

EAL

A Guide to Working with Children in the Early Years



This booklet aims to provide **information** and **practical help** for the Early Years practitioner when a child arrives with little or no English.

Whilst you may encounter some anxieties during the initial settling-in period, working with bilingual / emerging bilingual children is a most rewarding experience which will enhance and enrich your setting.

The booklet is divided into the following sections:

- 1 Gathering information
- 2 Cultural differences to look out for
- 3 Creating a welcoming environment
- 4 Providing a language learning environment
 - i) Receptive language and Communicating
 - ii) Games for EAL Learners
 - iii) Books for EAL Learners
- 5 Do's and Don'ts

What is the **pupil's correct name** and **how is it spelt / pronounced?**

Where exactly is the family from?

What is the **family's religion?**

Are there any **special circumstances ?**
eg Is the pupil an asylum seeker / adopted / from war zone

What **language(s)** are spoken in the **home?**

Who is the **primary carer?**

1. Gathering Information

This could be achieved using the Registration Form

Does the family **read / write** in the **home language?**

Is there a **dress code** or **dietary requirements?**

Does the pupil have **older / younger siblings?** Are they living at home / elsewhere?

What is the **parent's / carer's knowledge** of **English?**

What is the **child's knowledge** of **English?**

What **previous experience** does the child have of **pre school** in UK or elsewhere?

Are there **other family members / friends** living nearby?

Some children will **avoid eye contact** with teachers - in some cultures this may have a meaning other than an acknowledgement of listening



Some pupils may **nod their head to acknowledge you** but it does not necessarily mean that they understand you

Some children will **smile** even if being reprimanded, as this is a gesture of respect in some cultures

Some children will **avoid any physical contact** for cultural reasons

Some children **may not want to eat with other pupils** because of the difference in eating arrangements



2. Cultural differences to look out for.....

Some children may seem **aggressive when playing** or may show other behavioural patterns



Children from different cultures may have **particular dietary requirements**

Some children may appear **tired or uninterested** due to environmental adjustments, stress or limited English skills

Some children may be **unfamiliar with the toilet arrangements** in the setting
eg A child might be sent in nappies to avoid these difficulties



Some cultures – particularly some Asian families – may not want to have any **contact with animals**
There may also be sensibilities about photos, dolls and other images

Have **Welcome Posters** and other visuals around the walls to **reflect different cultures**.

Display children's own **named photos** to give everyone a **sense of belonging**

Have **examples of writing** eg **labels, notices** that the child may recognise from home to show that their **language is valued** and to help other children to learn to value other languages and scripts

3. Creating a welcoming environment

Have some **dual language books** for parents / carers and others to share. Share some **rhymes** in other languages. **Learn to count** in other languages

Explain to the children that some children speak other languages. **Encourage** them to **interact** with them. Help them to understand that **non response** is not social rejection but lack of comprehension

Establish a **consistent set of routines** ie *snack time, circle time* and **provide cues** as to what happens when eg *a frieze showing daily routine in pictorial form*

Ensure that the EAL child's **home life** is reflected in the setting eg *include familiar cooking equipment / food items in the role play area*

**See appendix for example*

Be prepared for children to spend **long periods in solitary play** at first

Children need the opportunity to **start to interact with others** through conversation. This can be in planned activities *eg Circle Time* or informal situations *eg Snack time*

By **watching** others involved in an activity children can have access to good language and will be **tuning in to the language** around them

Think carefully about **using questions that will include the information needed in a response.** *eg Ask "Would you like a green one or a blue one?" rather than "Which colour would you like?"* Use gestures to reinforce

When **planning sessions**, make a note of how the **activities can provide language learning opportunities** for the children using EAL.

Provide opportunities to **share books 1:1** with EAL children to allow them to encounter **"book" language**

4. Providing a Language Learning Environment

Support this through pictures, symbols and gestures wherever possible

Speak clearly but don't shout. EAL learners **need to hear English spoken as normally as possible** – if sentences are over simplified or loudly stressed this may make understanding more difficult

Use **gestures / visuals / props / puppets / other adults or children as models** in order to help explain what you are talking about

"Talk while doing" to model appropriate language *eg while playing a simple board game or using construction toys*

Accept any speech without correcting. **Model target sounds or words** for children – encourage but do not require repetition of models









Use the **home corner** to reflect **different cultural backgrounds** and encourage talk about familiar activities *eg cooking, eating*

Use **songs and rhymes** to provide an opportunity to **join in** a few words and **extend their language** in a non threatening environment

4i) Receptive Language and Communicating

The **EAL Beginner** will be **watching / listening** to the adults other children around him / her – it is **really important** to **support talk with visuals / materials / actions / gestures** wherever possible to **help convey meaning**.

Here are some examples of **language areas** that can be **developed quite naturally** during the course of **everyday activities** in the Early Years Setting

Greet people, respond to greetings	<i>Hello....How are you? Fine, thank you....OK</i>	
Express agreement / disagreement	<i>Yes....No..... I like / don't like</i>	
Identify objects and people	<i>What's this? Who's this? This is a..... It's..... They're.....</i>	
Answer and ask questions about physical characteristics and feelings	<i>I've got black hair.. I'm cold / hungry / happy / sad</i>	
Answer and ask questions about number	<i>How many pencils?... I've got two sisters There are six boys</i>	
Answer and ask questions about possession	<i>I've got a This is my bag.. Whose lunchbox is this?</i>	
Answer and ask questions about where things are	<i>Where's the book? (It's) in / on / under / by / behind..... The chair is by the table</i>	
Express simple actions	<i>What are you doing? What is s/he doing? I'm.....ing S/he's.....ing</i>	

Basic Topic Areas

Ourselves	Personal details Family Feelings / Needs Home Clothes Food Parts of the Body
Setting / School	The Environment <i>eg Hall. Playground, Furniture, Equipment</i> People who work with us
Mathematical Development	Numbers Shapes Size Money Time
Other Topics	Colours Animals Transport In the Town / Country Occupations Shopping Weather

4ii) Games for EAL Learners

Games introduce new vocabulary, new concepts, use of number, social language.

