



Speak the language of your heart

Our ability to talk is a miracle. Yet it is something every child can learn. How does your child learn a language? By repeating words and phrases. The more words your child hears, the faster they will learn to speak. So talk to your child whenever you can from the moment they are born. You can do this anytime. While caring for your child, at mealtimes, when you are playing together, or when you go for a walk.

Use the language that feels most natural to you. It will be easier to say exactly what you mean and what you feel. Speak the language of your heart. If you are fluent in several languages, use the one you want your child to learn.

If you speak more than one language in everyday life, you are multilingual. Being multilingual has many advantages. It gives you a better feel for language. It also makes you more flexible in your thinking and more empathic. Your child will learn several languages simultaneously without difficulty. This is much easier for children than adults.

At your local library you can find out more about early language development and raising your child to be multilingual. We also have wonderful (read aloud) books for children in various languages. Come visit us. We will be happy to help!



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The first language as a foundation

The language spoken at home will be your child's first language. This native language is the foundation for all future language learning. Your child will build other languages on top of this foundation, just like building a house. The stronger the foundation, the better. It will be your child's frame of reference when learning other languages.

How does this work? Your child learns what the word 'apple' means in their native language. They know that an apple is round and that it can be green or red and can taste sweet or sour. When learning another language, your child simply has to learn the new words for 'apple', 'green', 'red', 'sweet' and 'sour'. They already know what these words mean.

So keep talking with your child. Sing songs together. Read aloud to them. Tell them what you are doing. And use the language you know best. That way, you use a wider range of words and form longer sentences. This will help your child develop a stronger foundation.

When several languages are spoken in your home, it is fine to expose your child to all of them. Your child will listen to what is said around them and will learn to distinguish between languages without any problem.



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Languages around you

You almost certainly know people who speak more than one language at home. Friesland is a multilingual province, where Frisian and Dutch are spoken alongside Bildts and Stellingwerfs. People with a migrant background often speak a second or third language in addition to their first language.

What languages is your child exposed to? What languages do your family, neighbours and friends speak? What about the staff at the childcare centre, school or the babysitter? What languages are most important to you? And what language or languages do you want your child to learn? For example, by passing on your native language to your child you will make it easier for them to communicate with relatives. This often creates closer family ties.

Raising your child to be multilingual is not something you have to do alone. You can ask those around you to speak to your child in a particular language. Your child will quickly learn to switch from one language to another.



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The Frisian language

Frisian is the second official language in the Netherlands. Not all Dutch people speak Frisian, and it is considered a minority language. Most people in the Netherlands speak Dutch. As Dutch is the language spoken by the majority, it receives far more attention.

This makes it all the more important to establish a firm foundation for a minority language. Children need to hear Frisian often. The stronger a child's grasp of Frisian, the easier it will be to learn other languages. Frisian children will get plenty of exposure to Dutch outside the home, this is why they quickly become multilingual.



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A colorful illustration of a family of three. On the left is a woman with long blue hair, a yellow face, and a red hoop earring. On the right is a man with a yellow face, a blue baseball cap, and a mustache. In the center is a child with a yellow face, a red tuft of hair, and a red shirt. The background consists of concentric red and orange circles. Two speech bubbles are present: one from the woman and one from the man.

hasto
toarst?

wil je
wat
drinken?

Learning to talk through listening

Language development in the first year

The foundation for language development is laid very early on. While still in the womb, a baby is able to hear sounds and can distinguish its mother's voice from other voices. After birth, babies prefer these familiar sounds.

At around 6 months, your baby will begin to babble. They will start with the easiest sounds first, such as 'e', 'a', 'p' and 'm'. They will also start to understand simple words and sentences. Especially if they see gestures at the same time.

Don't be afraid to talk to your child in your native language. Do it whenever you can. Your child will get enough exposure to Dutch at school, on television and at the library. Children with a strong foundation in their native language develop a better command of Dutch.

Tips:

- Talk with your child all day long no matter what you are doing!
- If you know songs or stories in Frisian or any other language, enjoy sharing them with your child.
- Start reading aloud very early on. Books contain a wider range of words than ordinary conversations. At the library you can find picture books in various languages.



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Simultaneous language learning

Language development from 1 to 2.5 years

Your child learns to speak a language by listening to it. For the first 2.5 years, they absorb everything just like a sponge. Slowly but surely, they start to understand more and more of what is being said. They will also try to produce their own words.

Multilingual children grow up speaking two or more languages. To begin with, their vocabulary in each language is often smaller than that of monolingual children. But their total vocabulary is larger! This makes sense because your child probably uses different languages in different settings. If you frequently use several languages, your child will eventually speak Dutch just as well as their monolingual peers.

At this stage of language development, your child starts to connect several languages. They use their existing knowledge of language to learn a new language. The stronger their foundation in their first language, the easier it is to learn a second language. So it is important to keep communicating with your child in their first language as much as possible.

Tips:

- Keep talking with your child. Talk about what you see.
- Ask questions: "Where is the table?" And confirm the right answer: "Yes, that is the table."
- Say what you are doing: "I am putting on your socks."
- Tell the story in a book in your own language.
- At the library you can find picture books in various languages.



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Connecting languages

Language development from 2.5 to 5 years

In the beginning, children gather all the languages they hear in one big dictionary. Their language learning abilities are always switched on. From the age of 2.5, your child will start forming short sentences with words from this dictionary. They will also start to ask questions, such as: "Mama, can I have an apple?"

At this stage, multilingual children often mix up the languages they are learning. This is normal. It shows that your child is making connections between the languages and it means their language development is progressing well.

If you are raising your child to be multilingual, they may go through a silent stage before they start speaking a new language. However, there is a lot going on in your child's mind. They are listening to what they hear around them and are trying to understand and translate new words. Your child's language development continues during this period. As their confidence increases, the words will come naturally.

As your child gets older, they will find it easier to differentiate between languages. Later, they will be able to switch effortlessly from one language to another.

Tips:

- Do not correct your child. Repeat the sentence correctly.
- Keep reading aloud and communicating in your child's first language.
- Watch a Dutch TV show and talk about it in the language you speak at home.
- Take your child to the library regularly.
- Let your child point to and name things in a book.
- Play a lot of language games that involve reciting rhymes, completing sentences and naming objects: "I see something that is long and red and you can write with it."



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