**English as an Additional Language (EAL)**

# **The Unique Child**

More and more children in our Early Years Settings are learning English as an Additional Language (EAL).

* Some will be bi-lingual from birth, because their parents use both languages
* Some will speak some English at times, but are not fluent
* Some will speak conversational English, but are not able to express more complex thoughts
* Some will be at a much earlier stage of learning English

A child may have been born in England, yet have had very little exposure to English.

Remember:

* All children are entitled to equal access to the curriculum – providers must promote equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice
* Partnership with parents/carers is vitally important to a child’s progress
* Bilingualism is an asset, and an opportunity for everyone to celebrate

## **Effective Practice**

Meeting the Family

If possible meet the family before the child begins pre- school.

Find out whether you need an interpreter with you. The family may have a friend who can help.

During the meeting, find out how to pronounce the child’s name, and what languages the child speaks. Ask which language the child is strongest in. Use lots of gesture if you need to.

Ask about the child’s religion, customs and diet, and explain that you will respect these. Ask about celebrations the family might observe, and whether they would like the setting to share the celebrations.

Find out about the child’s experiences, siblings, likes, dislikes, worries and difficulties.

Make sure that parents/carers know the times and days their child will be attending, and discuss fees and grants.

Explain what drinks and snacks will be provided, and what the child will need to bring, eg for lunch. If you need to, use props to help you explain the lunchbox, suitable shoes for outdoor play, book bag, PE kit etc

Explain the activities the child will be involved in. Use a picture book to help

Discuss bringing a coat for outdoor play.

Encourage the family to share stories and other books at home, to join the library, use the park, swimming pool etc.

Explain how valuable it is to keep speaking the home language. Explain that research shows that a child will learn English better if they go on developing the language they know best, and have a strong foundation in this language.

Ask the family if they have any questions or worries.

Explain that they can talk to you (or the child’s key worker) about anything concerning their child.

Let them know that you welcome and celebrate the different languages and cultures in your setting, and that all the staff will help your child have a happy experience.

# **Positive Relationships**

## Effective Practice:

Make sure that parents/carers feel welcome, even if they can’t speak any English yet. Let them know they are welcome to talk to you about anything, including worries.

Let them know that racism is not tolerated, and will always be dealt with sensitively.

If you are sending a note home to all families, speak to the parents as well, to check they understand.

Make reports clear and jargon-free, and give parents the chance to talk about them for more clarity.

Continue to reassure parents that using their strongest language at home is beneficial to general learning and English learning

# **Enabling Environments**

## Effective Practice:

The good pre-school setting is an excellent place for a young EAL learner, and will already, for example:

* Make sure that all staff have read and understood your policies on anti-racism and inclusion/equalities.
* Use resources and displays around the setting to reflect the cultural diversity and experiences of the children and beyond.
* Use signs or other visuals around the setting to help the child navigate, and know where to find things.
* Have a “Welcome” sign in many languages, including those languages spoken in the setting.

provide plenty of opportunities for outdoor play (research has shown that this leads to 5 times more utterances, and so is particularly beneficial to language development

# **Learning and Development**

Effective Practice:

Some children need to go through a “silent period” before they feel ready to talk. This can last for weeks, or even months. Let them listen and observe, look for signs that they are ready to join in, and praise every attempt to join in, however small. Check body language for signs of distress. Remember that personality plays a great part in language development.

Use lots of positive expressions and gestures. Try repetition, or, if that doesn’t help, vary the way you explain. Continue to include the child in talk, even if they are silent themselves.

As with any child, observing their actions and interactions will help you plan the next steps in learning.

Use lots of visual support, pictures and objects to help show what you are talking about, eg puppets, role play items, dolls, story props…

Use stories with clear illustrations and repeated language patterns. Let the child take the book home to look at again – if it is a dual language copy, they can hear the story read in their home language, and make links between languages.

Provide opportunities for all the children to hear and participate in music from other cultures, and see scripts, taste foods etc.

Model lots of talking as you play alongside the child: “I’m putting the hat on.” “Here are the scissors” etc.

Closed questions - “What’s this colour?” etc – may be helpful at first, but do not get stuck on them – once a child is ready to join in, you can gradually move to more open questions – “Why is he happy?” etc. This will help extend the language development.