

Let's Talk About ... Young Dual Language Learners and Their Families



Does your preschool include dual language learners (DLLs)? That is, are there children under age 5 learning a second language while they continue to develop in their home language? Often, preschool teachers who speak just one language may be serving several children who speak other languages. That can be an opportunity to help all the children learn more about languages.



Working with children

Model respect for language diversity.

- Explain that languages are what people use to talk to each other. People in different parts of the world may use different sounds and words when they talk, sing, or write.
- Explain that knowing how to speak more than one language can be good for our brains and help us learn more about the world.
- Help children learn the names of the home languages spoken by families in the program.
- Share songs or short recordings in each language. If you have no DLLs, share examples of Spanish and other languages.

Support home language learning for the DLLs in your class.

- Learn and use some words and phrases in their home languages. You could start with, “Hello,” “Goodbye”, “I’m glad to see you,” “Thank you,” “Let’s play,” “I’m sorry,” and “Time for lunch.” Help all the children learn them, too.
- Create multilingual labels for items in your classroom.
- Have books in the home languages of the children in your program. Encourage families to borrow them.



Working with families

- Find out all you can about resources for immigrants in your area. Families of DLLs have a wide range of immigration experiences. Some have had traumatic journeys. We cannot expect them to tell us about their trauma, but we can show them where they might find help.
- Learning English can be a long and complex process. Parents need information about their children, now, in words they understand. Have schedules, invitations, and newsletters translated into the families’ home languages. Use interpreters during conferences with families of DLLs.
- Encourage families of DLLs to keep using their home language with their children.
- Ask the families to suggest some children’s songs or action games the class can learn. If they are willing, help family members record themselves singing songs or reading books aloud in their home language for their children to listen to and share with classmates.

Let all parents know that you will be talking with the class about different languages. Tell them you will teach a few useful words in languages other than English. Remember, research shows that knowing more than one language can be an advantage for any child.

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.



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