

# Understanding the steps of learning for children with English as an Additional Language in the Early Years



EMAS

 Brighton & Hove  
City Council



# Introduction

Practitioners who are new to working with children and families who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL) are often concerned about how to best meet their needs.

## Here are some of the comments practitioners have made...

“He doesn’t have any language”  
 “She doesn’t speak”  
 “I don’t understand him”

### Children learning English as an Additional Language may:

- Be silent
- Mix words from both languages
- Make many grammatical errors

These features are normal when acquiring a new language and do not necessarily indicate a language delay.

This guidance outlines the steps that children go through when acquiring an additional language and gives suggestions about how practitioners can support them in this journey within an inclusive environment.

It is recommended that it is used to monitor English language acquisition for individual children and that practitioners use the “what can we do to help” section to consider their levels of support for the children with EAL.

It is important to remember that the process of learning an additional language can take several years and is different for each bilingual child. For children entering a setting where a different language is spoken, it can take three months for them to begin to understand. It may take two years before they can hold a conversation and up to seven years to have full cognitive understanding of the new language (based on research by Jim Cummins).

**This guidance is referring to children who have age appropriate development in their Mother Tongue and are new to English.**

These steps correspond to the NASSEA EAL Assessment framework for the EYFS



# Step One: New to English

Step one can be subdivided into three mini steps

What a child may do	What can we do to help?
<p><b>Early – silent, non verbal:</b> This can be quite a lengthy time for some children but can be shorter depending on child’s confidence &amp; support from adults, other children &amp; the environment.</p>	
<p><b>Listening/Understanding</b></p>	
<p>Go through a silent or non verbal stage but they are still active in their language learning – watching, listening, mirroring actions and exploring (internalising). The child will be ‘tuning in’ to all the new language heard.</p>	<p><b>Don't worry if the child does not talk for some months - communicate together through smiles, gestures and eye contact. Continue to talk to the child eg use a running commentary as you play alongside the child-using short simple sentences.</b></p>
<p>Understand more than they can speak, ie child may understand a question but only shake their head in response.</p>	<p><b>Use language in context: eg talk about the sand, water or bricks while playing with them, as talk out of context can be confusing.</b>  <b>Use visual cues whenever possible e.g. Makaton, photos, real objects, facial expressions, gestures.</b></p>
<p><b>Speaking</b></p>	
<p>Use home language with adults or children who do not speak the same language.</p>	<p><b>Do not put pressure on child to speak until confident and ready but involve them in circle games, turn taking games, outdoor play etc where they can feel included and are under less pressure to perform and can rely on clues from peers.</b></p>
<p>Rely on gesture and non-verbal communication.</p>	<p><b>Reinforce phrases from routines, eg ‘wash your hands’.</b>  <b>Pick up on non verbal responses. Children may use them to indicate a need or as a response to a question.</b>  <b>Children may need extra support with sharing etc until they develop the appropriate language. Access bilingual support in Mother Tongue (if possible) so that the child can access learning alongside others.</b></p>

# Step one cont.

What a child may do	What can we do to help?
<b>Middle – using simple words and phrases</b>	
<b>Listening/Understanding</b>	
<p>Join in with routines and follow one-step instructions</p> <p>Begin to join in with action rhymes.</p> <p>Respond to yes/no questions</p>	<p>Help the child to understand simple classroom phrases... “Can I have..?”, “Wash your hands,” “Sit on the carpet,” “Hang up your coat,” “Put on an apron.”</p> <p>Use circle time to reinforce language structures eg “I like to play with....” or “I like to eat....” or “Today I feel...because...” For all such activities ensure the child with EAL has a later turn so they can observe good role models.</p> <p>Provide regular opportunities to use songs, rhymes and stories in their play.</p> <p>Provide opportunities for repetition of a few core songs/ rhymes and stories.</p>
<b>Speaking</b>	
<p>Echo phrases while processing meaning</p> <p>Begin to practise the vocabulary learnt by echoing phrases associated with routines, eg ‘tidy up time’.</p> <p>Become familiar with chunks of social speech, eg ‘Mummy come soon’ and ‘Happy birthday’ and learn to apply them in order to interact with others.</p> <p>Increasingly use one word utterances (usually nouns) to perform many functions, eg naming something, asking or responding to a question.</p>	<p>Give extra time for child to think before they answer</p> <p>Respond positively to all attempts at speaking English eg "Yes, it is tidy up time".</p> <p>Keep talking and involving the child in activities with other children and adults. Use familiar objects and family photos to encourage talk. Give extra time for the child to respond and give encouragement and praise for any effort to communicate.</p> <p>Use what the child says to extend and model language, eg Child: ‘Car’. Adult: ‘Yes, the car's driving’. If a child has nouns they need verbs as their next step.</p> <p>Share ongoing activities with parents/carers to support concept development in Mother Tongue.</p>

What a child may do	What can we do to help?
Late – communicating through very short phrases, greetings, simple words	
<b>Listening/Understanding</b>	
<p>Respond to simple questions in context. e.g. Who's picking you up today?</p> <p>Begin to join in with stories alongside others e.g. repetitive phrases</p>	<p>Use Makaton to reinforce questions.</p> <p>Choose stories that have good visuals and a repeated refrain and good clear illustrations like Dear Zoo, Brown Bear, We're Going on a Bear Hunt, We're Going on a Lion Hunt, Goldilocks and the Three Bears.</p>
<b>Speaking</b>	
<p>Begin to construct their own phrases in the here and now in context. Their main concern will be to get their meaning across, so function words will be missing, eg 'me bike garden'.</p>	<p>Accept all that the child says and remodel phrases without criticism, eg 'Yes, you can go to the garden and have a bike'.</p>
<p>Non verbal gestures will go alongside the speech to help clarify their meaning.</p>	<p>Respond positively to all attempts at speaking English.</p>

