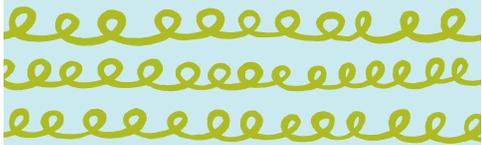


Supporting Second Language Development

a resource provided by
Way to Grow



A leading advocate in early childhood learning for 28 years, Way to Grow empowers parents to be their children's first and foremost teachers. Learn how you can help us do even more at waytogrow.org.

Way to Grow

125 W Broadway Ave. Suite 110
Minneapolis, MN 55411

TEL 612.874.4740
waytogrow.org

Children who are learning to speak are like sponges—absorbing every word, phrase, sound, and part of speech they hear. Over time, all those words heard during conversations, on the TV, and even in line at the grocery store are repeated as mumblings and utterances until they develop into intelligible and cohesive sentences. From babble to conversations, the development of human communication is fascinating to observe, whether it's a first or second language.

How does language develop?

Language acquisition develops in stages. How quickly a child progresses through these stages depends on a number of factors, including family participation in their language learning, exposure to vocabulary, parental education, and social environment. With a solid vocabulary in their home language, it is much easier for children to learn a second language!

We know that parents are a child's first and foremost teacher and for over 25 years we have helped more than 66,000 children and families navigate early childhood development and education. With over half of our families speaking a language other than English in the home, we look to the research-based ***Developmental Sequence for Secondary Language Learning***, to guide our curriculum.

The four stages of language development are:

STAGE 1: USE OF HOME LANGUAGE

Children begin life using their home language. They are familiar with it and feel comfortable using it to navigate the world. However, at some point the child will become aware of the fact that their home language is different from what is spoken at school or in the wider community.

STAGE 2: NON-VERBAL PERIOD

The "silent period" is the starting point for learning a new language. During this time, children barely understand what is said and communicate through body language like crying, pointing, nodding, using facial expressions, or short words like yes and no. However, children still process and interpret information by observing and listening.

STAGE 3: TELEGRAPHIC AND FORMULAIC SPEECH

Telegraphic speech is the use of only key words in a sentence or using a sentence without proper grammar. (e.g. a child may say, "teacher water," when asking their teacher for a drink of water.) Children may begin to use the new language, but cannot speak in full sentences.

Formulaic speech is a verbal expression that has no literal meaning. (e.g. "be that as it may.") Native speakers know what the phrase means, but when broken into individual words, the meaning is lost. A child

learning a second language will use words and phrases they have heard without understanding how the words function. For example, a child may say, “clean up time” only because they have heard adults use those words, not because they know what the phrase means.

STAGE 4: PRODUCTIVE LANGUAGE

Learning new language involves using receptive and productive skills.

Receptive skills are used to understand what is being communicated. For example, a child learning a second language receives the language and then must decode it’s meaning and comprehend what is being expressed.

Productive skills are when the child uses language to create a message and communicate something new through speaking or writing. When a child can form their own words in a new language, not just understand what others say, they communicate as though they are a native speaker.

Support second language development at home

These stages will not develop on their own. Even if you do not speak your child’s second language, there are still ways for you to help support their language development. Remember, a solid understanding of your home language is important for learning a second one! The following activities can help you help your child at home:

READ A BOOK WITH YOUR CHILD

Any time you have an opportunity, read with your child in your home language. If your child is in school, talk to their teacher about what books they are reading so you can read them together at home.

TALK ABOUT THE BOOK YOU’VE READ TOGETHER

After you’ve read to your child, spend time discussing the pictures and the main ideas of the story together. Ask questions about what happened, their favorite parts of the story, or what they would have done in the same situation. These conversations can help children better understand what they have read and increase comprehension.

TAKE YOUR CHILD TO YOUR LOCAL LIBRARY

By taking your child to the library and letting them pick out their own books, you are creating a positive environment for reading and giving them the power to decide for themselves.

TALK WITH YOUR CHILD

Conversations with your child help them develop their awareness of sounds and speech. You already talk to your child every day, so why not make those moments even more impactful? Consider doing the following in your home language:

- **Label emotions and talk about feelings**
By giving children the words to express emotions, you help your child communicate their feelings rather than acting out.

Find a public library near you with this tool from Digital Public Library of America: find-your-public-library.dp.la

Feel like taking a walk? See if your community has any Little Free Libraries to explore at littlefreelibrary.org.

- **Identify and name objects**
Look around the house or in your environment together and identify and name what you see. This activity will help expand your child's vocabulary.
- **Use letter naming, letter sounds, and alliteration**
By emphasizing letters and their sounds, you can help further develop your child's vocabulary. For example, look around your house and find objects that start with a certain sound or specific letter.
- **Explain similarities and differences**
When you talk about how things are the same or how they are different, you are teaching your child how compare and differentiate between things they encounter. You are also giving them the language needed to communicate their observations to the world.

Remember, every interaction, encounter, or experience you create with your child is an opportunity to further enhance their development. Learning a second language can be a valuable skill for any child and as a parent, you don't have to sit on the sidelines while they learn. By engaging your child in your home language, you can build a strong base for any new language they may learn. You have the power to set your child up for success in school and life, no matter the language!

Reference:

Horst, Kate. *SEEDS of Early Literacy: A Relationship Based Professional Development Program*, 2012, p. 39.