

# 12

Points

for Supporting  
Our Children in Learning  
How to Talk.

0 – 6 years

## Talk to Me and Listen to Me

Englisch → Deutsch

A Brochure for Parents with Children



**Dear Parents,**

The kindergarten is a meeting place where your child and you as a family can grow into a community. For many children, it is the first educational institution where they can curiously explore the world outside their families, play and learn together.

Being able to express themselves, to understand and to be understood is of central importance for children in their daily interaction and for their overall development – both in their family and in kindergarten.

You as parents have an important role in the language acquisition of your child! In the first years of life, parents, together with siblings, are the most important language role models for their child. When playing and talking to each other every day, structures and networks build up in the brain which are essential for language acquisition and later learning at school.

This brochure "Talk to me and listen to me" supplements scientific findings on the acquisition of one or more languages with practical tips and recommendations for everyday life. The brochure shows you ways in which you can give your child good support in language acquisition in the first years of his or her life.

Parents of multilingual children will also find plenty of useful information on how children can acquire more than one language.

Have fun playing and talking with your child!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christiane Teschl-Hofmeister".

Did you know that

**... you can even support your child's speech and language development during pregnancy?**



**"Hello, you can't see me, but I can hear you!"**

**Suggestion 1**

Simple everyday things **you can do for your child**

**You can start to tell your child about the world you live in as early as the first months of pregnancy.**  
Tell your child about the things that concern you.

Read the following **to help you decide**  
which language or languages to speak at home with your child:

**Talk to your child in the language that you feel most comfortable with and that you speak best.** When you do this, you will be providing your child with the largest vocabulary possible. And you will also be laying the foundation for all the other languages that your child will learn in his/her life.

It can also be of **great advantage** for your child if you and your husband/partner speak different languages. Each of you can then interact with your child in the language that you speak best. This means that your child will grow up imitating good speech patterns in two languages.

**In addition to the language that you decide to speak at home, it is very important that your child also learns German – the language of the country where he/she lives. It is essential for your child to have a good command of German if he/she is going to feel at home here, make new friends and receive a good education. Your child can still learn to speak German well, even if you speak a different language with him/her at home.**

**What the experts say:**

A child is already aware of voices, **particularly that of his/her mother**, after the fourth month of pregnancy.

A child learns to recognize the **melody of his/her native language** even before he/she is born. A baby in the womb is also influenced by music, sounds and noises.

**Parents are their child's chief role models for language during his/her first years of life.** It is therefore important during pregnancy that parents think about which language or languages they want to speak with their child.

Did you know that

**... your child learns most when you speak with him/her the language you know best?**



**“Mummy’s language is okay! – Daddy’s language is okay!”**

**Suggestion 2**

Simple everyday things **you can do for your child**.

**Speak the language or the dialect that you know best with your child.**

**Talk with your child as much as possible** and give him/her lots of opportunity and time to talk himself/herself.

Tell your child things about who you are and where you come from **by telling stories, singing songs and playing children’s games from your home country**. That is important because children need roots to grow and develop.

Find new and positive ways for your child to learn other languages. Set a good example for your child. **If you have a positive attitude towards languages and language learning, towards keeping up your own language and German, that attitude will rub off on your child.**

**What the experts say:**

**Good emotional ties provide an important basis** for a child’s general development as well as for his/her speech and language development. Children immediately notice if their parents are talking to them in a language they feel comfortable with and are confident about speaking.

The better parents can speak the language they want to pass on to their child, the better that is for their child’s speech and language development.

**Having a good command of your native language is the best prerequisite for learning other languages.** Every language contains knowledge about the world that you also pass on to your child.

Did you know that

... self-confidence is the best prerequisite for your child's speech and language development?



**"I am lovable the way I am."**

Suggestion 3

Simple everyday things **you can do for your child**.

**You will have lots of opportunities throughout the day to talk with your child** and to engage him/her in conversation. You can and should start doing that the very day your child is born.

**Tell your child what you are doing with him/her at that very moment.** React to the sounds and noises he/she is making and show him/her that you enjoy listening to them.

Don't put off promises indefinitely.  
That will make your child feel insecure.  
**Keep the promises you make to your child.**

**Listen to your child**, talk with and praise him/her. Let your child tell you about his/her experiences. Always let your child finish his/her stories and never interrupt them.

**What the experts say:**

**A child** particularly **needs the love and affection of his/her parent/s** in order to develop and to learn how to talk. A child has to feel loved and accepted if he/she is to grow in self-confidence. This energy is the key to every child's development.

