



DVD „Schools in the county of Zurich – information for parents“

How can parents encourage the language development of their multi-lingual child?

Fact sheet for parents of children whose first language is not German

1. Speak the language that comes naturally to you and the one you speak best. This is probably your first language. (Don't assume children generally find it easier at school if parents whose first language isn't German, speak German with them).
2. When talking to your child, avoid mixing your first language with German. Use your first language even if your child answers you in German. Let your child choose which language to reply in though.
3. When each of parent speaks a different language, speak your own language with your child. It is important to have clear rules: „Mum speaks this language, dad speaks another one, and when we eat together, this is what we speak.“
4. Don't let crises get you off track. Your child may go through a phase of only speaking German even though they understand your first language. If you carry on in your language, your child will learn as a listener – and will speak this language again later.
5. Encourage your child's interest in their first language – tell them about your day, listen to them, look at picture books with them, say rhymes, sing, tell stories or read out loud.
6. Make plans so that your child needs to communicate in their first language, for example a holiday with relatives (but without parents) or a holiday camp.
7. A good understanding of German is really important for school. Make sure your child has lots of exposure to the German language from a young age: at the playground, in a playgroup with German-speaking children, in various clubs (for example sport, music)
8. As parents, be open to German and learn the language. You are role models for your children.
9. Encourage your child to watch films and read comics or books in their first language and in German. Make the most of what the school library and local libraries can offer.
10. Enrol your child in extra classes in their first language and culture (Heimatliche Sprache und Kultur – HSK) and encourage them to tell you what they have learned there.
11. Keep in touch with your child's class teacher and their HSK teacher on a regular basis.

Recommended reading:

Raffaele De Rosa and Claudio Nodari (2003): Mehrsprachige Kinder. Ein Ratgeber für Eltern und andere Bezugspersonen, Bern, Haupt Verlag.

(Multilingual children. A guide for parents and others)

For further information, go to: www.vsa.zh.ch/dvdeltern

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