

Bilingual Children and Families in Early Childhood Services

The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF) acknowledges that communication is crucial to belonging, being and becoming. 'Children's use of their home language underpins their sense of identity and their conceptual development... They have the right to be continuing users of their home language as well as to develop competency in Standard Australian English.'

(EYLF: p.38)

Things to consider

Communication between parents and children is fundamental to maintaining healthy family relationships. Studies show that where there is little communication between parents and children as a result of children's loss of language skills in their home language, the gap between parent's values and traditions and those of their children's widens. With additional support, bilingual learners can gain proficiency in both languages, maintain family connections, and develop a sense of identity that honours both their adopted and home cultures.

What you can do as an educator

- Help parents understand the importance of their role in their children's literacy development.
- Help parents identify their language goals for their child and themselves.
- Create a "bilingual" learning environment through materials, labelling, and other strategies and learn a few helpful phrases to fit with daily routines in the child's home language.
- Ensure children are provided with additional support and resources, if required, such as those available through the Inclusion Support Agency and the Bicultural Support Program.
- Provide parents with resources in their language and take home learning tools that supports their home language and English language learning.
- Encourage parents who have limited English proficiency to consider building their own language skills.
- Support educators' professional development in learning about cultural diversity and building linguistic capacity.

Things to remember



Involving parents is essential to supporting children to maintain their home language.

Many bilingual parents believe that they are doing their children a favour by not speaking their first language at home. In their eagerness to adjust to a new setting, parents may overlook or avoid this important aspect of their children's development. Yet knowing their parent's language is vital to children's cultural identity and maintaining healthy family relationships.

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Tip Sheet 5

Quick Tips

- ▶ Emphasise to parents that they are their child's first teacher.
- ▶ Being able to speak two or more languages is a strength and an advantage.
- ▶ Emphasise to parents their home language and English are both important to their child's growing up and will support the transition to school process.
- ▶ Early childhood service educators can assist with supporting the maintenance of the home language.
- ▶ Encourage parents to create their own resources. Record stories and songs for the children, use them in the centre or ask a parent to join in with songs or read a story in their home language.
- ▶ Label objects and areas in the classroom. Encourage parents to write the labels in their home language.
- ▶ Help parents connect with other families who speak their language.
- ▶ Encourage parents to meet with other families to talk about strategies, share materials, and resources for helping children maintain their home language.
- ▶ Manage parent's expectations. Learning and practicing two languages takes time, their child might mix up words or mix languages together. Some confusion is to be expected.
- ▶ Some government services such as Centrelink will translate documents if relevant for their service provision.

Useful Resources

Book Garden

Online catalogue including multicultural children's books, early childhood curriculum and other resources.

www.thebookgarden.com.au

Children's Services Central General Resource Library (Lady Gowrie Child Centre)

Specialist children's services resource pool, accessible online, includes multimedia, books, articles, videos, and a range of hands-on materials for children and staff, resources to support curriculum development and resources for staff professional development.

Toll Free: 1800 157 818

www.cscentral.org.au

Connect Child and Family Services Inc (Possum Toy Library)

Operates Possum Toy Library and Parents and Educators Resource Library, includes multicultural resources.

Phone: 02 4758 9966

www.connect.asn.au

Free Kindergarten Association (FKA)

Multilingual, multicultural, educational materials for early childhood programs designed to support staff to incorporate multicultural perspectives in all programming.

www.fka.com.au

Global Language Books

Resources including mono and bilingual children's books in over 70 languages, music, games, puzzles, resources for refugees, multicultural posters, and much more. You can filter by language, cultural group, by age or resource type.

www.globallanguage.com.au

Little Big Book Club

New Arrivals Family Reading Pack provides age appropriate reading materials in multilingual formats designed for the needs of migrant and refugee families with children aged five years and under. The aim of the resources is to encourage parents to talk and participate in early language and literacy activities with their children in both English and their first language.

www.thelittlebigbookclub.com.au

Local Library Services

Check your local library catalogue for bilingual books or you can request books in over 40 community languages from the State Library of NSW free of charge.

My Language

Provide access to search engines, web directories and news in over 60 languages; translated training courses for the public.

www.mylanguage.gov.au

Support Services

Bicultural Support Program

Provide time limited linguistic and cultural support to eligible Children's Services to assist with the inclusion of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, refugee and Indigenous children. Recruitment and training of new workers offered on an ongoing basis. To Access the program you need to be referred by either Children's Services Central or by your regional Inclusion Support Agency.

Phone: 02 9569 1288

www.eccfcsc.org

Inclusion Support Agency (ISA) – Sydney North West

Provide childcare services staff with practical advice and support in including children with additional needs into a quality child care environment.

Phone: 02 4732 7843

Email: isa@penrithcity.nsw.gov.au

Office of Early Childhood Education and Child Care

Information available about Special Child Care Benefit (SCCB) for parents experiencing financial hardship and how to access free child care if studying Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) – see **Fact Sheet 11**. For children with additional needs, including children from culturally and diverse backgrounds, your child care service may be eligible for extra assistance through the Inclusion and Professional Support Program – see **Fact Sheet 14**.

www.oececc.gov.au