

## TEACHING ENGLISH TO KID AT HOME

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### **ABSTRACT:**

Children learn naturally when they are having fun. Children feel more comfortable and confident when they know what to expect. Repetition is essential children often need to hear words and phrases many times before they feel ready to produce them themselves. Established a routine for your English time at home, it is better to have short, frequent sessions than long, infrequent ones. Fifteen minutes is enough for very young children. Parents can gradually make sessions longer as child gets older and their concentration span increases. Parents have to enthusiastic and give children lots of encouragement and praise. Children will pick up on enthusiasm for the language. Whatever parents approach, the most important thing is to relax, have fun and make English an enjoyable experience for both parents and child. Many parents are eager to help their kids learn English from a young age. One of the most important factors in teaching foreign languages to young children is helping them form positive perceptions of communicating with foreign languages. A great advantage of early childhood second language exposure is that it helps children form a positive impression of foreign languages. When children are exposed to a foreign language from a very young age, they tend to view the language positively and learning another language becomes something they are very comfortable with. However, if you force a young child to speak a second language even when they are resisting, you run the risk of creating a negative impression of that language.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

For the most part, it is parents who teach their young children to speak their home language. Throughout the first two years of life, it is often the mother's voice

and her special way of talking, called 'parentese', that teaches young children about language and how to talk.

Parents, even with a basic knowledge of English, can successfully support their

young child learning English by re-using and adjusting many of these same parentese techniques.

Parents may worry about their accent in English. Young children have a remarkable ability to alter their accent to match the English of their surroundings. Young children need to feel 'I can speak English' and 'I like English' and their parents' support can help them achieve this from their first lessons.

Young children are natural language acquirers; they are self-motivated to pick up language without conscious learning, unlike adolescents and adults. They have the ability to imitate pronunciation and work out the rules for themselves. Any idea that learning to talk in English is difficult does not occur to them unless it's suggested by adults, who themselves probably learned English academically at a later age through grammar-based text books.

Here are some suggestions for helping your children enjoy English:

Ease up when necessary  
Some parents think a great way to help their children learn another language is to use only that language at home. It's a

commendable idea, but it's not unusual for children to grow frustrated and want their parent to speak to them in their native tongue. The last thing you want is for your child to develop negative feelings towards foreign languages, or to have any difficulty communicating with Mom and Dad.

Nothing is more important than you having good communication with your children. If your children are expressing frustration when you try to communicate in English, it may be best to ease up and use your native language. You want your children to feel 100% comfortable communicating with you.

Let your children see YOU enjoying English:

One of the best ways to get children interested in doing something is to let them observe you enjoying that activity. Don't make a big deal out of it, but let your children see you reading English books or newspapers. Watch English DVDs, listen to English music or let them see you speaking English with a friend. Your children look up to you. When they are playing, they pretend to be you. If you'd like them to be interested in English, show them that you are interested in English.

Use English that doesn't require them to answer in English. If a child is forced to respond in a second language they find difficult, they can become frustrated and disappointed easily. You can use a lot of English with your children that doesn't pressure them to speak.

Use simple commands, such as "Put on your shoes." "Let's go." or "Give me the apple, please." Give praise, like "Good job!" "Well done!" or "What a beautiful drawing!" Make observations or point things out, "It's cold today!" "Look at the brown dog." or "This ice cream is yummy." Ask basic questions that can be answered through gesture or short answers, such as "Which shirt do you want to wear?" – while holding up two shirts to choose from, "Do you like spaghetti?" or "Where are your shoes?" These are all great ways to communicate naturally with them in English without forcing them to speak.

### **Expose your children to English**

Remember that INPUT is essential. Identify some English media (such as DVDs and CDs) that your children like and let them enjoy it on their own terms

without pressuring them to produce English right away. Sometimes we have unrealistic expectations for young foreign language learners. Just as a young native English speaker needs time to start producing English, so does a young foreign language learner. Almost all language learners go through a "silent period" before they begin producing language on their own. Naturally, the silent period for a child can often be quite long.