**A child needs to feel secure and wanted.** If you don't have time to listen to your child at any one moment, tell him/her why and let him/her know when you will have time. Children need to know the reasons why things are the way they are or why something is not possible.

Did you know that

**... your child can easily cope with speaking two or more languages when growing up?**



**"There is room in my head for two or even more languages."**

**Suggestion 4**

Simple everyday things **you can do for your child.**

**What should you do**, if you are raising your child in your native language, for example, English, Turkish, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Kurdish, Russian, Spanish etc., and the language spoken outside the home is German?

**Talk to your child in your own language as much as possible.** Get to know families in your neighbourhood who speak German. Help your child to make German-speaking friends. Arrange for your child to join a Spielgruppe (playgroup) or a Kindergarten (kindergarten). That will help him/her to grow and develop. **The sooner he/she has contact with German-speaking children, the faster and easier he/she will learn German.**

**If each parent speaks a different language very well**, children have the opportunity to learn two languages. Make sure that you have clear rules if you and your partner speak different languages. This is particularly important for very young children. **Each of you should talk to your child in your own language.** In that way, your child learns to associate a specific person with a specific language. And that will help him/her to sort out the languages in his/her head.

The choice of language can also be determined by the situation: one language may be used in everyday communication while the other is spoken at dinner, doing homework or for telling bedtime stories. This approach is called creating "**language islands.**"

Regardless of whether your child grows up speaking one, two or three languages, **it is paramount to be a good and patient listener, and to praise your child.**

**What the experts say:**

**It is not a problem for children to grow up speaking two or more languages.** Millions of children live in countries where lots of languages are spoken in everyday situations. Speaking more than one language won't harm your child.

Multilingual children **develop like monolingual children**, that is, at their own pace. Some start talking early, others later; some talk a lot, and others less.

**The way children learn languages is full of dynamism.** Children are always in the process of learning new things and integrating what they already know. Mixing up languages is just part of that process.

You should only start to be concerned and **consult your doctor (G.P.)** or another professional **if your child's speech has not developed for some time** or he/she stops talking altogether.

Children growing up speaking more than one language **need specific support in all languages.** Parents can do a lot of different things to ensure that their children become good learners.

Did you know that

**... only children who can hear well also learn to speak well? And did you know that if you talk to babies in a higher pitch they respond faster?**



**"Talk to me and listen to me!"**

**Suggestion 5**

Simple everyday things **you can do for your child**.

**Observe your child**, particularly after the sixth month. Does he/she react to sounds? Does he/she turn his/her head when you call his/her name?

Musical clocks and rattles are especially suited for **attracting your baby's attention**.

**Talk to your baby as often and as much as possible.** In that way, you will also be able to notice if he/she can hear well.

Imitate the sounds and coos of your baby. You should be talking to your young baby from the moment he/she is born and **telling him/her what you are doing with him/her at that very moment**. Children of all ages love songs and nursery rhymes.

Don't forget to take your baby or toddler for a check-up, **particularly after an ear infection**: you can go to the Elternberatung (parent counselling in your municipality) or to your doctor (G.P.).

**What the experts say:**

**Good hearing is a prerequisite for being able to speak well.** After six months a healthy baby should be making more and more noises, imitating sounds, talking with himself/herself. If that is not the case, you should have your baby's hearing tested again.

**Hearing-impaired babies** also make sounds in the first months of life, **but they then become increasingly quieter**.

**Talking to babies in a higher pitch** increases their attention span. That's how you can get a baby to smile early on.

Did you know that

**... all the senses are used for learning to talk?  
Touch, sight, experience, grasping things  
etc. are as important as hearing.**



**"I can do it myself!"**

**Suggestion 6**

Simple everyday things **you can do for your child.**

**Hold your baby in your arms as often as possible** and let your child feel positive about being touched by you.

**Let your child play with different objects**, touch, hold and let go of them. Give him/her something to chew on. Let your baby experience as many things as possible by himself/herself.

When your child is older, **let him/her try out as many activities as possible**: at home, crawling/running on the playground or in the garden, playing with sand and water, shouting and singing, helping you with the cooking, setting the table, digging up soil and planting things in the garden. **That way he/she will become independent at an early age, which will help him/her at school too.**

**What the experts say:**

**Hearing, seeing, touching, moving, grasping, experiencing movement, sensing gravity** and lots more things help your baby to experience and understand the world. This is how babies develop their emotional, intellectual and social skills and even their command of language.

