

Where can you find more information?

Literature used in this pamphlet:

Elaine Weitzman and Janice Greenberg: "Sprog i samspil—En praksisnær guide til sproglig og social læring i dagtilbuddets fællesskaber", A Danish adaptation by Helle Iben Bylander and Trine Kjær Krogh, Dafolo 2016.

Opinionen, 2013: "Modersmål er en smuk gave", Opinionen - theme on native tongues, March 2013.

Frida Paustian, 2007: "Forældre med hver sit sprog", article in "Vores børn" October 2017.

Sprogpakken.dk

The Royal Danish Library: "Hvordan lærer mit barn sprog?"

On Slagelse Municipality's website – www.slagelse.dk - and the Nordby Centers website – www.nordbycentret.slagelse.dk - can you read much more about language assessments and stimulation of your child's language:

- View materials on language assessment
- Read about the goals of language stimulation for multilingual children
- Read the legislation on language assessment and language stimulation

The
Nordby Center
Langes gård 12, 2. tv.
4200 Slagelse
www.nordbycentret@slagelse.dk
Telephone: 3078 5820



Slagelse Municipality

When Mom and Dad speak other languages than Danish



A guide for parents

Center for Children & Young people

The Nordby Center

2021



Dear parents

As parents to a multilingual child, you may at times feel uncertain as how you best can support your child's language development.

The sooner children begin learning Danish, the more opportunity they will have to benefit from the learning environments in day-care and kindergarten in Denmark. In the end, learning Danish at an early age will ensure children a better start for doing well in school and further studies.

The fact that your child is growing up in a multilingual family does not automatically guarantee that he or she will end up speaking your family's native language(s) or achieve fluency in Danish. It requires an active effort on your part and cooperation with your child's day-care to assure your child's ability to speak and understand the Danish language.

This pamphlet is to inspire you as well as inspire you to cooperate with your child's day-care in your child's efforts to learn Danish.

This pamphlet is based on scientific research on multilingualism. You will find literature references on the back of this pamphlet.

If you have any questions, the multilingual specialist teachers at the Nordby Center, are always available to provide guidance and support for both parents, day-care and kindergarten staff.

We hope that you find the contents of this pamphlet helpful!



Activities in day-care, kindergarten and school

There are many fun activities in your child's everyday life that you as a parent can get involved in, and take advantage of, to stimulate your child's language development.

Reading games in kindergarten, help children's vocabulary grow

In Slagelse Municipality, a number of kindergartens use reading games (Called "LæseLeg" in Danish) to help stimulate language growth.

The focus of these games is to have fun while reading with a small group, of no more than five children. The same book is read over three sessions. The teacher selects a number of so-called "focus words" from the book, which the parents get to take home. The children and teacher talk about what the book is about, and the teacher prepares practical activities based on the theme of the book. You can't take these books home with you, but you can find them at the library, or have a copy of the focus words and pictures of the book sent to you. You can read more about these reading games at www.laeseleg.dk where you also find inspiration to how parents can develop their child's language.

A Bridge-Building material between kindergarten and school

In order to ensure a good transition for children from day-care, kindergarten and school, all institutions use the same material (called a "Kanon" in Danish).

The themes in the "Kanon" are:

- Insects and nature*
- My fantastic body*
- The book "Villads from Valby"*

Find the "Kanon" at www.slagelse-kanon.dk



Good language learning strategies

Making language fun to learn!

Here are some good language learning strategies for teaching your child language in phases 5 and 6:

- Use open questions (not yes and no questions).
- Avoid directly correcting your child's mistakes (when your child is finished speaking say the sentence again using the correct sentence structure).
- Pay attention to your child's interests. Ask questions about what interests your child and wait for him or her to respond.
- Make learning language a game so it becomes fun learning something new.
- Interpret what your child says and help him or her to put his or her thoughts into words.
- Explain words that your child does not already know by showing them things in real life (rather than just using more words).
- Relate to something your child already knows and encourage your child to talk to you and tell you stories. This will strengthen your child's identity.



Parents play an important role in helping children learn language

Your child cannot learn to speak a language on his or her own. Language develops when your child interacts with the people he or she trusts: Parents, siblings and close relatives. Your family's communication patterns (E.g. if family members talk loudly or talk in a more moderate tone of voice) and what your family chooses to talk about, play therefore a tremendous role in your child's developing language, both native language and Danish language development.

