

# Maintaining Your Family Language[s]

Maintaining your family language forms the foundation for all later language development. Your child can easily acquire multiple languages when they have opportunities to see, hear and communicate with strong language models.

Early Years Professionals in Victoria are guided by the *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework* (VEYLDF). The Framework recognises multilingualism as an asset and establishes the expectation that children will be supported to maintain their family language[s], learn English as an additional language, and learn languages other than English while attending Early Years Education and Care programs (VEYLDF, 2016).

There are many benefits for your child in maintaining and continuing to develop their family language[s]:

- Your child can extend their cognitive flexibility and development through the use of your family language.
- The maintenance of your family language[s] is essential for family relationships, creating connections and a sense of belonging.
- Family language[s] are inextricably linked to your child's identity, culture and wellbeing.
- Fluency in your family language[s] supports your child to learn additional languages such as English.

The VEYLDF (2016) explains to educators that the 'acquisition and maintenance of first or home languages has a significant and continuing role in the construction of identity' (pg. 18). Therefore, an essential component of supporting the development of English as an additional language is for educators and families to engage in collaborative partnerships to encourage and support children to maintain and continue to develop their family language[s].

## Developing English as an Additional Language in Early Childhood Education and Care Environments

Your child will have many opportunities to learn English in Victorian Early Childhood Education and

Care environments. Research tells us that 'children can successfully learn English (or another language) as an additional language through exposure to the language, explicit modelling and language teaching, and appropriate time to acquire the new language' (VEYLDF, 2016, pg. 22).

Knowing one language can help children understand how other languages work. The skills children develop in one language can be transferred to the new language. It is through the family language that children can make sense of the new language, its rules and vocabulary. When your child becomes immersed in an English language environment, they will have the opportunity to hear English in many different contexts. They will want to join in and play with other children and educators will provide good models and many opportunities for your child to hear and practice English.

Language skills develop at a pace appropriate to a child's prior language experiences, exposure to the new language and new environments in which they are learning. Children learning multiple languages at the same time may, for a period of time, speak more of one language than the other. Initially children may mix the languages when they speak. They may know the word in one language and not the other. To maintain the fluency of their conversation, they use the words that they know. This is a natural and flexible skill children develop as they use their languages across multilingual contexts.

### Remember...

It takes time to develop conversational fluency in a new language and children need time and unpressured support from the adults around them as they go through the processes of learning an additional language.

It is the Right of all children to use and learn their family language[s] (UNCRC, 1989).

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#### References

Department of Education and Training, 2016. *Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework*.

UNICEF, 1989. *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (UNCRC).