



mehr Sprache.
Kanton St.Gallen

Talk to Me and Listen to Me!

12 ways

we can help our children learn to talk

A brochure for parents

English

**0-4
years**

Dear Parents,

Congratulations on the birth of your child. The long wait is now over. You can hold your child in your arms at long last. You've probably already received congratulations from family and friends. Perhaps you have already asked yourself what sort of a life your child may have, and what you can do to give them a good start.

As parents, you want the best for your child. But bringing up a child often brings with it new challenges, so sometimes you may feel a little overwhelmed when you have to make decisions about what is best for them. That happens to many parents.

We have produced this brochure to help you answer one of those important questions. Talk to Me and Listen to Me! is intended to inform you how you can help your child as it learns to speak during the first few years of life.

The early years are a very important period for language development and as parents you can help your children learn to speak and use their languages. A good knowledge of languages is important for life in our society nowadays and also professionally in future.

If you yourselves have not grown up speaking German or only learnt German as an adult, you may be wondering how you can help your child to speak it. You will find useful information about this in our brochure, along with some practical tips for how children can grow up with a good knowledge of two or more languages.

Encouraging children to speak is not rocket science. This brochure will teach you how to do it. But it requires your attention and your active participation. Read through this brochure more than just once. And let it guide you. You will discover more and more things that will help you stimulate your child in the first few years of life.

We wish you great pleasure with your child and wish you all the best.

**Centre for Integration & Equality
St Gallen Canton**

Did you know that ...

you can help your child's language development even during pregnancy?

1. Hello! You can't see me but I can hear you!

What the experts say:

- As early as the fourth month of pregnancy, the unborn baby starts to become aware of voices, particularly the mother's voice.
- A baby learns to recognize the melody of its native language even before it is born. It is also influenced by music and other sounds while in the womb.
- The parents are a child's chief role models for language during its first few years of life. For this reason it is important during pregnancy that parents think about which language or languages they want to speak with their child.

Useful tips

What you can do to help your child:

Start to tell your child about the world around you even before it is born. Talk to it about the things that concern you.

When deciding which language (or languages) you will use with your child at home, consider the following.

Talk to your child in the language that you feel most comfortable with and that you speak best. This will be the language in which you can give your child the broadest vocabulary. And you will also be laying a solid foundation for all the other languages that your child will learn in life.

It can also be of great advantage for your child if you as parents 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 language patterns in two languages.

No matter what language you decide to speak at home, it is very important that your child also learns the local language, German. It needs a good knowledge of German to feel at home here, make friends, and get a good education. Your child can still learn to speak German well even if you speak a different language with them at home.



Did you know that ...

your child learns most when you speak with them in the language you know best?

2. Mummy's language is okay! Daddy's language is okay!

What the experts say:

- A good emotional relationship is important as the basis for a child's general development and their speech and language development. Children immediately notice if their parents are talking to them in a language they feel 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 basis for learning other languages. Every language contains knowledge about the world that you pass on to your child.

Useful tips

What you can do to help your child:

Talk to your child in the language or dialect that you know best.

Talk with your child as much as possible and give them lots of opportunity and time to talk for themselves.

By telling your child stories, singing songs and playing games from your home country you are telling them about who you are and where you come from. That's important because children need these roots too.

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 maintaining your own language and towards German, that attitude will rub off on your child.

Did you know that ...

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

3. I am loveable the way I am!

What the experts say:

- A child needs the love and affection of their parents if they are to develop properly and learn to talk. They need to feel loved and accepted if they are to develop self-confidence. This energy is the key to every child's development.
- A child needs to feel secure. If you don't have time to listen to your child right away, explain why and let them 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.

Useful tips

What you can do to help your child:

You will have lots of opportunities throughout the day to talk to your child and to engage them in conversation. You can and should start doing that the very day your child is born.

Tell your child what you are doing with them while you are doing it. React to the sounds they make and show them that you enjoy listening to them.

Don't put off promises indefinitely. That will make them feel insecure. Keep the promises you make to your child.

Listen to your child, talk to them and praise them. Let your child tell you about their experiences. Always let your child finish their stories and never interrupt them.