Provide as much enjoyable input as you can, and let them start producing English at their own pace. Read to your children in English as well. Find some good English picture books that your children enjoy looking at with you and read to them at storytime. Just be careful not to completely replace books in your native language with English books. For developing literacy, it's extremely important that you read to your child in their native language regularly.

### **Focus on the positives**

Learning a second language should be a positive experience. Remember that this isn't a race. If you are exposing your children to English regularly in fun ways,

they will be fine as they progress in their language learning. If you push too hard, they will start to resist. Focus on the positives. Praise your children for their English, but don't go overboard and make them feel like speaking English is extraordinary. You want your children to feel positive about English without making them feel like English is a big scary subject beyond their reach.

The advantages of beginning early:

Young children are still using their individual, innate language-learning strategies to acquire their home language and soon find they can also use these strategies to pick up English.

Young children have time to learn through play-like activities. They pick up language by taking part in an activity shared with an adult. They firstly make sense of the activity and then get meaning from the adult's shared language.

Young children have more time to fit English into the daily programme. School programmes tend to be informal and children's minds are not yet cluttered with facts to be stored and tested. They may have little or no homework and are

less stressed by having to achieve set standards.

Children who have the opportunity to pick up a second language while they are still young appear to use the same innate language-learning strategies throughout life when learning other languages. Picking up third, fourth, or even more languages is easier than picking up a second.

Young children who acquire language rather than consciously learn it, as older children and adults have to, are more likely to have better pronunciation and feel for the language and culture. When monolingual children reach puberty and become more self-conscious, their ability to pick up language diminishes and they feel they have to consciously study English through grammar-based programmes. The age at which this change occurs depends greatly on the individual child's developmental levels as well as the expectations of their society. Stages in picking up English Spoken language comes naturally before reading and writing.

### **Silent period**

When babies learn their home language, there is a 'silent period', when they look and listen and communicate through facial expression or gestures before they begin to speak. When young children learn English, there may be a similar 'silent period' when communication and understanding may take place before they actually speak any English words.

During this time parents should not force children to take part in spoken dialogue by making them repeat words. Spoken dialogues should be one-sided, the adult's talk providing useful opportunities for the child to pick up language. Where the adult uses parentese (an adjusted form of speech) to facilitate learning, the child may use many of the same strategies they used in learning their home language.

### **Beginning to talk**

After some time, depending on the frequency of English sessions, each child (girls often more quickly than boys) begins to say single words ('cat', 'house') or ready-made short phrases ('What's that?', 'It's my book', 'I can't', 'That's a car',

'Time to go home') in dialogues or as unexpected statements. The child has memorised them, imitating the pronunciation exactly without realising that some may consist of more than one word. This stage continues for some time as they child picks up more language using it as a short cut to dialogue before they are ready to create their own phrases.

### **Building up English language**

Gradually children build up phrases consisting of a single memorised word to which they add words from their vocabulary ('a dog', 'a brown dog', 'a brown and black dog') or a single memorised language to which they add their own input ('That's my chair', 'Time to play'). Depending on the frequency of exposure to English and the quality of experience, children gradually begin to create whole sentences.

### **Understanding**

Understanding is always greater than speaking and young children's ability to comprehend should not be underestimated, as they are used to understanding their home language from a

variety of context clues. Though they may not understand everything they hear in their home language, children grasp the gist – that is they understand a few important words and decipher the rest using different clues to interpret the meaning. With encouragement they soon transfer their ‘gist’ understanding skills to interpret meaning in English. When to translate

Young children’s ability to understand should not be underestimated; they understand much more than they can say in English. In their home language young children are used to understanding only some of the words they hear and filling in the rest from the speaker’s body language and clues around them to get meaning. Where parentese is used, they appear to transfer these skills to working out the meaning in English.

When both new concepts and new language are introduced at the same time, it may be necessary to give a quick translation once, using a whisper, followed directly by the English. If translation is given more than once and again in following sessions, a child may get used to waiting for the translation instead of using

his or her own clues to understand the English.

