

ENCOURAGING PARENTS TO USE THE CHILD'S HOME LANGUAGE



While children are learning English in your Care for Newcomer Children program, it's important that you encourage parents to continue using the child's native language at home. There are many benefits to doing so, which include improved fluency in both the native language and in English, strengthened family bonds and more.

HERE ARE 5 REASONS TO ENCOURAGE FAMILIES TO USE THEIR NATIVE LANGUAGE WITH THEIR CHILDREN AT HOME:

- 1. The child's and parents' first language carries the personal, family and cultural history that is familiar to the parent and child (i.e., games, stories, songs).** The new language may not be familiar enough to the family to communicate these, and the child may miss out on the richness of this history.
- 2. The parents are completely fluent in their native language, and they will naturally gradually increase the complexity of the language they use with their child as they mature.** This is very important for the child's language development because rhythm, speech patterning, word order, etc. are learned as the child matures. For language to develop fully, this natural acceleration is critical. If parents are using a language they are less fluent in, this full acceleration doesn't occur.
- 3. If the parents' skills in the second language are limited or they make many errors, the child (who learns by imitation) will pattern their speech after the parents' including errors in rhythm, language use, accent, etc.** Although the accent will disappear over time, if the child is eight years old or younger, their fluency may be limited. Correcting these errors will be harder to do than if the child had started to learn the new language from fluent speakers. These errors may cause problems in all the language areas including writing, spelling, speaking, reading, composing, etc. since these skills depend on the child's ability to hear the complete sentence rhythm.

ENCOURAGING PARENTS TO USE THE CHILD'S HOME LANGUAGE

CARE FOR
NEWCOMER
CHILDREN
RESOURCE
SERIES

- 4. The first language carries a stronger, more personal and better communicated message than a second language.** Bonding through language is the cornerstone of family relationships. If the parent has limited use of a second language and uses mainly this language with the child, their bonding through language will be much weaker emotionally. Language use becomes reduced and more cursory. For example, "Pick up your toys" (command) vs. "What a lovely house. Can you put it away now so that we can have supper?" (interactive). Interactive language fosters deeper emotional ties. It also facilitates joking, makes for more natural conversations and improves non-verbal communicative gestures (i.e., touch, animation, facial gestures, etc.). Emotions are much harder to express in a foreign language. In many cases losing the use of the home language may also hinder the child's emotional bond to extended family members (e.g., grandparents) and their role in child rearing may be greatly altered and diminished.
- 5. Parents will unconsciously find it more of an effort to communicate with a child in a foreign language and so the parent will begin to speak less.** This not only affects the child's language development, but also the ability of the child and parent to share concerns, feelings and work cooperatively for solutions.

Adapted from: Julie Dotsch, *One World*

Visit cmascanada.ca for more resources to support your work with newcomer families



SUPPORTING THE SETTLEMENT OF YOUNG IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE CHILDREN / SOUTENIR L'ÉTABLISSEMENT DES JEUNES ENFANTS IMMIGRANTS ET RÉFUGIÉS
Funded by: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada / Financé par : Immigration, Réfugiés et Citoyenneté Canada