

QUICK TIPS for Getting Started

Young Dual Language Learners (Birth through 5 years)



Create a Welcoming Environment

- ❖ Learn to **pronounce children's names** correctly!
- ❖ Display pictures or posters of families that are representative of **all** the families in your care.
- ❖ Display children's books in the languages of the families in your care—even if *you* can't read them (contact libraries or parents).
- ❖ Provide culturally relevant learning materials that are representative of diverse environments to show you value and accept differences.
- ❖ Invite parents and community volunteers who speak the languages of the children in your care to participate in classroom activities.
- ❖ Remember to interact with children who are learning English as much as you do with native English speakers.
- ❖ **SMILE** a lot—help children feel safe and welcome!



Instructional Tips for Getting Started

- ❖ Use **lots** of **visuals** (objects, photos, pictures) when talking.
- ❖ Use **gestures** and **voice tone** to illustrate what you mean (e.g., use a “big” voice while vertically and horizontally separating hands far apart to describe “big”).
- ❖ **Simplify** your language with children who are in the beginning stages of learning English—when conversing, giving directions, or reading.
- ❖ Slow down and **speak clearly**—we don't realize how fast and “garbled” we often speak!
- ❖ Support children's **home language** *whenever possible*. Use their home language to introduce new concepts, vocabulary, and to check for understanding.
- ❖ Provide audio recordings of children's home language (music, rhymes, stories) to help children continue developing their home language and to provide a respite from listening to English.
- ❖ Learn a few **key words or phrases** in the children's home language.
- ❖ Provide children **down time and quiet areas** where they can rest from the task of learning a new language.



Connecting with Families



- ❖ **Learn everything you can about your families' language and culture of origin.** But don't assume that each family will fit into a generalized "cultural formula". Each family is unique and comes with their own particular set of beliefs and values apart from their country of origin. Nevertheless, it is helpful to know that some cultures value *interdependence* over *independence*, for example, so that you don't misinterpret parents' desire to feed and dress their three-year-old as "pampering" (Barerra & Corso, 2004). Helping children with eating and dressing beyond age 3 may be considered a requirement for "good" parenting in their culture.
- ❖ **Find an interpreter if possible to help interpret and act as a cultural bridge between you and families.** Having someone who speaks the home language of parents and children is one of the most powerful ways to demonstrate that you value their language and culture. Having bilingual and bicultural staff and/or adult volunteers also helps you communicate more fully with families and learn more about their "take" on what is happening with their child and in your program.
- ❖ **Introduce yourselves to families—even if you don't speak their language!** Smile and make eye contact and let them know how delighted you are to have their child in your care. If possible, show them samples of their children's work while meeting. Although they might not understand everything you say, your demeanor and attitude will convey that you value them and their child! You might even ask parents to teach *you* a few words in their language for the people and things that are important to their child.
- ❖ **Encourage parents to speak with their children in their home language.** Some parents believe that children will learn English "faster and better" if they are only spoken to in English. As a result parents may stop talking to their children in the home language and/or speak to their children in less than fluent English. But children need to hear **lots** of rich language to build their language skills. Studies show that children transfer the language they acquire from their home language into English and that children do not become "confused" by dual language learning (Escamilla, 2005; Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004; Tabors, 2008). So let parents know that **being a strong language model for their children in any language is the best way to ensure that they learn English**. This is true for children with speech/language disabilities as well (Genesee, 2010; Genesee, Paradis, & Crago, 2004).
- ❖ **Invite parents to teach the children in your care a song, rhyme, dance, or story in their home language.** This helps children see that you value their language and helps parents feel included and welcomed. Doing this on a regular basis also gives *all* children the experience of learning another language!!

