

# EARLY HEAD START TIP SHEET

No. 43

Supporting Infants & Toddlers who are Dual Language Learners, August 2010

## **Does Early Head Start teach English to infants and toddlers whose home language is not English if that is what the family wants?**

### **Response:**

Early Head Start (EHS) is required to support the child's overall development by respecting and supporting the home language, culture, and family composition of each child. Programs, of course, provide families with information about language development and learning in two languages in order to make informed decisions.

### *Partnering with families to support language and communication development*

Understanding the family's goals for language learning is crucial. Staff can demonstrate respect for the family's values by talking with them about their beliefs around maintaining their home language while at the same time, supporting English language development.

Families who speak a language other than English at home may feel that their children should begin to learn English early on in order to succeed in school. Or, they may believe that the role of EHS is to teach their children English, the majority language, because earlier exposure will ensure faster acquisition. Reassuring and informing parents that learning two languages does not come at the expense of either language; that infants and toddlers are capable of learning two languages early in life; and that learning and maintaining the home language lays the foundation for learning English can lead to more effective parent-teacher partnerships.

Programs and families should balance the best interest of the child and, at the same time, consider parents' values and goals when developing curricular plans around language and communication development. Conversations and planning should include:

- A **process very young children use to acquire language(s) and develop communication skills.**
- The **advantages of maintaining home language**, such as supporting the family's role as the child's primary teacher as well as preserving emotional bonds, cultural ties, and the ability to communicate with extended family members.
- The **benefits of dual language development** for children's early language and early literacy development, for family communication and functioning, and for children's feelings of self-worth.

### *Staff's beliefs*

Staff's own cultural beliefs regarding how infants and toddlers whose home language is other than English acquire language may vary. Like with families, some staff may believe it is best for children and families to support dual language development. Other staff may firmly believe it is best that families, including the infants and toddlers, should learn English. Each of these beliefs impact how staff shares information on and provides ongoing support for language development. I.e. staff members who believe that children benefit from experiences in two languages are more likely to provide individualized programming that supports dual language learning whereas those

who believe children must learn English only are likely to focus on English only language experiences, providing less or no exposure to the home language.

### *Shaping services through language policies*

Providing individualized experiences for dual language learners requires detailed effort and intentionality; therefore, many EHS programs develop policies regarding the program's beliefs and procedures for supporting language and overall development of infants and toddlers whose language is other than English. Language policies should guide program practices and include explicit guidelines for staff about how dual language goals will be implemented, supported, and monitored.

### **Considerations:**

- How does the program determine the family's needs and goals regarding supporting the child's learning in two languages? How does the program disseminate research based information to staff and parents regarding the latest findings in early dual language learning?
- How does the program collaborate with and support the family in preserving their home language? In learning English?
- How does the program support staff and families in understanding infant and toddler language development? In understanding language development when multiple languages are involved?
- How does the program ensure that staff members have the necessary skills to support and answer parents' concerns about raising their child bilingually?
- How does the program support staff working with families who speak a different language than them?
- What effort is the program making to hire qualified staff members who speak the same language and reflect the culture of the children and families served?
- What can programs do to support children who are dual language learners when programs are short of bilingual staff?
- How does the program help staff to reflect on their own cultural assumptions about learning in two languages, and diversity in general?
- How does the program support the child's language and social emotional development?
- How does the program ensure that the child's environment(s) provide language-rich experiences?

### **Performance Standards, Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations:**

- 1304.21(a)(4)(iii) Grantee and delegate agencies must provide for the development of each child's cognitive and language skills by promoting interaction and language use among children and between children and adults.
- 1304.21(a)(3)(i)(E) Grantee and delegate agencies must support social and emotional development by supporting and respecting the home language, culture, and family composition of each child in ways that support the child's health and well-being.
- 1304.21(b)(2)(i) Grantee and delegate agencies must support the social and emotional development of infants and toddlers by promoting an environment that encourages the development of self-awareness, autonomy, and self-expression.
- 1304.51(c)(2) Communication with parents must be carried out in the parents' primary or primary or preferred language or through an interpreter, to the extent feasible.