Did you know that ...

your child can easily cope with speaking two or more languages while 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. In fact, millions of children live in countries where several languages are spoken in everyday life. The child's development doesn't suffer from this.
- Multilingual children develop just like monolingual children, that is, at their own pace. Some start talking early, others later; some talk a lot, and others less.
- A child's language development is a dynamic process. Children are always learning new things and consolidating what they already know. Mixing up languages is just part of that process.
- You should only start to be concerned and consult your family doctor or a specialist if your child's speech has not progressed for some time or if they stop talking altogether.
- When children grow up speaking more than one language, they need specific support in all languages. Parents can do a lot of different things to ensure that their children become good learners.

Useful tips

What you can do to help 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?

Make sure you talk to your child in your own language as much as possible. Get to know families in your neighbourhood who are native German speakers. Help your child to make German-speaking friends. Enrol your child in a playgroup. That will foster their development. The sooner they have contact with German-speaking children, the faster and easier they will learn German.

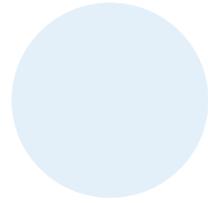
If each parent speaks a different language very well, your child will have the opportunity to learn 'mummy's language' and 'daddy's language'. Make sure you have clear rules for when the different languages are spoken. That is especially important for very young children. The mother speaks 'mummy's language' with them and the father speaks 'daddy's language'. In that way, your child learns to associate a specific person with a specific language. That will help them sort out the languages in their 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'.

No matter whether your child grows up speaking one, two or three languages, what is most important is to keep talking to your child, be a good and patient listener, and give them encouragement!

Did you know that ...

only children who can hear well can 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, and ‘talking’ to themselves. If that isn’t the case, you should have your baby’s hearing tested again.
- Hearing-impaired babies also make sounds in the first few 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.

Useful tips

What you can do to help your child:

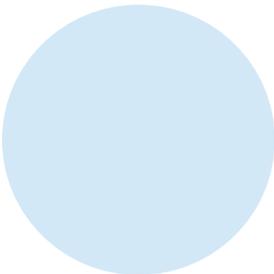
Observe your child, particularly after the sixth month. Do they react to sounds? Do they turn their head when you call their name?

Musical clocks and rattles are especially suited for attracting your baby's attention.

Talk to your baby as often and as much as possible. Then you'll be able to notice whether they can hear properly.

Imitate the sounds and coos your baby makes. Even while they're still very young, you should constantly tell your child what you're doing with them while you're doing it. Children of all ages love songs and nursery rhymes.

Don't forget to take your baby or toddler for a check-up, especially after an ear infection: you can go to the local parent advisory service or to your family doctor.



Did you know that ...

we use all our senses when learning to talk? Touching, seeing, grasping and physically experiencing things are just as important as hearing.

6. I can do that myself!

What the experts say:

- Hearing, seeing, touching, moving, grasping, sensing movement, experiencing gravity and lots of other things all help your baby to learn 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 they are allowed to grasp things. Tasting foods will help them learn the meaning of words like 'sweet' and 'sour'. They will figure out what corners and edges are when they start to crawl. Babies develop an understanding of the abstract concepts behind words by exploring the world around them.

Useful tips

What you can do to help your child:

Hold your baby in your arms as often as possible so that your child feels positive about being touched by you.

Let your baby play with different objects, touching them, clasp them and letting go of them. Give them something to chew on. Let your baby experience as many things as they can by themselves.

When your child is older, let them try out as many different activities as possible: crawling or running around at home, in the playground or in the garden, playing with sand and water, shouting and singing, helping you in the kitchen, setting the table, digging around and planting things in the garden. That way they will become independent at an early age, and that will help them at school too.

Did you know that ...

there is a connection between movement, playing, good nutrition, healthy teeth and your child's speech and language development?

7. I can do more than you think!

What the experts say:

- Children need to have lots of experience playing and otherwise being active. Providing children with opportunities to be active helps them learn how to speak properly. They should be allowed to jump, hop, walk, run, and dance. Language and movement go hand in hand.
- When children play, their movements become more refined, especially their fine motor skills, and as they do so their mouth and tongue movements also become more precise.
- Correct tooth alignment is important for a child to learn how to speak correctly. Good, intelligible pronunciation is part of speaking a language well.

