



Social & Emotional Development / Valuing Diversity

Child of a Different Language



Dear Debi,

I care for a 3 ½-year-old who doesn't speak English. This is his first group experience, and he seems intimidated. How do I help him communicate his needs to me and the other children?

– **Monica**, Culver City, CA

Debi's Tips



Debi Gutierrez

Host

- Get to know the child's family, culture and language
- Support the child's native language
- Provide activities that don't rely on language interactions
- Encourage friendships with other children

Expert Advice



Magaly Lavadenz,

Ph.D.

Language, literacy and learning specialist

When caring for a child who speaks a different language, it's essential for the provider to communicate with the parents so the child care provider can get to know the wants and needs of the child. If the child comes from a culture with significantly different food, it's important to find out from the parents what are the child's comfort foods. Like with all children, interview the parents to find out the child's personality traits. The provider should also learn some key phrases in his language, such as "food" and "bathroom."

While gestures can provide a way for kids to communicate without words, kids still need exposure to language to be able to develop their skills. A provider can do so by playing games in multiple languages. For example, you could play "Simon Says" in both Spanish and English. This way, a Spanish-speaking child can feel welcome and the child won't be separate from the rest of the group.

Besides teaming a child up with other students who speak his language, make sure to have books in that child's language. Reading is important, so have the other children exposed to his language too. You should encourage all the children to learn phrases in his language, so it doesn't seem as foreign to them.

If you are only taking care of one child, you can still expose a child to different cultures through stories. Common childhood stories often have versions written in other cultures. Familiar songs like "Itsy Bitsy Spider" in a different language are also a good way to promote exposure to other cultures too.

Try to use little bits of a new language and connect those words to actions, like with the game, "Simon Says." The reality is that children live in a multicultural world, so you should expose them by sharing language, culture and food.

Child Care provider Comments



Sonia Corzo

Child care provider for 6 years, mother of four

Once I cared for a child who spoke a specific tribal dialect. It was challenging to communicate with her because it was neither Spanish nor English. We used signs a lot, but eventually the little girl started picking up Spanish and English. Her mother was only fluent in her dialect so I encouraged the little girl to use her native language.

She ended up speaking English and Spanish with me, and then talking in the dialect with her mom. I encouraged her mother to bring foods from her country, so she brought Guatemalan food; it was a great way for her daughter to share her culture with the other children.



Clarissa August

Family child care provider for 21 years

When I was a teacher at a daycare center, there was a family with 2 children who spoke an African language. The kids were 2 and 4 and only spoke this language at home. When they came to school, we had to integrate them into the English-speaking environment.

They were really scared when they first started. Their mother said they knew English, but they wouldn't use it when they were playing with the other kids. But after about 6 months they started using English words and began speaking to the other kids and calling them by their names.



Karolina Ramirez

Child care provider for 6 years

We have books and activities in Spanish. Sometimes we'll even watch "Dora The Explorer" and we'll repeat what she says. Other times we do activities outside and we'll speak Spanish only. In circle time our kids tell us about their weekends in their native language, and if the other kids don't understand what is being said, we translate it for them. We also help our kids embrace different languages with food.

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