- 1304.53(b)(4) Staff and program consultants must be familiar with the ethnic background and heritage of families in the program and must be able to serve and effectively communicate, to the extent feasible, with children and families with no or limited English proficiency.
- 1304.52(g)(2) When a majority of children speak the same language, at least one classroom staff member or home visitor interacting regularly with the children must speak their language.
- 1306.20(e) Classroom staff and home visitors must be able to communicate with families they serve either directly or through a translator. They should also be familiar with the ethnic background of these families.
- 1304.40(a)(2) As part of the ongoing partnership, grantee and delegate agencies must offer parents opportunities to develop and implement individualized Family Partnership Agreements that describe family goals, responsibilities, timetables and strategies for achieving these goals as well as progress in achieving them.

## Resources:

Bardige, Betty and Marilyn Segal. **Building Literacy with Love: A Guide for Teachers and Caregivers of Children from Birth Through Age 5.** Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE. 2005.

**Dual Language Learners (DLLs) and their Families.** *The Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center.* DHHS/ACF/OHS.

<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/ecdh/eecd/Dual%20Language%20Learners%20and%20Their%20Families> (accessed August 14, 2010).

**DLLs and Their Families: Program Preparedness Checklist Version 4.** DHHS/ACF/OHS. 2010.

Early Head Start National Resource Center (EHS NRC). **Building Blocks: The Essential of Early Head Start [webcast series], 3: Supportive Relationships: Meeting the Diverse Needs of Families.** DHHS/ACF/OHS. 2008. <http://www.fc-tv.com/webcast/ehswebcastarchive/> (accessed August 14, 2010).

EHS NRC. **Technical Assistance Paper, 5: Linguistic Diversity and Early Literacy: Serving Culturally Diverse Families in Early Head Start.** DHHS/ACF/HSB. 2001.

Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Project. **Early Head Start Research to Practice: Supporting Language and Cognitive Development in Early Head Start.** DHHS/ACF/OPRE. 2006. [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/ehs/ehs\\_resrch/reports/lang\\_literacy/lang\\_research.html](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/ehs/ehs_resrch/reports/lang_literacy/lang_research.html) (accessed August 14, 2010).

**Head Start Dual Language Report: Dual Language Learning: What Does It Take?** DHHS/ACF/OHS. 2008.

**Head Start Bulletin, 78: English Language Learners.** DHHS/ACF/ACYF/HSB. (2005).

- Bellamy, Carol. “Beginning the New School Year with Learners from Many Cultures.” 33–35.
- Cruzado-Guerrero, Judith. “Building Strong Language Foundations in Early Head Start.” 18.
- Tabors, Patton and Lisa López. “How Can Teachers and Parents Help Young Children Become (and Stay) Bilingual?” 14–17.

Genesee, Fred, Johanne Paradis and Martha Crago. **Dual Language Development and Disorders: A Handbook on Bilingualism and Second Language Learning.** Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes. 2004.

Prieto, H. Victoria. “**One Language, Two Languages, Three Languages...More?**” *Young Children Journal*. National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). (January 2009): 1–2. <http://www.naeyc.org/files/yc/file/200901/BTJRockingRolling.pdf> (accessed August 14, 2010).

**Ready for Success: Supporting Dual Language Learners (DLLs) in Head Start and Early Head Start [webcast and webinar series].** DHHS/ACF/OHS. 2009.

Rosenkoetter, Sharon and Joanne Knapp-Philo, Eds. **Learning to Read the World: Language and Literacy in the First Three Years.** Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE. 2006

Stechuk, Robert; Susan Burns and Sharon Yandian. **Bilingual Infant/Toddler Environments: Supporting Language and Learning in Our Youngest Children.** Washington, DC: AED/Migrant and Seasonal Head Start Technical Assistance Center. 2006. <http://www.aed.org/Publications/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&pageid=15384> (accessed August 14, 2010).

Tabors, Patton. **One Child, Two Languages: A Guide for Early Childhood Educators of Children Learning English as a Second Language, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.** Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes. 2008.

Tabors, Patton. **One Child, Two Languages: A Guide for Preschool Educators of Children Learning English as a Second Language.** Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes. 1997.

*Zero To Three Journal*, 29(1): **Language, Culture, and Learning.** (September 2008).

- Fort, Pilar and Robert Stechuk. “**The Cultural Responsive and Dual Language Education Project.**” 24–28.
- Genesee, Fred. “**Early Dual Language Learning.**” 17–23.

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*This Tip Sheet is not a regulatory document. Its intent is to provide a basis for dialogue, clarification, and problem solving among Office of Head Start, Regional Offices, TA consultants, and grantees. If you need further clarification on Head Start policies and regulations, please contact your Regional Program Specialist.*