Useful tips

What you can do to help your child:

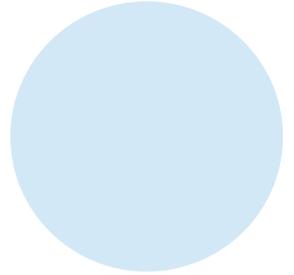
Let your child balance on a low wall, eat with their fingers, drink with a straw, blow cotton wool balls, etc. Take your child to the playground and into the countryside as often as you can.

Do handicrafts with your child and let them work with scissors. Children won't hurt themselves provided an adult is there to supervise. It helps them learn to control their movements and develop their imagination.

**Your child should not drink sugary drinks.
Otherwise they might become a habit.**

Make sure that your child's teeth are correctly aligned. You should not let them use a dummy after their third birthday.

It's important to give them healthy food and something to chew on.



Did you know that ...

talking and playing with your child daily can help them make enormous progress in learning how to speak?

8. Will you play with me?

What the experts say:

- The more you interact, talk and play with your child, the more they will consolidate structures and networks in their brain. These structures and networks are crucial for your child's language development and their learning at school.
- Regularly listening and actively using a language or languages helps your child assimilate the rules of grammar. You will be helping your child to learn vocabulary, explore the grammar and communicate correctly with others in those languages. Your child needs lots of input in each of their languages and needs not only to hear a lot but also use those languages actively themselves.

Useful tips

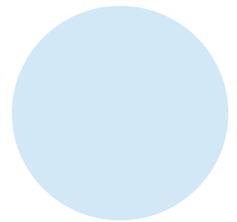
What you can do to help your child:

Talk and play with your child at an appropriate level. Talk directly to and with your child – at least fifteen minutes every day.

Also talk to them while they are performing everyday activities, e.g. taking off their shoes and coat, putting on slippers, drinking a cup of tea, being put to bed, etc. Instructions and orders are not enough.

Use varied language structures and expressions. Then your child will increase their vocabulary (for example, use different words to express the same ideas: beautiful, pretty, nice, etc.).

Nursery rhymes and songs are a great way for children of all ages to develop their language skills. If you can no longer remember the songs and nursery rhymes of your childhood, 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 them to repeat the correct word or phrase?

9. Just let me speak!

What the experts say:

- Being constantly corrected takes all the fun out of talking. A more effective technique is 'corrective repetition'.
- Children do not always show you what they can do. They often understand a lot, yet talk a lot less. Just like seeds, children need time to grow.
- When children grow up speaking two languages, one language may be more developed than the other. That may change in the course of time, depending on what is important in a certain stage of the child's life and the experiences they associate with a particular language. For example, bilingual children might lose interest in their native language the moment they start attending a German-speaking kindergarten and German-speaking friends become important to them.

Useful tips

What you can do to help your child:

Whenever your child says something wrong, repeat it casually the way it should be said. Don't force them to repeat the correct word or phrase.

Don't get upset if your child does not immediately start using a new word.

Be patient! Keep talking your native language with your child even if they answer you in another. When a child grows up with two languages, they may refuse to actively use one of them, even for quite a long time.

If your child is going through such a phase, do not pressure them. Give them as many opportunities as possible to actively use both languages.

Did you know that ...

reading stories aloud and discussing them is a very useful way to help your child's language development and prepare them for starting school?

10. Will you continue reading the story to me today?

What the experts say:

- Research shows that reading aloud to children in their early years has a beneficial effect on children's language development.
- Reading stories aloud and talking about them expands their vocabulary. They also create a good foundation for reading and writing because written language is different from spoken language. When you read aloud to your child, they are also learning the written language.
- Children who listen to stories and talk about them learn a lot of things that will later help them in school. For example, they learn to listen, concentrate, remember events, new words, new sentence patterns, etc.

Useful tips

What you can do to help your child:

Read picture books and storybooks aloud; read a little every day in the language or languages that you speak at home with your child.

Many libraries have picture books and story-books in various languages. Ask your local library whether they have books in your native language.

All children love rituals! Your child will too. Bedtime stories can become such a ritual. Children love hearing 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 stimulating 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 storytellers.

Did you know that ...

children learn best when playing or doing things with others rather than when sitting in front of the TV or the computer?

11. TV? No, thanks! It's much more fun when daddy and mummy play with me!

What the experts say:

- In order to learn a language, children need to understand the meaning of what is being said and not just hear and listen to sounds. In other words, they have to 'grasp' what they see and hear.
- A child only learns how to speak well when they have direct contact with other people: with their mother and father, brothers and sisters, with extended family members, and later with friends.
- We recommend watching good children's films with your child. Watching TV or playing computer games for hours on end is harmful. Children do not learn much from them.