Remember to include children in the group who will provide good language models

Many of these activities / games will be well known in the setting. Car Boot sales and attics are also worth raiding.

This is by no means an exhaustive list and you will no doubt know others and have particular favourites, but it serves to illustrate how to find language learning opportunities among readily available resources

Games

Match –a – Balloon

Picture Lotto / Matching Pairs

Picture Snap

Sound Lotto

What Belongs Where ? (Spectrum)

Animal / People Jigsaw Puzzles

Tummyache Game

Simon Says

Size Lotto

Teddy Bear Opposites (Orchard Toys)

The If....Game (Philip and Tacey)

Teddy Bears Colour Match Express (Orchard Toys)

The house that Jack Built

Picture Dominoes

Press & Peel

Magnetic Storyboard with story packs

Guess Who?

What's in the Bag?

The Shopping List Game

Any Dice and Board Games

Language / Vocabulary Focus

Colours, dice, your / my turn, throw, board, put

Common nouns

Common nouns

Common verbs and nouns

Common nouns, positional language, Where...? Home / In the street

Parts of the body, clothes, animals

Food, like / dislike

Instructions, parts of the body

Common nouns, language of size

Front / back, push / pull, over /under etc

Common nouns, food, transport, animals

Colours

Colours, parts of house, shape

Common nouns

Various common scenes – school, home, farm, shop, seaside

Book language, common nouns, verbs

Physical descriptions, clothes

Any set of objects eg classroom equipment / animals / vehicles / play food

Common supermarket items

Directions, counting, taking turns

4iii) Books for EAL Learners

Choose books with very **little text**, but which are clearly supported by **strong visual impact**

The best stories, rhymes are those with **repetitive** or **predictable storylines / refrains**

Choose books that relate to children's experience which provide positive images and value cultural diversity

Wordless Picture Books are ideal for "reading" in any language. They can be used to introduce new words or explore culture specific references

Many stories have **audio taped** versions to enable the pupil to see and hear the language simultaneously. Talking books are beginning to be produced for the computer, including some dual language texts. You can also make your own tapes / talking books with software such as Clicker4

More and more books are being produced in **dual language text**. These are equally valuable for sharing with children who speak one language

Home made books are **easy** and **inexpensive to make** and can be used to **support the classroom curriculum** in many ways. They can be both **fiction and non fiction**. They can provide an important **link between home / school**. **Bilingual versions** can be produced with help from home or other bilingual speakers

Here are some books for the EAL Beginner, but you will be able to think of many more that will be equally suitable

Spot books	Eric Hill	Mr Gumpy's Outing The Shopping Basket	John Burningham
Brown Bear, Brown Bear The Very Hungry Caterpillar	Eric Carle	Dear Zoo	Rod Campbell
Rosie's Walk Titch	Pat Hutchins	How Do I Put It On How Do I Eat It Peace at Last	Shigeo Watanabe Jill Murphy
Handa's Surprise	Eileen Browne	The Snowman	Raymond Briggs
Lima's Red Hot Chilli	David Mills	A Dark, Dark Tale	Ruth Brown

5. Do's and Don'ts

Children who speak EAL may be at risk of underachievement due to some commonly held assumptions and mistakes that are often made, usually with the best of intentions. By following the Do's and Don'ts below you can minimize this risk.

The first basic principle is to recognise that children learning EAL **do have** language skills, they just don't happen to be in English. These skills are transferable to second and subsequent languages.

There will be some children learning EAL who have a language delay or disorder but this will also show itself in the child's home language. Good liaison with parents and assessment in the child's home language would be crucial before referring to Speech and Language Therapy.

Do group children learning EAL with other children who are strong language models; they will learn a lot from playing with their peers
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Do ensure children learning EAL are placed in their appropriate age group

Do acknowledge and value children's home languages
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Do reassure parents that maintaining and developing the home language is important and will support learning English
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Do actively encourage and support peer interaction through play

Do accept that children learning EAL are likely to have developed skills in other areas of learning, so ensure activities are age appropriate

Do accept that children need to copy – it is a way of learning
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Do accept and value any attempts to communicate, whatever the language and quietly praise even minimal efforts
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Do speak to children as they play, commenting on what they are doing and giving them the words they need in context

Do expect children learning EAL to switch off frequently. It is very tiring listening to a language you don't understand
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Do be patient. Children have different ways of learning and progress at different

rates

Don't withdraw children learning EAL for 1-1- sessions to 'teach them English'. This is inappropriate and almost always counter-productive

Don't encourage parents who have limited English to teach their child English at home. Languages are best learnt from native speakers

Don't suggest English should replace the home language; children will need to communicate with their extended family

Don't be surprised if children learning EAL find it hard to settle at first

Don't assume that children are being deliberately difficult if they don't always comply with your expectations; there may be cultural differences

Don't assume children learning EAL understand what you say and are being difficult if they don't do as you say. They may have developed strategies for *appearing* to understand by copying others and learning the routines

Don't refer to children's home language as 'jabbering away' in their own language or talking 'gibberish'; this is simply disrespectful

Don't continually ask children questions e.g. 'what's this?', 'what colour is that?'. If the child knows the answer you have taught them nothing and if they don't know they will feel they've failed

Don't be discouraged if the child learning EAL doesn't want to speak much for a while (this can go on for about 6months). Concentrate on building the relationship with the child and laying the foundations of English – the language will come later.