Your baby will understand what the words "smooth" and "rough" mean when he/she is allowed to grasp things. Being allowed to taste foods will help him/her to comprehend the words "sweet" and "sour." He/she will figure out what corners and edges are when he/she is allowed to crawl. **Babies develop an understanding of the abstract concepts behind words by exploring the world around them.**

Did you know that

**... there is a connection between movement, play, healthy nutrition, caries-free and healthy teeth, and your child's speech and language development?**



**"I can do more things than you imagine."**

**Suggestion 7**

Let your child balance on a low wall, eat with his/her fingers, drink out of a straw, blow cotton wool balls etc.

**Take your child to the playground and into the countryside as often as you can. Build or make things with your child and let him/her play with scissors.**

Children cannot hurt themselves if an adult is present. They learn precise movements and are able to develop their imagination.

Your child **should not drink sugary drinks.**

Please don't get him/her started on them.

Make sure that your child's teeth are correctly aligned. **You should not let your child use a dummy after his/her third birthday.**

**Healthy food** and something to chew on are also **important**.

Simple everyday things **you can do for your child.**

**What the experts say:**

Children need to have lots of experience playing and moving. **Providing children with many opportunities to move and play helps them to learn how to speak well.** You should allow your child to jump, hop, walk, run, dance etc. Language and movement go hand in hand.

**Mouth and tongue movements become more precise** when children's movements, especially their fine motor skills, become more refined through play.

Correct tooth alignment is important for a child to be able to learn how to speak correctly. **Good, intelligible pronunciation is part of speaking a language well.**

Did you know that

**... talking and playing with your child on a daily basis can help him/her to make enormous progress in learning how to speak?**



**“Are you going to play with me?”**

**Suggestion 8**

Simple everyday things **you can do for your child**.

**Talk and play with your child on his/her level.**  
Talk directly to your child – **at least fifteen minutes per day.**

**Talk also to your child when he/she is doing everyday activities**, e.g. taking off his/her shoes and coat, putting on slippers, drinking a cup of tea, being put to bed etc. Instructions and orders are not enough.

**Use varied language structures and expressions.**  
In that way, your child will increase his/her vocabulary (For example, use different words to express the same content: beautiful, pretty, nice etc.).

**Nursery rhymes and songs are a great source for children of all ages to develop speech and language.**  
If you can no longer remember the songs and nursery rhymes told to you as a child, ask your parents or older family members, or look them up in books. Alternatively, you can make up your own nursery rhymes and stories.

**What the experts say:**

**The more you interact, speak and play with your child, the more structures and networks that are established by his/her brain.** These structures and networks are important for your child's speech and language development and when he/she goes to school.

Listening to and actively using a language or languages on a regular basis helps your child to discover the rules of that language/those languages. **Your child can learn words, explore the grammar of those languages and communicate correctly with others.** Your child needs lots of input and should not only be listening a lot but also talking a lot.

Did you know that

**... you should not constantly correct a child and require him/her to repeat the correct word or phrase?**



**"Just let me talk!"**

**Suggestion 9**

Simple everyday things **you can do for your child.**

**Whenever your child says a sentence or a word incorrectly, repeat it matter-of-factly in the correct form.** Do not force your child to repeat the correct word or phrase.

**Do not get upset** if your child does not immediately use a new word.

Be patient. Talk with your child in your native language even if he/she answers you in another.

**When a child is bilingual, he/she may refuse to actively use one language, even for a longer period of time.**

When your child is going through such a phase, do not put pressure on him/her. **Give your child as many opportunities as possible to actively use both languages.** That is the best thing to do.

**What the experts say:**

**Corrections take all the fun out of talking. The more effective technique is corrective repetition.**

Children do not always show what they can do. They often understand a lot more and talk a lot less.

**Children need time to grow.**

**When children grow up speaking two languages, one language may be more developed and the other less developed. That may change in the course of time** and depends on what is important in a certain phase of the child's life and the experiences he/she associates with a particular language. For example, bilingual children might lose interest in their native language the moment they start attending a German-speaking Kindergarten (kindergarten) and German-speaking friends become important for them.

Did you know that

**... reading aloud and discussing stories are very important ways of supporting your child's speech and language development and of preparing him/her to start school?**



**"Will you continue reading the story to me today?"**

**Suggestion 10**

Simple everyday things **you can do for your child.**

**Read picture books and story-books aloud; read a little every day** in the language or languages that you speak at home with your child.

