Using your home language - Parent factsheet

Information for parents/carers

Parents and carers are an important part of a child's education. This information sheet provides advice to support parents and carers to understand the importance of maintaining a child's home language/s.

Benefits of multilingualism

If you are multilingual, it means you can communicate in more than one language. There are many benefits to bringing up a multilingual child.

Having a multilingual brain may mean your child has improved attention and is better at switching between tasks. In fact, research shows that "maintaining home languages both at school and at home does not interfere with learning English [but] is a crucial resource for learning English" (Hertzberg & Valdez, 2026, p. 20). Because of this, children who learn English and continue to learn their home language may have better chances at higher academic achievement in later years than students who learn English and forget their home language. Parents and carers are encouraged to speak and, where possible, read and write in their home languages with their children.

A sense of identity and belonging

Raising your child to be multilingual may help them recognise the importance of their culture and heritage, as well as develop a strong personal identity. Understanding another language supports your child to understand your home language and culture better. Being multilingual can reinforce an understanding of customs, ideas, and perspectives from your culture.

Learning English

If your child is still learning to speak, read and write in English they are an English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) learner. Your child may be given extra support at school to help them to further develop their English. This may mean they work with an EAL/D teacher who is a specialist English language teacher at the school or your child's main teacher will provide extra help in the classroom when needed.

Learning English takes time, and your child will progress at their own rate. You can help your child by continuing to speak your home language with them. Experts have found that keeping your home language is very helpful when learning English or another language. Continuing to use your own language at home can make learning English easier because concepts learnt in one language are often transferred to another.

Using interpreter services

You don’t have to speak English to be able to communicate with your child’s school. If English is not your first language and you feel more comfortable speaking in your own language you can ask the school for an interpreter. This will be at no cost to you. Schools can offer phone interpreting services for families. You can ask for this service if you or a family member needs help to communicate with the school. The service can help you with:

- parent-teacher interviews
- to understand a school report written in English
- if you are being asked to sign a document you can’t read
- any meetings about your child’s wellbeing



How to help your child at home

Learning to read and write in your home language will help your child learn to read and write in English. Your child's home language skills help them learn and understand concepts in English.

Things to try:

- Use your home language with your child every day. This helps to maintain your home language and keeps your own relationship with your child strong.
- Read books and watch TV shows in your home language with your child. It doesn’t have to be educational, doing these things for fun is important too.
- Share songs and stories from your childhood. Families have a rich heritage to pass on and children enjoy hearing about their parent’s and carer’s childhood.
- Visit your local library. ACT libraries have books available in many languages to borrow and have bilingual story telling events for young children and their parents.
- Listen to audio books in English and in your home language.
- Share your culture and traditions. Teachers value the role parents and carers have in sharing culture and traditions and welcome visitors to the classroom. You might like to speak with your child’s teacher and organise to share a book or story with the class.
- Look for activities in the community. The ACT has many cultural events and activities throughout the year. Meet other families who speak your home language or join with other families to start your own event.
- Continue to use your home language as your children get older. Sometimes children prefer to speak English as they grow older. Talk with your children about the benefits of knowing two (or more) languages. Continue to speak in your home language and stay committed to using it as your family’s language and culture is something to be proud of.

References

Hertzberg, M. L., & Valdez, C. (2026). Teaching EAL/D students in mainstream classrooms (2nd ed.). Primary English Teaching Association Australia (PETAA).