, there are, as a matter of fact, large individual differences in how fast language learning takes place.

**It takes from 5 to 7 years to learn a new "school language"!**

## **6.**

### **What do we mean by the terms?**

A mother tongue is a language spoken in the child's home, either by both parents or one of the parents, in communication with the child. A child may therefore have more than one mother tongue.

A second language is a language learned in addition to the mother tongue.

A majority language is a language spoken by the majority (most people) in the country.

Multilingual is a collective term for bilinguals or multilinguals. This means that the child speaks more languages than just one mother tongue.

## **7.**

### **How can you help a child with language development?**

There are many ways of teaching the child more than one language, and here are some suggestions:

1. Talk to the child right from the time of birth.
2. Feel free to use two languages from the start, if there are more than one language in the family. Many children learn two languages simultaneously as they grow up.
3. Use the mother tongue at home, and let the child learn Norwegian in kindergarten.
4. Give the child many opportunities to hear and use both languages in everyday life.
5. Tell stories, use songs, nursery rhymes and read for your child in both languages or in the language used by the family at home.
6. Listen to music in both languages. Singing is a good way to learn languages.
7. Let the child watch children's television in both languages.
8. Give the child varied experiences. This can improve the child's vocabulary.