

How can I support my child's English acquisition at home?

Guidelines published by St George's English as an Additional Language (EAL) department

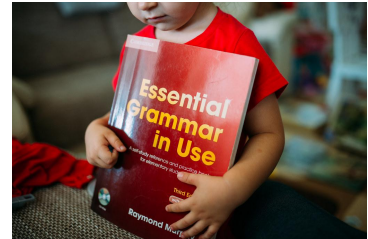
Multilingual learners are learning the language of instruction at the same time as learning rigorous academic content, all while trying to remain balanced between their primary culture and the new one that they are now learning in.

Parents can significantly help their children make the transition into an English speaking school environment by supporting them at home, even if the parents speak little or no English. The more exposure a child has to correct English outside of school, the better progress they will make at school.

English language learners may benefit when they develop solid literacy skills in their first language before learning to read in a second one. Through their native tongue, they are developing key reading and writing skills that are essential for acquiring a second language.

They also benefit from being exposed to as much English as possible outside of school, so that they acquire a wide vocabulary base, an understanding of linguistic and grammatical structures, and develop both their receptive skills (reading and listening) and their productive skills (speaking and writing).

A child who speaks English well enough to make friends and follow lessons at school still needs to acquire the academic literacy and study skills in English that will allow them to show their knowledge and understanding in written tests and exams. The higher up the school the student joins, the greater the need for a specific focus on English for Academic Purposes (EAP).



SOCIAL SKILLS + ACADEMIC SKILLS + LANGUAGE SKILLS

The information below is intended as a guide to help parents support their child's English learning at home, regardless of their linguistic or educational background. *The EAL Department would be delighted to provide further advice, assistance or recommendations, please email niki.sweetnam@stgeorge.school.it for more information. Visit <https://www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages> to learn more about English levels.*

1. Learn English yourself if you don't already speak it

To build a positive attitude towards learning, and towards English as a language, the best place to start is with yourself! Learning or improving your English with your child is a great way to spend time together and create a positive attitude towards learning and speaking another language. It shows your children that 'having a go' and making a mistake is better than only speaking when you have the perfect sentence prepared.

2. Read books and watch TV in English at every opportunity

For younger children, reading illustrated storybooks is a great way to develop language, as every page is supported by visual clues. The language is simplified, repetitive, and introduces features such as rhyme. It widens vocabulary and encourages children to ask questions about character and plot. A great alternative is to use audio books or online stories if you are less

confident about reading out loud to your child in English. Older children will benefit greatly from graded readers with online audio as hearing and seeing the words reinforces sound, spelling and meaning.

When children are watching cartoons, films or documentaries on TV, make sure the language is changed to English, with or without subtitles. It does not matter whether your child understands everything or not, they are hearing correct English, learning the sounds, and making connections between what they hear and see on-screen in a clearly-defined context. Older children should watch Sky News or the BBC World News to start developing their own ideas about world events, and to allow them to pick up the necessary language skills to be able to speak confidently about issues that are important to them.

Above all, talk with your child about what they are reading or watching, ask them questions and encourage discussion around the topic. This does not have to be in English, often children need to explore and develop their ideas in their native tongue before being able to express them in English.

3. Establish a whole-family reading routine

Read yourself! Show a good example by talking about the reading you do at work and at home – this lets your child know that reading is an important part of your life. Set aside a time and a place for reading for the family – 15 minutes every evening when everyone just reads. Setting up a mini-library in a cosy corner at home specifically for this purpose is a good way to grow a love of books at home.

Encourage your child to read books, but also newspapers, TV guides, comics and magazines. Ask your child to find out information from the Yellow Pages, the Internet, cookery books, etc. If English is not your family's first language, you can buy dual language books, and of course you can talk about the books and stories in *any* language.

4. Help with meaning

Give children time. Let them make a guess (by reading to the end of the line, thinking about what is happening in the sentences before and after) before you tell them the word or they look it up. Use a dictionary to check the meaning of new words rather than an online translation tool. This is because when your child looks up a word in a dictionary they are using other skills too such as alphabetical order, logic, spotting words within words, processing skills and repetition. Encourage them to read the whole entry for the word they are checking, which will expose them to yet more new vocabulary and help them to make connections between the different forms and meanings of the same word, and the different contexts in which it can be used.

5. Establish a homework routine

Establishing a good study routine at home can make a significant difference to your child's learning. Provide a quiet environment by removing or minimizing any potential distractions and make sure that your child has all the supplies he or she needs including pencils, books, paper, etc. Take the time to answer any questions your child may have. If you don't know the answers, you can help your child find resources to help answer the questions he or she has, or you can help your child write down the question to ask his or her teacher. Even if you cannot yet speak English yourself, you can still check on your child to see if homework assignments are finished.

6. Don't be afraid to use your native tongue

This tip may be the most important since it is the bridge between your child's learning situations — that is, the connection between the primary language and culture and new language and culture. You can explain unfamiliar words and concepts in the language familiar to your child and continue to build their literacy skills in the primary language, while practicing and developing English and academic literacies. Consistent opportunities for reinforcement of learning the new language and understanding the new culture are important. For example if your child is struggling to understand a Physics lesson in school, first find a video online that will explain it in their native tongue. Once they have understood the main concepts and terminology and can discuss them with you, ask them to make notes in their native tongue before looking up a similar video in English and adding to their notes *in English*.

6. Make sure all devices are set to English

Every bit of technology we own comes with language options and of course one of the main ways of developing language is through repetition. By using English as the operational language for your home TV, iPad, laptop, Wii or telephone, each time your child sees you accessing something or tries to themselves, they will see English in a natural context. They will also be highly motivated to learn the necessary language to operate the devices!

It goes without saying that there are a great many apps for learning and practising all aspects of English, and that a smartphone will most likely be your child's preferred way to access the internet. With a set of earphones they can be directed to websites such as the ones listed at the bottom of this document to watch YouTube clips, educational videos, science experiments and much more.

7. Tune in to a UK radio station and leave it on in the background

There is a huge difference between being exposed to a language and learning a language. Traditionally, when we think about learning a language, we think of our grammar classes in school, repeating verbs and turning the pages in a textbook. However, successful learning also requires exposure to the sounds and rhythm of another language instead of explicit instruction. The radio offers the chance to hear another language spoken by lots of different speakers with various accents. All you have to do is switch it on while you make dinner or are driving in the car.

8. Ask English-speaking friends over

All of us, no matter our age, will use another language when we see a practical use for it. So why not invite your English-speaking friends over for dinner? Your children will really benefit, especially if the dinner-table conversation is centred around topics relevant to them, and an after-dinner board game such as Monopoly, Cluedo or Who Am I is played. Even something as simple as dividing into teams and completing a word search or crossword puzzle together in English can be great fun and an invaluable learning experience.

9. Relax

Don't worry if your child makes mistakes or doesn't start speaking in English immediately. The brain needs to go through a process of decoding and pattern-finding during the language-learning process. Language production usually starts after a long period of listening and thinking.

There is some evidence to suggest that children who are exposed to a lot of different languages at once may need a little more time to put all the information into place. So perhaps in school a child learning new information in a third or possibly fourth language may seem to be a little behind a child who is handling the same new information in their first and only language.

10. Some useful websites

<http://www.wordsforlife.org.uk>

<https://www.perfect-english-grammar.com/>

<https://ed.ted.com/>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/>

<https://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize>

<https://www.cambridgeinternational.org/>

<https://www.flo-joe.co.uk/>

<http://statedclearly.com/>

<https://eapfoundation.com/writing/>