



Baden-Württemberg  
Forum Frühkindliche  
Bildung (FFB)



Growing up

with multiple

languages





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Many children in Germany grow up speaking several languages. Childhood multilingualism is therefore a part of everyday life for many families. **Many parents ask themselves how they can support their child so that their multilingualism can develop as a potential and a resource for the child's future.** This applies both to becoming competent in German as well as in the family language, i.e. the language spoken at home.

**This booklet provides information on the most important issues for your child in growing up speaking two or more languages.** It is aimed at parents, guardians and family members who are helping children to grow up speaking multiple languages.



I don't speak the standard language of my country of origin. Can I speak our dialect with my child?



My favourite language is nonsense language!

# Multilingualism

is a **resource**



We live in a linguistically mixed family where we speak many languages at the same time. Is that too much for a child?

I can speak four languages – how about you?





**Multilingualism does not place excessive demands on children.**

**How children learn multiple languages:**

- Multilingual children generally learn languages in a similar way to children who are monolingual.
- All children use the same language learning principles to learn one or several languages.
- It is important to talk with children often.
- Children growing up multilingually should have a variety of opportunities to hear and actively use all the languages in their everyday lives.

**The multilingual child...**

- is able to learn new languages more easily later on and finds it easier to understand how languages are structured.
- has good communication skills and can express themselves well.
- is flexible in his/her thinking and is able to switch between different tasks. The child needs this in order to learn several languages, but also in many other situations.

**Speaking the family language is not an obstacle to learning German!**

## Multilingualism is a resource

**You are the linguistic role model for your child.**

Even if your child is not yet speaking, he/she can hear the language and absorb a lot of information.

**Enjoy your own multilingualism.**

**You also share your culture, traditions and values through your family language.**

Family stories are often spread and passed on via family languages.

**One person, one place, one time, one topic – one language.**

As far as possible, introduce clear rules for language use within the family.

For example, this may mean that you prefer to speak one language when eating meals together.



My child mixes the languages. Is that a problem?

# Characteristics of multilingualism



I speak Romanian with my dad, Bulgarian with my mum and Swabian German at nursery.



We live in a large family with many different languages. How many languages can a child cope with at the same time?



### Code-switching

Multilingual children may mix their languages – this is called **code-switching**. For example, they may use words from the family language when they speak German.

**When children mix languages, it shows that they are actively learning and trying things out.** Sometimes, they use words and even grammar from another language. This makes communication easier for them.

### Grammatical errors

Multilingual children may make grammatical **errors**, especially when they are beginning to learn German. This can also happen when the children are older. It depends on when the child started learning German. The errors can also occur with the family language.

Difficulties with grammar are a sign of active learning. **These errors are part of a natural learning process and are temporary.**



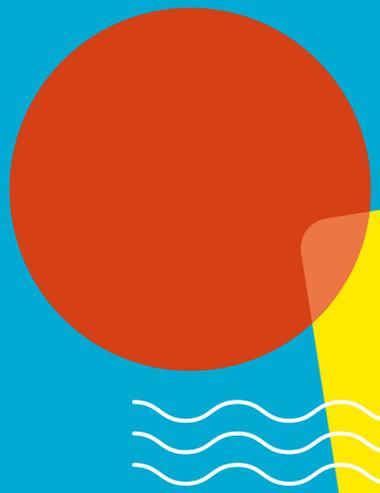
## Handling multilingualism

**If possible, use one language at a time when talking to your child.**

**Motivate your child to learn and speak German.**

**Make opportunities for your child to come into contact with the German environment.** In this way, he/she will have multiple language role models and conversation partners in German.

**Do not correct your child directly,** but listen and talk to him/her. Be patient if your child makes errors. Don't say: "That's wrong". Instead, it's better to repeat the child's sentence correctly.



My child can't talk!

My child doesn't pronounce words correctly!

My child has a stutter!

Is the multilingualism to blame?

# Language development disorders and multilingualism



Mixing languages together is fun!



Multilingualism is not the cause of language development disorders.

The percentage of multilingual children affected by language development disorders is **roughly the same** as for monolingual children (approx. 7%).

Language development disorders can have different causes. **Multilingualism is not responsible for a language development disorder.**

Speech development disorder or speech impairment?

Multilingual children tend to have a smaller vocabulary in German, especially when they are beginning to learn it. They also make grammatical errors more frequently, for example in sentence structure. **This indicates a need for language support in learning German, not a language development disorder.**



## Language development disorders and multilingualism

If your child has language problems over a period of time in all of the languages they speak, you can contact:

- a teacher or educational professional at nursery or at school
- the child's doctor or paediatrician
- a speech therapist.

They can give you professional advice and support.

I speak a secret language with my mother, our second language.



It is important to me that my child can talk to family members from my home country!



Our children speak German with each other. I would like them to speak our family language.

I can't speak German with my grandparents.



# Family languages are important



Family languages are important

The family language is important for learning German and a good foundation for all other languages. **Children use their linguistic knowledge from the family language when learning German.**

Emotional stability

The family language strengthens a child's emotional stability and **cultural identity**. It helps them to express feelings and emotions.

