



Engelska

Give your child a good start – promote language development!

Information on language development for
parents and guardians of children aged 0-6

Develop your child's language skills!

Did you know that children start to develop the ability to use language right from birth? This means that parents and guardians play a vital role in children's language development. You can make a big difference by being curious and receptive and by encouraging your child to use any and all languages they know.

In this publication, you can learn about:

- how language development in children works
- your role as a parent or guardian
- the importance of preschool for language development.

With this publication, the Swedish National Agency for Education seeks to inspire and inform parents and guardians and to provide tools you can use to promote your children's language development.

Children's language development starts early

Language development begins long before a child says their first words. For deaf and hearing-impaired children, language development starts before the child has signed their first signs. Research shows the importance of efforts to encourage language development at an early age, when the foundations of language skills are being formed.

Strong language skills are essential for your child's learning – in preschool, during their school years and throughout the rest of their lives. Language development is greatly influenced by the linguistic stimulation the child receives and the attitudes towards language that the child encounters. It is therefore important for your child to see, hear and experience language in their day-to-day life.

Through language, children learn to understand themselves, to interpret their environment and to organise their experiences. Moreover, the ability to express oneself is important for active participation in society and is thus a democratic right.

Children learn language from behavioural gestures of the adults around them, such as

- making eye contact and guess what the child wishes to say
- listening to the child
- repeating words the child says
- extending the conversation by adding new words
- using gestures, mimicry and body language to reinforce what is said
- rhyming, chanting and singing
- introducing books early
- discussing pictures with the child
- reading and telling stories to the child
- talking with the child, rather than telling them
- creating opportunities for play and communication with other children.

Parents/guardians play an important role

You are very important in your child's language development. Talk, read and interact with your child. This is how children discover early on that communication is meaningful. Use the language(s) in which you find it easiest to express yourself. Deaf children should be spoken to in language(s) they can access effortlessly, that is, the language(s) available to them.

Read aloud to your child

Spend time reading to your child each day. The time spent reading can depend on your child's age and level of development. For younger children, brief stories and simple board books are ideal. As your child gets older, you can read longer stories and choose picture books with more text. Later, you can switch to reading chapter books. Talk to your child about what you have read and share what you think. The library lends children's books in Swedish and many other languages free of charge. Many libraries also organise story hours and other activities for children, sometimes in several languages.



Attend open preschool

Open preschools can be found in many localities across Sweden. Open preschools provide a meeting place for children accompanied by their parents or guardians, and they are free of charge. Open preschools are primarily intended for the youngest children who have not yet started preschool. At open preschool, children can participate group activities with other children and adults, developing their socialisation and language skills.



Inform the preschool about your child's language skills

Families speaking several languages at home should inform preschool staff. Together with preschool staff, brainstorm what can be done to support your child's language development. Share with staff what interests your child and how they communicate. This helps preschools to plan and organise their instruction.

Encourage your child to use any and all languages they know

Create opportunities for your child to encounter people fluent in languages you speak at home. It is valuable for your child's Swedish-language development to encounter Swedish-speaking people in different contexts. Visit playgrounds and libraries or participate in sports where your child can encounter other children and adults who speak your child's language.



The importance of preschools

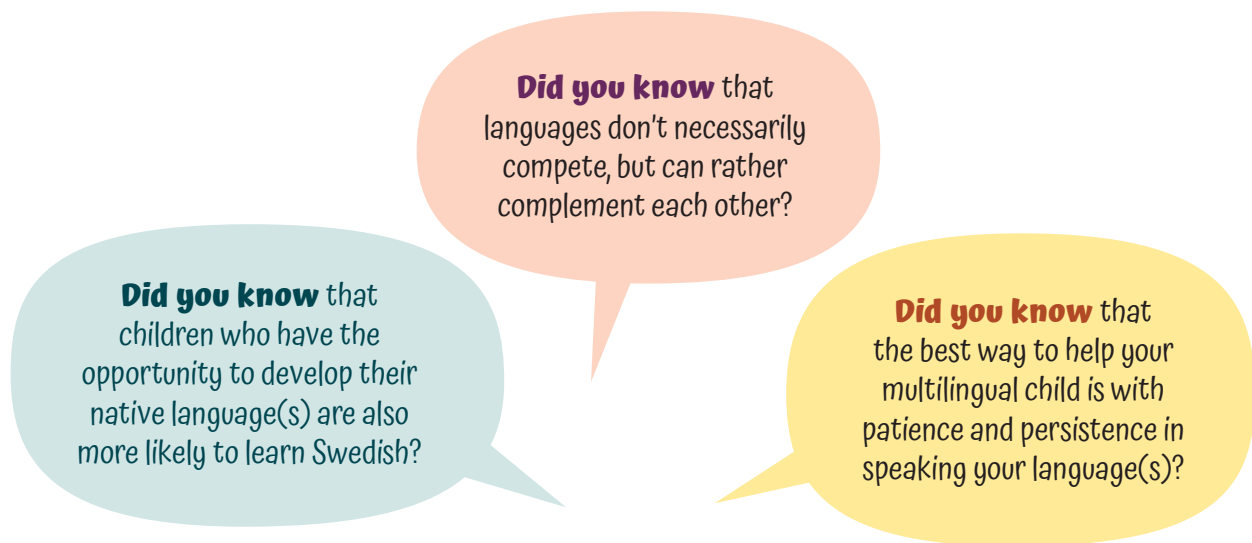
Numerous studies show that the language skills of children attending preschool are better than those of other children. Preschool education gives children the opportunity to enrich their language skills and vocabulary as well as their ability to communicate in diverse contexts.