#### English sessions

English sessions may last from just a few minutes up to about ten and can take place once or twice a day, depending on circumstances. The more frequently English is used, the quicker it is absorbed.

During English sessions parents need to focus on their child without any interruptions. Young children come to love English sessions, because for them English is a special time with their parent’s undivided attention.

Young children are logical thinkers: they need to have a reason for speaking English, since both they and their parents can speak the home language.

They may find it difficult to switch from their home language into English, so it is important to set the scene: ‘In three minutes we are going to have our English time. Setting the scene for English time might involve moving to a special place in the room: ‘Let’s sit on the sofa. Now, let’s talk in English. Warming up in English by counting or saying a familiar rhyme also

helps to switch into English before introducing some new activity.

Children pick up language when the talk is based around an activity in which they are physically involved. If they have already been introduced to the activity in their home language and understood the content, they feel more secure and can concentrate on understanding and picking up the accompanying English.

Where sessions are in only English, activities need to be shorter since children's attention span is generally not as long as in the home language. Listening only to English can be tiring Frustration.

After the initial novelty of English sessions, some young children become frustrated by their inability to express their thoughts in English. Others want to speak quickly in English as they can in their home language. Frustration can often be overcome by providing children with 'performance' pieces like 'I can count to 12 in English' or very simple rhymes, which consist of ready-made phrases.

## **Mistakes**

Children should not be told they have made a mistake because any correction immediately demotivates. Mistakes may be part of the process of working out grammar rules of English or they may be a fault in pronunciation. 'I goed' soon becomes 'went' if the child hears the adult repeat back 'yes, you went'; or if the adult hears 'zee bus' and repeats 'the bus'. As in learning their home language, if children have an opportunity to hear the adult repeat the same piece of language correctly, they will self-correct in their own time.

## **Gender differences**

Boys' brains develop differently from girls' and this affects how boys pick up language and use it. Sometimes mixed classes make little provision for boys, who may be overshadowed by girls' natural ability to use language. If young boys are to reach their potential, they need some different language experiences with girls and their achievements should not be compared with those of girls.

**Language-learning environments**

Young children find it more difficult to pick up English if they are not provided with the right type of experiences, accompanied by adult support using 'parentese' techniques.

Young children need to feel secure and know that there is some obvious reason for using English.

Activities need to be linked to some interesting everyday activities about which they already know, eg sharing an English picture book, saying a rhyme in English, having an 'English' snack.

Activities are accompanied by adult language giving a running commentary about what is going on and dialogues using adjusted parentese language.

English sessions are fun and interesting, concentrating on concepts children have already understood in their home language. In this way children are not learning two things, a new concept as well as new language, but merely learning the English to talk about something they already know.

Activities are backed up by specific objects, where possible, as this helps

understanding and increases general interest.

**Reading**

Children who can already read in their home language generally want to find out how to read in English. They already know how to decode words in their home language to get meaning from text and, if not helped to decode in English, may transfer their home language-decoding techniques and end up reading English with the home language accent.

Before they can decode English, young children need to know the 26 alphabet letter names and sounds. As English has 26 letters but on average 44 sounds (in standard English), introducing the remaining sounds is better left until children have more experience in using language and reading,

Beginning reading in English goes easily if young children already know the language they are trying to read. Many children work out by themselves how to read in English if they have shared picture books with adults or learned rhymes, as they are likely to have memorised the language. Reading what they know by



heart is an important step in learning to read as it gives children opportunities to work out how to decode simple words by themselves. Once children have built up a bank of words they can read, they feel confident and are then ready for a more structured approach.

### **Parental support**

Children need to feel that they are making progress. They need continual encouragement as well as praise for good performance, as any success motivates. Parents are in an ideal position to motivate and so help their children learn, even if they have only basic English themselves and are learning alongside their young children.

By sharing, parents can not only bring their child's language and activities into family life, but can also influence their young children's attitudes to language learning and other cultures. It is now generally accepted that most lifelong attitudes are formed by the age of eight or nine.