Useful tips

What you can do to help your child:

Let your child take an active part in everyday life.

Give them opportunities to literally grasp new words with their hands. Activities such as letting your child help you cook and bake, play with water, sand and stones or modelling clay are much more suitable for fostering your child's development than TV.

Whenever your child watches TV, you should pick a film and discuss it with them afterwards. That way, your child will have a better understanding of what they are watching and will also learn new words.

You can borrow lots of good games from toy libraries to 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 playgroup or kindergarten?

12. I also want to be with other children!

What the experts say:

- It is important for your child to have a good command of German: for their everyday life, their success at school and for their future career.
- To learn German properly your child needs lots of encouragement and a variety of different opportunities to hear and speak the language. Friends who speak good German are an excellent source of motivation.
- Regular attendance at a playgroup or a kindergarten gives your child the time to consolidate their 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 they make use of every opportunity to practise the language.

Useful tips

What you can do to help your child:

Encourage your child whenever they want 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 playgroup or kindergarten from the age of 30–36 months. Children are usually mature enough by that age and love to make new friends and join in games and activities with other children.

Even when they are younger your children can be placed with a child-care service if you work or think that they 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 playgroup or kindergarten. Talk to them about that, make them curious, teach them new words that they will need in their new surroundings.

Tell your child what a great thing it is for them to be able to speak several languages.

What we would also like to share with you ...

Languages we don't invest in are lost. We need to practise and use a language so that we don't forget it.

Once your child goes to kindergarten, and later on at school, German will become an important language for them. So they need your encouragement and support. But don't forget to maintain your own language or the language you speak in the home.

At school, classes in native language and culture (Heimatliche Sprache und Kultur, HSK) offer a good opportunity to improve knowledge of the first language. Enquire about this opportunity and enrol your child.

You should also read newspapers and books and talk about new topics with your child! This will help you and your child to continue developing your language knowledge.

Encourage your child to read a lot – both in German and in their other languages.

Languages are an asset – all languages. Their value increases the better they are developed and maintained. A good command of languages is extremely important nowadays in professional life and in society at large.

The native languages of migrants living in St Gallen – Albanian, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Italian, Turkish, Portuguese, Tamil, and many others – will become increasingly important in the global economy. A good command of another language in addition to German gives your child greater professional opportunities.

Institutions providing counselling and other services for parents in St Gallen Canton.

In your commune

You can find information about local childminding services, playgroups and kindergartens from your commune (Gemeinde).

Association for children in eastern Switzerland (Otschweizer Verein für das Kind)

The association promotes the health and well-being of children by providing advice and support for mothers and fathers of pre-school children. In the advice sessions, mothers and fathers can ask all their questions about the health, nutrition, development and upbringing of their baby or infant. They also provide the opportunity for contacts with other parents.

www.ovk.ch

Consultations for parents and children aged 0–3 years

Parents that are concerned about the development of their young child or their behaviour can come in for a consultation. The child's needs will be clarified and new solutions put forward.

www.kjpd-sg.ch

Child protection centre in St Gallen

Fathers and mothers that feel overwhelmed by the demands of raising their young child and are reaching their limits can contact the Tatkräftig parenting hotline. This service provided by the child protection centre (Kinderschutzzentrum)

advises parents anonymously, confidentially and free of charge.

www.tatkraeftig.ch

Family guidance counselling

Family guidance counselling centres (Familienberatungsstellen) provide support with parenting issues and help you to find solutions in difficult situations, such as distress, hyperactivity, conflicts among siblings, problems interacting with peers, and so on.

www.sozialberatung.sg.ch

School psychologist

You can consult the school psychologist (Schulpsychologische Dienste) should you have any questions about psychological issues relating to your child's school or upbringing.

www.schulpsychologie-sg.ch (St Gallen Canton)

www.schulgesundheitsstadt.sg (St Gallen City)

Books and toys

Many towns have libraries (Bibliothek) and toy libraries (Ludothek) where you can rent children's books and toys or games. More and more libraries have books in various languages, such as the Interkulturelle Bibliothek der Freihandbibliothek in St Gallen.

www.freihandbibliothek.ch

www.ludosg.ch

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