

mehr Sprache.
okay. zusammen leben

Talk to Me *and Listen to Me*

12 points
for Supporting Our Children in
Learning How to Talk
A Brochure for Parents with Children
Englisch – Deutsch

0-5
years

This brochure is a product of the “mehr Sprache” (“more Language”) programme: early language support and multilingualism – a challenge for families and early education. The objective of “mehr Sprache” (“more Language”) is to help ensure that children of immigrant parents living in Vorarlberg grow up in a supportive environment for developing speech and language. In addition, it aims to raise awareness in the state both of the increasing importance of multilingualism and related social issues.

Concept and realization:
okay. zusammen leben | advice centre for
immigration and integration issues
www.okay-line.at

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By order of:
Vorarlberger Landtag & Vorarlberger Landesregierung
(Parliament & Government of Vorarlberg)



Dear Parent/s

We would first like to congratulate you on the birth of your child. All the expectation and waiting is finally over. You can now hold your child in your arms. All your relatives, acquaintances and friends have probably already offered you their congratulations and best wishes. Like every parent, you most likely have also stopped now and again to consider what your child’s life is going to be like and how you can ideally help and support him/her.

As parents we only want what is best for our children. We often, however, feel slightly overwhelmed by the decisions we have to make regarding our children’s welfare. As you have probably learned from talking with other parents, lots of parents feel that way.

We hope that this brochure assists you in an important aspect of raising your child. “Talk to Me and Listen to Me” aims to inform parents about how they can actively support their children in learning how to talk in their first years of life. These years are vital for speech and language development. As parents we can help our children acquire language and learn how to talk. Today, a good command of one or more languages is essential for everyday social interaction and getting a good job. It will be even more imperative tomorrow.

We know that particularly parents who did not grow up speaking German or who do not speak German so well because they learned it later on in life quite often worry about what they can do to help their child learn how to talk. This brochure contains lots of helpful information and practical tips about how children can be raised speaking two or more languages.

This brochure will show you that helping children learn how to talk is not as difficult as you would think. You will, however, need to be attentive and proactive. Take time to read through this brochure again and again. Let it accompany you during the first five years of your child’s life. You are sure to keep discovering new things that will help you support your child’s development throughout these important years.

*We wish you and your child all the very best!
The “mehr Sprache” (“more Language”) team*

Did you know that...

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

1. Hallo, you can't see me, but I can hear you!

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.

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.

Did you know that...

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

2. Mama's language is okay! – Papa's language is okay!

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.

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.

Did you know that...

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

3.

I am lovable the way I am.

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.

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.

Did you know that...

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

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

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 Arzt/Ärztin (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.

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.

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?

5. Talk to me and listen to me!

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.

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 Arzt/Ärztin (G.P.).

Did you know that...

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

6. I can do it myself!

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.

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.

Did you know that...

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

7. I can do more things than you imagine.

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.

Simple everyday things
you can do for your child:

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.

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?

Simple everyday things you can do for your child:

8.

Are you going to play with me?

*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.

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.

*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.

Did you know that...

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

Simple everyday things
you can do for your child:

9. Just let me talk!

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.

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.

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?

10.

Will you continue reading the story to me today?

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.

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 Vorarlberg. Ask at the library where you live whether they have books in your native language.

All children love rituals.

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.

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?*

11.

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

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.

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.*

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)?

12.

I also want to be with other children.

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.

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.

Please take to heart that . . .

- we quickly forget languages in which we do not invest any time or effort. We have to keep up a language and use it if we do not want to forget it.
- When your child goes to Kindergarten (kindergarten) and later to school, German will become an important language for him/her. Your child will need your support and encouragement. Please do not forget to keep up the language that your child has grown up speaking, your native language or the language you speak at home.
- The muttersprachliche Unterricht (native language instruction) is a good way for your child to practice his/her first language. Ask at your child's school and enrol him/her in such a class.
- Read newspapers and/or books and talk with your child about new topics. That way you and your child will continue to develop your command of your native language.
- Encourage your child to read a lot in German and in other languages.
- The native languages of migrants in Vorarlberg include Turkish, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Spanish, Italian, Russian and many other languages. These languages are becoming increasingly important for business and industry. If your child has a good command of any of these languages besides German and English, he/she will have a head start on the job market.
- Every language is something to treasure. Its value grows the more you use it and the better you speak it. Nowadays, a good command of languages is decisive for a person's profession and his/her role in society.

Public Institutions, Counselling and Support Centres for Parents in Vorarlberg

Connexia-Elternberatung (Connexia Parent Counselling)

The women counsellors at Connexia advise parents about everything related to the care, diet and development of their newborn babies and toddlers up to the age of four. Parents can also seek advice about their child's speech and language development. Connexia operates over 100 counselling centres throughout Vorarlberg. Opening hours are posted in your Gemeindeamt (offices of your municipality) or Rathaus (town hall) and at the Connexia-Zentrale (Connexia main office) in Bregenz. No appointments are necessary during opening hours.

Connexia-Zentrale Bregenz (Connexia main office)
Tel: 05574-48787-0 (9.00 a.m. – 12.00 noon) | www.connexia.at

Family Point: Info-Service der Vorarlberger Landesregierung (Family Point: Information Service of the Government of Vorarlberg)

Family Point supports you in looking for child-care services. You can find information about Kleinkinderbetreuung (child-care for infants), Spielgruppen (playgroups) and Kindergärten (kindergartens) in Vorarlberg. Family Point also advises parents about financial support for families, such as Kinderbetreuungsgeld (child-care benefits) and Familienzuschuss (family allowance).

Family Point der Vorarlberger Landesregierung
(Family Point: Information Service of the Government of Vorarlberg)
Tel. ++43-5574-511-24100 | www.vorarlberg.at/familypoint

Calendar of Events for parents

Vorarlberg has a varied offering of public lectures, seminars and expert round-tables for parents on topics related to raising and supporting children. In future there will be more events about speech and language development and raising multilingual children. All of these events are listed at www.pfiffikus.at → "Zielgruppen" → "Eltern".

Gemeindeamt (Offices of the Municipality) / Rathaus (Town Hall)

Information about Kinderbetreuung (child-care), Spielgruppen (playgroups) and Kindergärten (kindergartens) in Vorarlberg is available at your Gemeindeamt (offices of the municipality) or Rathaus (town hall).

Bibliotheken and Ludotheken (Libraries and Toy Libraries)

There are Bibliotheken (libraries) and Ludotheken (toy libraries) in lots of towns and villages in Vorarlberg. Ask at your local library whether they also have children's books in your native language or in the language/s you speak at home. An increasing number of libraries stock books in several languages.

For the addresses and opening times of Bibliotheken (libraries) and Ludotheken (toy libraries) please visit the homepage of the Bibliotheksverband Vorarlberg (Vorarlberg Library Association): www.bvv.bvoe.at

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