

Appendix 3

Guidance for supporting children learning English as an Additional Language (EAL)

Young children learning one language at home and another in their early years setting need to use their home language as much as possible. Throughout this guidance it is presumed that the child's mother tongue will be encouraged and used throughout the suggested activities and stages of development. All children need to feel a sense of belonging. It is vitally important that children feel their bilingualism is valued and that they see it as the advantage that it is.

Children learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) may go through the following stages:

- **A silent period** – When first exposed to a new language a child may go through a 'silent period'. They may understand some aspects of the new language but not use it. This is quite normal and typically lasts between 6-12 months. When children go through the silent period, this can affect the use of their home language as well as the new language. This results in some children going through a phase when they are reluctant to use their home language in certain situations. This is a normal part of the language learning process.
- **Code mixing** – It is normal for the child to mix the new language and their home language in one sentence – this is known as 'code switching'.
- Lots of **grammatical errors**, e.g., 'a car yellow'.

It is important that information on the child's skills in their home language is sought from parents/carers. Parents should be encouraged to continue to speak to the child in their home language; this builds a firm foundation for the second language. Without this foundation, both first and second language can be delayed or disrupted.

Signs that a child may need additional support may be:

Simultaneous learning:

- Less than 20 words (combining both languages) by 2 years.
- No use of word combinations by 2 years (both languages from birth).

Sequential learning:

- Lack of normal milestones in first language (second language after home language).
- Prolonged phase of not talking.
- Difficulty in retrieving words.

When using the WellComm toolkit with EAL learners refer to the guidance in section 4 of the handbook (page 22)

Strategies to support children with English as an Additional Language (EAL)

- Try pairing the child with another that you know to be friendly and caring.
- Check pronunciation of the child's name, make sure everyone can say it correctly.
- Don't expect or insist on speech too early. Listening time is vital for the child to tune into the new language.
- Use non-verbal cues and materials.
- Be careful of misinterpreting facial expressions, gestures, body contact and personal space, which varies from culture to culture.
- Encourage the child to play with others you know to be supportive and understand the task they are doing – learning is often by imitation.
- Use of puppets is particularly valuable.
- Show the child pre-school routines with simple accompanying language – greeting, name of helpers, toilet, how to access drinks etc.
- Work in partnership with parents to establish a list of words which the child uses at home in their home language (write them phonetically to help your pronunciation) and encourage adults to use these in the setting.

“There is no subject called English as an Additional Language, which is why there is no recommended course book. EAL learners are learning the same subjects as everybody else. Pupils from English-speaking families, however, are learning it through their first language. EAL is about helping young children to learn, even though the curriculum is not being delivered in their first language”.

NASSEA 2015

For more information, please refer to the new NASSEA EAL Assessment Framework – which incorporates the Early Years Foundation Stage. This resource helps practitioners to observe, document and accelerate the ways bilingual children start to use English as a tool for learning in nursery/school, and then continue to develop their use of English through other subject areas. For further information visit:

www.nassea.org.uk