### **Why parents' help is best:**

Parents can focus on their child, spending some one-to-one time with them.

Parents can fit English sessions into any part of their day to suit their child and themselves.

Parents can regulate the length of an English session and select activities to fit their child's needs, interest and ability to concentrate.

Parents know their child intimately and can intuitively judge the type of English talking suitable for their individual ways of picking up language.

Parents can best interpret their child's moods and respond to them. Children have days when they eagerly absorb language and others when they find it difficult to concentrate.

Parents can introduce more fun, as they are working with an individual, not a class. Parents can introduce English culture into family life, so broadening their child's outlook and understanding of their own culture as well as things English.

### **What is parentese language?**

'parentese' is a form of talking that tunes into and adjust to a young child's language, providing dialogue with the child and shepherding them to their next level of competence.. women appear to be innate

users of parentese; some men seem to find it more difficult unless they can centre their talk around specific objects-a picture book or a game. However, children especially boys – need male role models as men use language differently. Men tend to take a more technical approach to using language and ‘chatter’ less.

Parents, using a soft caring voice and simpler language, unconsciously shepherd their young child through an activity by:

A running commentary (talking aloud) on what is going on:

Repeating useful language more often than in adult talk:

Reflecting back what their child has said and enlarging it:

Talking more slowly and stressing new words naturally without altering the melody of the language.

Using the same phrases each time to manage English sessions as well as activities and games. As children’s understanding increases, these basic phrases are enlarged: ‘Let’s play Simon says.’ ‘Stand there.’ ‘In front of me.’ ‘That’s right.’ ‘Are you ready?’

Adding facial expression and gesture to aid understanding

Using eye contact in one-to-one exchanges to reassure and also to encourage a hesitant child to speak.

Pausing for a longer time as children need to think about what they hear before they are ready to reply. When speaking is still limited, exaggerated pauses can add fun or hold interest in a game.

Some parents find it embarrassing to dramatise and use parentese. However, for the child, it makes picking up English easier as they are familiar with these natural ‘mini-lessons’ in their home language. Once young children begin to speak, parents innately feel less need to use parentese, except when introducing new language or activities.

### **Using everyday situations**

The advantage of teaching English at home is that you can use everyday situations and real objects from around the house to practise the language naturally and in context. For example:

Talk about clothes when your child is getting dressed, or when you are sorting

laundry (Let's put on your blue socks, It's Dad's T-shirt, etc)

Practise vocabulary for toys and furniture when you are helping your child to tidy their bedroom (Let's put your teddy bear on the bed!, where is the blue car)

Teach food vocabulary when you are cooking or going shopping. When you go to supermarket, give your child a list of things to find (use pictures or words depending on their age). Revise the vocabulary when you put the shopping away at home.

Children may lack confidence in speaking English – seeing their parents using English in various situations around the home may help them feel more comfortable speaking English. And of course it is good for children to see English being used in a place other than school.

Having "Time for English"

Children need a reason to communicate in English. If both parent and child can communicate more effectively in your mother tongue, children will be less motivated to join in. Allocating "Time for English" for a focussed period of time in a day helps (ten minutes, perhaps?) – and preparing the children in advance helps

too. "We have *Time for English* in five minutes time."

For young children, having a toy that you pretend speaks only in English is a good way to make English fun and meaningful. Your English time could be *Time with Harry* perhaps. As you do your activities, Harry could say simple phrases: *Very good! What's that in English?* etc.

Doing everyday things. You can repeat these phrases while you do everyday things, like laying the table, going shopping, putting things away. Repeat these phrases more often than you would naturally.

*Let's put the plates here.*  
*That looks nice! OK. Three yogurts.*  
*This goes here.*

### **Getting the children to respond**

The next step is to try to use phrases for children to act on and respond to in English. So during these everyday events, ask children to help or ask them about their opinions.  
*Where is your book?*  
*Can you put the spoons on the table?*  
*Which is your favourite?*

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