Your child's day-care will help him or her to learn Danish. It is possible to get extra help, if your child needs assistance learning Danish. Staff conduct language assessments on a regular basis. Staff will also cooperate with you to help your child learn Danish as quickly as possible, through appropriate language challenges and learning environments. It is extremely important for your child's future that he or she benefits as much as his or her peers when starting school. It is NEVER fun for a child to fall behind in school because of language issues.

Multilingual children learn language differently than monolingual children. By working together, we can give your child the best possibility of success. **However, YOU play the most important role in your child's language development!**

Definition of multilingual children: Multilingual children are children who on a daily basis operate in two or more language environments and need to use one or several languages to do so.

- Some children speak both Danish and a native language with their parents.
- Other children primarily only use one language.
- Other children grow up with a mother and father who have different native languages, in addition to learning Danish.

It is important that you inform the staff at your child's day-care, about which languages your child hears and uses on a daily basis. This is important knowledge for your child's day-care.

Questions for parents about native language(s)

Your expectations to your child

Learning to speak a language should be fun. If your child finds it difficult or tedious to learn a language, this will negatively affect progress. This is why parents should make a conscious decision about how they would like to help their child learn a language. Not choosing is also a choice!

What language to speak with your child?

Parents should speak to their children in the language in which they are most fluent. If parents are better at speaking a second language, e.g. Danish, then it is not crucial that the child learn the parent's first language. The most important thing is to communicate with your child in the language in which you are most comfortable.

Consider this: When you get angry and express your emotions, what language do you then speak? This is your "preferred" language, the one you are most comfortable with and the language you should speak with your child.

Which language level would you like your child to achieve?

1. *Should your child be able to both speak and understand your native language?*
- Both parents must fully be able to express themselves in their native language otherwise communication may become awkward and it can be difficult to be equals as parents in the language you speak at home. If each parent speaks a different language, then you may consider whether it is of great importance for your child to learn all three languages at once, or if one language and Danish would be sufficient, while your child is still in kindergarten.
 - If your child is to remain interested in learning language, he or she must use it on a daily basis. This means speaking with your child, reading books and watching children's TV programs or films and communicate regularly with family members who speak the language you want your child to learn.

• Phase 4: The Compounder (18-24 months)

The child's vocabulary grows quickly, and the child participates more actively in conversations, though without being able to make real conversation.

The child is now able to string words together into full sentences. Parents should at this point in the child's development, be aware of encouraging their child to continue speaking, through asking questions, showing interest in and listening to their child.

• Phase 5: The Early Sentence User (2-3 years)

The child goes from using sentences with two words, to sentences with about five words. As a parent, you may notice that the most successful conversations will be the ones begun by your child. This is because the subject of the conversation will be one your child is comfortable with and interested in.

• Phase 6: The Late Sentence User (3-5 years)

The child can now speak in long sentences and make conversation. As a parent, you can encourage your child to tell long, detailed stories by asking questions related to what your child is telling you. Often children will tell stories about events from their everyday life. Some children are also able to fabricate stories from fantasy.



Understanding your child's language development

Children's language development typically undergoes six stages.

In the following, we will briefly look at these six stages or phases of development in order to provide parents with an insight into how they best can support their child's progress to the next phase (Elaine Weitzman & Janice Greenberg, 2016: *Sprog i samspil*).

- **Phase 1: The Discoverer (0-8 months)**

The infant is not consciously aware of how to communicate its needs. Eye contact and infant adapted speech are important for its mental and physical wellbeing and development. Parents need to interpret their infant's behaviour. For example, if the infant looks at its teddy bear, you could pick it up and ask, "Would you like your teddy bear?" then give it to your baby.

- **Phase 2: The Communicator (8-13 months)**

The infant becomes more social as its neck becomes stronger and gains control of its head, facial expressions, and the sounds and gestures it makes. Parents must develop joint attention with their infant, as he or she wants to share feelings and interests, e.g. when you are playing with your infant and he or she hands you a toy and waits for your reaction.

- **Phase 3: The Single-Word User (12-18 months)**

The child begins to use single words. As a parent, you should speak in a simple language and ask your child questions that he or she is able to answer. Be a good linguistic role model. Speak about things your child can see and touch in short and precise sentences.