Language separation

Family members often speak many languages. Language separation can be achieved by, for example, using the rule '**One person, one place, one time, one topic – one language**'. This helps children to separate and actively use several languages.



## Family languages are important



**Continue to speak to your child in your family language, even if your child is learning German at nursery or at school.**

Talk to your child a lot and regularly in your family language!

**Play with your child!** You can use the language to accompany your actions and those of your child. This will help your child to learn your family language.

**Read aloud to your child regularly.** Use books in the family language and in German for this. The wording and sentence structures in books are usually varied and challenging. This helps children to understand content at school and to express themselves well.

**Tell your child stories in the family language.** This can have a major influence on your child's language development.



## Family languages are important

### Appreciate family languages

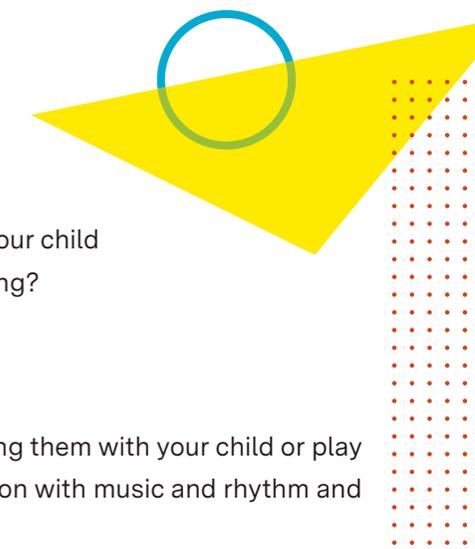
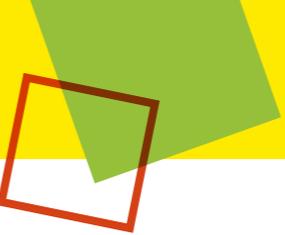
Language is more than just words! The family language is often the language of the heart. How do you as parents talk to each other and to your children? Which other people in your family are important to you and which languages do they speak?

### Strengthen family languages

Find out whether there are play afternoons or Saturday language schools for learning your family language in your area. With these, your child can get to know other children who speak the same family language.

### Make family languages visible

Bring your language, culture, literature, national cuisine and lots more into your child's daily life! These are an important part of your child's identity and should not be restricted just to the family home.



### Have conversations

Talk to your child a lot and listen to your child. What is your child interested in at the moment? What is he/she experiencing? What is your child moved by at the moment?

### Songs and rhymes

Did you listen to songs and rhymes or play finger games when you were a child? Sing them with your child or play fun rhyming games. Your child will enjoy having fun with the language in combination with music and rhythm and can expand his/her vocabulary.

### Language role models in the family

Be a good language role model for your child! In this way, your child will gain lots of experience in everyday communication – in conversations, storytelling, arguing, reasoning and persuading. Cultivate the languages you speak and have fun with them!

How can I help my child to do well at school?



I don't want my child to speak German with me! What should I do?



I have many friends because I can speak many languages.

# Have fun learning German



I want to be part of it!



**Early contact with the German language**

The age of the child plays an important part in language learning. Children can learn multiple languages more easily and more quickly at an early age. **The earlier children come into contact with languages, the better!**

**Motivation to learn German**

Learning and speaking languages should be fun! Motivation plays an important part. If the child experiences the language being useful in everyday life, **then he/she will want to learn and speak it!**

**Time to learn German**

In order to learn languages, children need **people** to talk with them, **time** to engage with the language, and a variety of **opportunities** to use it.

Multilingual children learn German in a very similar way to monolingual children. If you start later with it, they may need a little longer to speak both languages.

**Multilingual children usually reach the same language level as monolingual children.** Individual factors can speed up or slow down the learning process.

## Have fun learning German

**Make sure your child comes into regular contact with German.**

In order to learn German well, children need a variety of opportunities to hear the language regularly and to speak it themselves, e.g. by attending playgroups, sport or dance activities, or painting or craft sessions.

**Attending a nursery is very important for your child, both linguistically and socially!**

Here, your child will come into contact with adults and children who speak German. Educational specialists can give professional support for your child's development.

**Show your appreciation for the German language!** If you as parents speak positively about the German language, your child will be motivated to learn this language.

**Be a role model for your child!**

Learn German yourself and use German more in your everyday life.



## Have fun learning German

### **Be patient and encouraging**

when your child is learning German. Praise your child for their individual learning achievements!

**Ensure that your child hears and speaks both the family language and German regularly from an early age.**

### **Don't put pressure on your child**

if he/she doesn't want to speak your family language.



### **Speak to your child in your language.**

The best way to support your child is to mainly use the language in which you feel most confident, linguistically and emotionally.

### **Speaking multiple languages is great!**

Show your child how useful it is to speak both German and your family language. Being able to speak many languages is a valuable resource for life, school and, later, for work!



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## Forum Frühkindliche Bildung Baden-Württemberg

Königstraße 14 · 70173 Stuttgart

poststelle@ffb.kv.bwl.de · [www.ffb-bw.de](http://www.ffb-bw.de)