**This guidance is referring to children who have age appropriate development in their Mother Tongue and are new to English.**



# Step Two: Becoming familiar with English

What a child may do	What can we do to help?
<b>Listening/Understanding</b>	
<p>Begin to respond to 2 step instructions</p> <p>Listen attentively in whole group situations when interested</p>	<p>Give child extra time to process instructions</p> <p>Use story sacks, puppets and visual prompts to support children's understanding and bring the stories alive!</p>
<b>Speaking</b>	
<p>Begin to use descriptive language, e.g. 'big', 'blue', 'lots and lots', happy, sad.</p> <p>Show increased confidence in using English and begin to use simple sentences and extended phrases with more control of functional language.</p> <p>The emphasis will continue to be on communicating meaning so sentences/phrases won't be accurate.</p> <p>Apply structures of their home language to English. Use English to initiate conversations, give simple instructions and convey a simple message.</p>	<p>Emphasise descriptive language in different contexts e.g. different play activities, snack time, etc.</p> <p>Monitor where child prefers to play and talk. There will be children who will choose long avoidance activities eg bikes. Plan for additional staff to support and extend their play.</p> <p>Provide lots of opportunities for talk where child can practise their English skills, eg role play, puppets, circle games, in a non-threatening way.</p> <p>Ensure child has correct language structures modelled during adult: child interactions, eg providing a commentary when playing alongside child such as 'My car is going over the bridge, where is your car going?' (Use body language and facial expressions to clarify meaning.)</p> <p>Model conventions of politeness in English eg there may be more 'pleases and thank yous' than in the Mother Tongue e.g. "Please can I have .... " rather than "I want..."</p>

What a child may do	What can we do to help?
<p>Begin to develop more control in the use of functional language (people or objects) and start to ask functional questions, eg 'What shall I do now?'</p> <p>Begin to combine or extend certain simple sentences in order to communicate new ideas of their own.</p>	<p>Respond positively to all attempts at speaking English</p> <p>Support children to extend sentences by modelling connectives e.g. promoting... 'and then...' 'because...' 'what happened next?'</p>

### Other good practice ideas for this stage

Make and share photo books with familiar pictures e.g. family, home, local environment etc.

Leave story props in the environment for children to revisit and reinforce language.

Provide opportunities for children to record and listen to their own talk.

Provide opportunities for children who speak the same language to play and talk together.

Make sure resources show positive images of the child's home culture, eg books, dolls, toys, games, role-play. Use dual language texts and signs.

Help all the children to learn a few simple words in the home languages represented in your setting, eg hello, thank you, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 (if possible, use the parents/carers help for this).





# Step Three: Becoming confident as a user of English

What a child may do	What can we do to help?
<b>Listening/Understanding</b>	
Follow instructions alongside peers.	Reinforce sequencing language 'first...next...last' through cooking and construction.
Begin to respond to open ended questions.	Plan time with an adult in the learning environment to extend language and thinking.
Listening stamina is the same as peers.	
<b>Speaking</b>	
Show growing competence in using English. Talks using longer, grammatically correct sentences.	Provide visuals to develop narrative talk e.g. a sequence of photos.
Can retell events in a connected recount or narrative when content is familiar using story language where appropriate.	Share stories and provide discussions to expose child to more complex vocabulary and different texts
Use more detailed and correct vocabulary and a wide range of verbs e.g. roses and tulips instead of flowers.	Use technology to create books with children

## A note about home language

Young children learning one language at home and another at the setting/school need to use their home language as much as possible. Parents should be encouraged to speak their home language with their child. This builds a firm foundation for the second language. Without this foundation, both first and second language can be delayed or disrupted.

# Resources

## ***More information on EMAS:***

[www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/children-and-education/schools/emas-ethnic-minority-achievement-service](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/children-and-education/schools/emas-ethnic-minority-achievement-service)

[www.facebook.com/BrightonHoveEMAS](https://www.facebook.com/BrightonHoveEMAS)

[www.twitter.com/BHCC\\_EMAS](https://www.twitter.com/BHCC_EMAS)

## ***Information on all aspects of English as an additional language:***

[www.naldic.org.uk](http://www.naldic.org.uk)

(National Association for the Development of Language in the Curriculum)

## ***Information and research on bilingualism and language learning (with helpful advice for parents)***

[www.literacytrust.org.uk/talk\\_to\\_your\\_baby/resources/308\\_bilingualism\\_faq](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/talk_to_your_baby/resources/308_bilingualism_faq)

[www.bilingualism-matters.ppls.ed.ac.uk](http://www.bilingualism-matters.ppls.ed.ac.uk)

## ***Dual language book stockists***

[www.mantralingua.com](http://www.mantralingua.com)

<https://www.little-linguist.co.uk>

## ***Supporting refugee children in the EYFS***

[www.naldic.org.uk/eal-teaching-and-learning/outline-guidance/ealrefugee/refey/](http://www.naldic.org.uk/eal-teaching-and-learning/outline-guidance/ealrefugee/refey/)

[www.redcross.org.uk/en/What-we-do/Refugee-support/Refugee-facts-and-figures](http://www.redcross.org.uk/en/What-we-do/Refugee-support/Refugee-facts-and-figures)

## ***Persona dolls are a valuable tool to discuss diversity and inclusion with young children***

[www.personadoll.uk](http://www.personadoll.uk)





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**EMAS provide advice and support on all aspects of supporting children with EAL.**

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