If you wish your child to master a language that he or she only uses in his or her contact with the one parent, this may result in the child believing that it is a secret language, which only may be used at home.

If you decide that your child should learn both parent's native languages, then each of you should speak, sing and read with your child in your own native language. Remember to take time for both of you to communicate with your child. Make some sort of agreement between yourselves about whom will speak which language to your child.

2. Should your child be able to understand but not speak your native language(s)?

3. Should your child merely be familiar with your native language(s)?

If your goal for your child's language acquisition is number **2** or **3**, then you are not required to be as consistent to which language you speak with your child on a daily basis, but nevertheless you should teach your child words and phrases in your native language.

What to know about learning multiple languages

Adults are often concerned that children will get confused if they have to learn two languages at once. Research shows, that there is no negative impact on a child's development when having to learn two languages at once. The important thing is to ensure that you follow through with the choices you make while your child is still young, as consistent language use, makes it easier for them to learn. If one parent repeatedly switches between two languages when speaking with the child, the child will then become confused. On the other hand, the child will feel at ease and learn two native languages if their mother speaks in her native language and their father speaks in his.

A helpful tip to multilingual parents: avoid mixing languages, as a young child does not know that you are speaking a mixture of two languages!

It is common for multilingual children not to master all languages at the same level. A multilingual child may therefore have a slightly lower vocabulary in two languages than a monolingual child has in one. This makes no difference, as the multilingual child has vocabulary in two different languages instead of just one. (Anders Høyen in Opinonen, 2013, and Anne Holmen in Paustian, 2007).

Expectations to you as parents

The staff at your child's day-care and kindergarten expect that:

- You show an interest in the activities your child takes part in during the day at day-care and kindergarten by talking with your child about these activities and ensuring that your child is involved.
- You talk about and put into words your everyday life together, e.g. when you are both helping in the kitchen. When you go for walks that you talk about what you see along your way, even if it is just a walk to and from kindergarten. In addition to stimulating your child's language, you also show an interest in his or her everyday life.
- You talk to your child at a level he or she understands and is appropriate for the child's age level. A child cannot adapt how they communicate with you. This is the adults' responsibility.
- Children do not learn letters from the alphabet, numbers and rhymes by heart without understanding them and being able to describe their meaning. Children need opportunities to ask you questions about what they have learned in kindergarten or at home.
- Children read books with their parents from a very young age. You should talk about what you see in the books you read together, repeat the words your child says incorrectly after he or she has spoken, and encourage your child to talk with you and use gesture.
- Your child shows up regularly and gains a satisfactory level of exposure to Danish on a daily basis during the week.



As a parent, you may disagree with some of these guidelines. Your views on what learning is, often reflects your own upbringing; Were you allowed to speak to adults? Or did you have to be quiet? Did your parents read or sing to you as a child? Were you allowed to question your parent's authority without punishment?

Your family values must be respected. On the other hand, you must also consider that your child is growing up in Denmark and together with day-care staff find a new and better approach to learning.

Advice for parents about cooperation



As a parent, you can cooperate with kindergarten staff to encourage your child to learn Danish.

- You can offer to help the staff translate words from your native language, so it is easier for them to understand what your child's interests are.
- Show enthusiasm, when your child uses Danish expressions. Your child will feel motivated to learn more Danish when you show them you are proud of their progress.
- Ask the staff about activities your child has participated in during the day, and have a conversation with your child in your native language about their day.
- Tell the kindergarten staff about your child's experiences at home, so the staff can ask your child questions about these experiences.
- Play word games with your child. Explain to your child that things have different names in different languages; they are called one thing in your native language and something else in Danish.
- Watch Danish children's TV together and have a conversation with your child (in your native language) about what you see.
- Go places and participate in activities where your child can hear Danish outside of day-care/school, such as going to the library, playgrounds or playgroups where children speak Danish.
- Read children's books from your native language and in Danish for your child. Choose for example the books they are reading in day-care or kindergarten. While you are reading, have a conversation with your child about the contents and pictures in the book.
- Conversations should revolve around things, which interest your child, for example: "cars", "dragons", "food" or "princesses".
- If you are concerned about your child's language development, you should ask the day-care or kindergarten staff to make a detailed plan for developing your child's language.