**You can borrow picture books and story-books in various languages from numerous libraries in Lower Austria.** Ask at the library where you live whether they have books in your native language.

All children love rituals. So does your child. **Bedtime stories are such a ritual.** Children love to hear the same stories over and over again until they have understood everything completely and can repeat the story themselves. Help your child to retell stories by, for example, asking interesting questions.

Even if your German is not perfect, you can still probably **read German picture books aloud to your child.**

**Grandparents and other people the child knows and trusts** can also be good listeners and story-tellers.

**What the experts say:**

**Research shows** that reading aloud to children in the very first years of their life has a beneficial effect on children's speech and language development.

**Reading aloud and telling stories expand a child's vocabulary. They also create a good foundation for reading and writing.** Written language differs from spoken language. When you read aloud to your child, he/she is also listening to and learning the written language.

**Children who listen to and retell stories learn** a lot of things that will later help them in school. For example, they learn **to listen, to concentrate, to remember events, new words, new sentence patterns etc.**

Did you know that

**... children learn best when playing or doing things with others and not when sitting in front of the TV or the computer?**



**"TV? No, thanks!  
It's much more fun  
playing with Mummy/  
with Daddy...!"**

**Suggestion 11**

Simple everyday things **you can do for your child.**

Let your child participate in your life. Give him/her opportunities to literally grasp new words with his/her hands. **Such activities as letting your child help you cook and bake, play with water, sand and stones or plasticine** are much better suited to support your child's development than TV.

If you let your child watch TV, **you should decide what he/she may watch and discuss the programme or film with him/her.** In that way, your child will better understand what he/she is watching and will also learn new words.

**You can borrow lots of good games from libraries.**  
You can easily provide your child with a variety of stimulating things to do without spending a fortune.

**What the experts say:**

As well as hearing and listening to sounds children need to understand speech and the meaning of what is being said to them in order to learn languages: **they have to "grasp" what they see and hear.**

**A child only learns how to speak well when he/she has direct contact** with other people: with his/her mother and/or father, brothers and sisters, with extended family members and later with friends.

We recommend watching good children's films with your child. **Watching TV for hours on end or playing computer games is harmful.** Children do not learn much from them.

Did you know that

**... children can learn to speak very good German if they have a German-speaking friend from an early age or attend a Spielgruppe (playgroup) or Kindergarten (kindergarten)?**



**"I also want to be with other children."**

**Suggestion 12**

Simple everyday things **you can do for your child**.

Support your child **whenever he/she wants to visit friends or invite them home**. Children usually learn the languages that are important for everyday interaction very quickly.

**Enrol your child in a Spielgruppe (playgroup) or Kindergarten (kindergarten) as soon as he/she is 30-36 months old.** Children are usually mature enough at that age and love to make new friends and join in games and activities with other children.

**Your child can also be taken care of by a child-care service when he/she is younger** if you work or think that your child will benefit educationally.

If you speak another language at home other than German, you can use games to **prepare your child for speaking German as a new language at the Spielgruppe (playgroup) or Kindergarten (kindergarten)**. Talk to him/her about that, make him/her curious, **teach him/her new words that he/she will need in his/her new surroundings**.

**Tell your child what a great thing it is for him/her to be able to speak several languages.**

**What the experts say:**

**A good command of German is important for your child: for his/her life in Austria, his/her well-being at school and for his/her future career.**

In order to learn German your child needs lots of encouragement and **many different opportunities to hear and speak the language**. Friends who speak good German are an excellent source of motivation.

**Regular attendance at a Spielgruppe (playgroup) or a Kindergarten (kindergarten) after his/her third birthday gives your child the time to consolidate his/her command of German before starting school** as well as to prepare for the challenges ahead. Even if the language you speak at home is not German, your child can still learn to speak German very well if he/she makes use of every opportunity to practice the language.

Did you know that

**... the topic of language development plays an important role in Lower Austrian regional kindergartens?**

**What else you need to know.**



**In regional kindergartens in Lower Austria all children are supported in their language acquisition through varied, comprehensive programs: for example, by being read aloud to, looking at picture books, inventing stories, philosophizing, role-playing, community games, making portfolio contributions or talking to the children.**

**Children who need more support in their language development are additionally supported individually by the entire team within the group together with special kindergarten teachers and/or intercultural staff.**

**Intercultural employees** support multilingual children in their overall development and ensure an appreciative, intercultural environment in the group.

