

## Speech Ability from the Word Go – Factsheet U7a

### Advice on dealing with a multilingual family environment

#### Dear Parent!

Your child is now old enough to go to a day-care centre – a new challenge for you as parents. If your child hasn't learned to speak any German yet, you might be worried as to whether your child will get along with the others, and whether the child carers will understand your child. This will also be a major step for your child, and your child will especially need your support.

In the following, we'll be giving you some important tips on how to deal with different languages in the family and in the day-care centre.

#### If your child has grown up almost only in the family language so far

- **Talk to your child's carers.**  
Your child probably won't understand that much German, and only be able to say a few words. Talk about that to your child's carers for them to help your child.
- **We recommend that your child go to a day-care centre regularly and make friends with German-speaking children.**  
This will give your child an important opportunity to practise German, so you should also encourage your child if he or she wants to meet German-speaking children in the afternoon as well, as they will be especially good role models for learning German.
- **Exchange a few sentences in German with the carers as you drop off and pick up your child at the day-care centre.**  
Your child will see that German is important to you too. Appreciating both languages will play a major role in how good your child will take to each individual language.
- **If you only speak a little German yourself, this would be a good opportunity to learn German together with your child.**

#### If your child has been growing up in a multilingual environment

- **Don't worry if your child makes more progress with German, even preferring the German language.**  
Children often choose a language that they are beginning to speak in. The language they prefer to use may change and change again as time goes on. Don't demand that your child use your native language in these phases, but still keep on using your own native language at home all the same. At the same time, show your child that you are pleased at the progress he or she is making in German.
- **Don't worry if your child mixes up languages.**  
This is perfectly normal, and happens often. Your child will replace words and grammatical constructions that don't yet sit as well in one language with those of the other. There's no cause for alarm, as your child will stop doing this when he or she has gained proficiency in both languages.

#### If you are worried about how your children's speech is developing:

Talk to your paediatrician about it. Your paediatrician will take other tests as necessary to decide whether speech therapy or other remedial measures are needed. What's important is how well your child is doing in his or her native language. If your child only shows difficulty in German, it's probably because your child hasn't had much exposure to German yet. You might like to encourage your child in this direction for him or her to pick up the slack quickly.

However, if your child is also showing problems in his or her native language, there might be a speech development problem. This happens as often with monolingual children as it does with multilinguals – multilingualism does not cause speech development issues. In this case, speech therapy is your best option.

#### What your child can already do

Three-year-olds have a good range of vocabulary and can form sentences of four to five words, making a real conversation possible. Children also develop at different rates at this age, and some milestones will take a little longer with some children than with others. Minor lags should be quickly recovered, though.

#### How you can help your child's speech development

- **Always try to pick up conversation with your child, over and over again.**  
Talk about picture books and common experiences.  
Ask your child questions about what he or she has been saying.
- **Now use longer, more complicated sentences.**  
However, explain unknown words to your child.
- **If your child says something that isn't quite right, say it right and add missing words.**  
Remember not to demand that your child repeat you, and avoid criticism – keep your child interested in continuing the conversation.  
Child: „Cor gone fasts.“  
Parent: „Right, the car went really fast.“