

Helping Preschoolers Learn in Two Languages

Does your preschool class include children who speak languages other than English at home? Young dual language learners benefit from maintaining their home language while they are learning English. Here are some ways that teachers who are not fluent in their preschoolers' home languages can help.



It is important for children to maintain their home languages as they learn English.

- Learning in both languages helps keep a child moving forward in many developmental areas.
- Keeping a child's home language helps preserve family ties.
- Knowing more than one language is an asset.

Make the classroom a place where *all* children feel valued.

- Never allow teasing or isolation that could make a child feel unsafe or unwelcome.
- Put posters and pictures on walls related to all the children's cultures. Make sure those images reflect accurate, modern examples of each culture.
- Provide some books and games in the home languages of all children.
- Label objects in the classroom using children's home languages as well as English. Children can participate by placing the label on the correct item.
- Create a picture chart showing basic needs—eating, drinking water, and entering the bathroom—along with appropriate words in English. Children can point to a picture to communicate their needs, then repeat the words that the teacher uses.

Plan ways to bring the children's home languages and cultures into the classroom.

- Learn at least a few words in each of the home languages that you expect to have in your classroom. Learn to say hello in each language and make a habit of greeting children and families in their home language.
- Ask your local library for help or look for free translation apps.
- Play music from each child's culture and home language.
- Ask parent classroom volunteers to read some books in each child's home language.
- Invite children to teach words and phrases from their home languages to the class.
- Encourage children to share objects or games from their home cultures.

Help children to understand and use both English and their home languages.

- Create routines that help children anticipate what will happen next even when they don't understand all that is said.
- Use visual aids to illustrate words used in class.
- Reinforce English words they are learning with ongoing activities over several days.
- Promote child-to-child conversations.
- Encourage children to talk to their families about what they do at school. Sending home a picture of the child doing a classroom activity may help spark conversations.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



Children's Research Center
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
51 Gerty Dr. • Champaign, IL 61820-7469
Telephone: 217-333-1386
Toll-free: 877-275-3227
E-mail: iel@illinois.edu
<https://illinoisearlylearning.org>



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