They complement the educational program for all children with playful intercultural and multilingual activities, and they contribute to the mutual understanding between parents and the kindergarten teams by providing language and intercultural guidance.

**Special needs kindergarten teachers** accompany children who need more support in their development – for example in their language development. They encourage all children to play and learn together in an atmosphere of mutual appreciation.

They advise the kindergarten team on questions concerning the assessment of the language level, the accompaniment of children with increased language development needs as well as in talks with parents.

**Portfolio** In Lower Austrian regional kindergartens a portfolio-folder is created with each child, in which the developmental steps of the child are documented.

You, as parents, also have the option of adding family contributions to the portfolio: for example, a photo of the family, holiday pictures or drawings. Looking at and sharing your child's portfolio together is fun, strengthens the relationship with your child and is highly conducive to language development.

Do you know which

## ... services are available for counselling and support of parents in Lower Austria?

What else you need to know.



### The service pages of the Kindergarten Department

of the Office of the Lower Austrian Regional Government offer a wealth of information, brochures and documents on the subject of kindergartens in Lower Austria:  
[noe.gv.at/kindergarten](http://noe.gv.at/kindergarten)

For example the brochures: „My child is attending kindergarten“ and „From kindergarten to school“ (in several languages), a list of recommended multilingual children's books and much more.

**Libraries in Lower Austria** offer a wide range of children's literature for lending. You can find libraries in your area under the following link: [loslesen.at](http://loslesen.at)

Digital media such as e-books, e-audios and e-videos can be borrowed at [noe-book.at](http://noe-book.at)

“**Zeit Punkt Lesen**” is an initiative of the state of Lower Austria to convey a colorful and lively reading culture. Reading tips, craft ideas and information about current events and projects can be found at [zeitpunktlesen.at](http://zeitpunktlesen.at)

**The Federal Office for the Positive Predication of Digital Games (BuPP)** offers guidance in the selection of apps and computer games for parents and educational staff: [bupp.at](http://bupp.at)

**Tips for safe, child-friendly use** of the Internet and digital devices: [saferinternet.at](http://saferinternet.at)

**Internet search engines for children** refer exclusively to content specially selected for children and use language suitable for children. The contents can be accessed for specific age groups. For example:

[blinde-kuh.de](http://blinde-kuh.de)  
[helles-köpfchen.de](http://helles-köpfchen.de)  
[fragfinn.de](http://fragfinn.de)

For parents seeking advice and support for children who show developmental slowness or irregularities, Lower Austria has **facilities for medical, social and psychological help for children and their families**:  
[noe.gv.at/fruehfoerderstellen](http://noe.gv.at/fruehfoerderstellen)

The professional association **logopädieaustria** offers help in the search for a speech therapist in Lower Austria:  
[www.logopaedieaustria.at/therapeutensuche](http://www.logopaedieaustria.at/therapeutensuche)

**Bilingual picture book guide** for children over five years:  
[papperlapapp.co.at](http://papperlapapp.co.at)

**HÖR ZU, BAKABU. Children's songs for early language development**: [bakabu.at](http://bakabu.at)

## Imprint



Editor and media owner:  
Federal State of Lower Austria, represented by  
the Office of the Lower Austrian Government,  
Department of Schools and Kindergartens,  
Landhausplatz 1, 3109 St. Pölten

Basic content: Elisabeth Allgäuer-Hackl,  
Gerlinde Sammer, Elizabet Hintner

Text: Elisabeth Allgäuer-Hackl, Lidwina Boso  
Editor: Eva Grabherr

Translation and translation editing: Julia Warner

Photo credits: Lois Lammerhuber;  
Land Niederösterreich (page 2),  
Lennart Nilsson / TT (page 4)  
Graphic Design: Lois Lammerhuber, Martin Ackerl

The core contents of this brochure were developed within the framework of the programme *"more language. Early language development and multilingualism - a challenge for families and institutions of early education"* on behalf of the federal state of Vorarlberg. Information on the programme: [www.okay-line.at](http://www.okay-line.at).

Copyright of the original publisher:  
"okay.zusammen leben/Projektstelle für Zuwanderung und Integration (Verein Aktion Mitarbeit)

Adaptation and copyright for NÖ regional kindergartens:  
Office of the Lower Austrian Government,  
Department of Kindergartens, St. Pölten, 2026

Print: Office of the Lower Austrian State Government,  
Building Management Department, Official Printing Office.