All children must be offered a stimulating language environment

Language, learning and identity development are interlinked. This means that children need to think, learn and communicate with others. The working methods, environment and materials of each preschool must be adapted to the needs of the children. All children attending preschool must be offered a stimulating linguistic environment where preschool staff are role models in communication. This takes place in preschool activities both indoors and outdoors, such as playing, eating and dressing.

All children must have the opportunity to learn Swedish

Preschool is the first step in the Swedish education system and must lay the foundations of the learning that continues through their school years and throughout the rest of their lives. Preschools must place great emphasis on stimulating children's language development in Swedish. This can be done by capitalising on their curiosity and interests. This includes children who are native Swedish speakers, children who are non-native Swedish speakers and children who are entitled to instruction in national minority languages or Swedish sign language. The Swedish language is a prerequisite for children to learn to read, write and count in Swedish. Preschools therefore play an important role, both as a meeting place and in preparing children to become active citizens in society.



Children must have the opportunity to use any and all languages they know

Preschools gather people from different cultures, and it is common for the children to speak several languages. As society becomes increasingly globalised and intercultural, multilingualism is a skill and a resource for learning. Having knowledge of several languages and an understanding of different cultures provides an advantage in professional life. When children have the opportunity to use any and all languages they know, the languages enrich each other. Children gain additional opportunities to develop their thinking and learning.

Multilingual children often use words from different languages in different contexts. This means they are using all the languages they know to make themselves understood. This is both natural and practical. It is common for multilingual children to find it easier to discuss certain topics in one language than in another. It is also common for multilingual children to prefer to use one or another language at certain times.

How much Swedish your child learns may depend on how often they have the opportunity to speak the language. This makes it important for your child to regularly attend preschool. Children who hear and speak Swedish on a regular basis can learn the language, regardless of whether it is their native language.



Children who are deaf, hearing-impaired, or who use sign language for other reasons must be given the opportunity to develop their ability in Swedish sign language. Swedish and Swedish sign language are necessary to communicate, to be understood and to participate on an equal footing. This ensures that society functions on the collective as well as the individual level.

All children must be read to and have conversations

Reading aloud, telling stories and engaging in conversation are some ways that preschool staff promote children's language development. Children must be given opportunities to retell stories and talk to other children and adults. Preschools offer literature in Swedish as well as other languages. It is important that children's different environments and cultures are visible at the preschool – in activities, books and images – to ensure that they can recognise themselves.

Preschool staff and parents/guardians must work together

The school must have regular discussions with you, the parent or guardian, about your child's well-being, development and learning. This includes discussions about your child's language development. A well-functioning collaboration between preschool staff and parents or guardians based on an inter-cultural approach promotes children's language development.

Native language at preschool

Children who are non-native Swedish speakers must also have the opportunity to develop their native language. With support at preschool and at home, multilingual children can learn their native language(s) as well as Swedish. Preschools must also ensure that different cultures are made visible in their activities and programmes.

National minority languages in preschool

Children who belong to national minorities must be supported in their development of their national minority language. They must also be supported in developing their cultural identity. Certain municipalities are administrative districts for Finnish, Meänkieli and Sami. If a child lives in one of these municipalities, that child is entitled to preschool education wholly or to a significant extent in the minority language. Preschools must also help children to learn the national minority languages Yiddish and Romany.

As regards open preschool, wherever there is a demand for Finnish, Meänkieli or Sami, municipalities must endeavour to offer all or a substantial part of their open preschool programming in that language.

Swedish sign language in preschools

Deaf or hearing-impaired children and children requiring Swedish sign language for other reasons (e.g., immediate family members who are deaf), are entitled to support for learning Swedish sign language and to a conducive learning environment based on their circumstances and needs.

Did you know that children start to develop the ability to use language right from birth? This means that parents and guardians play an important role in children's language development. It is therefore important that you are curious and receptive and that you encourage your child to use any and all languages they know.

Numerous studies show that the language skills of children attending preschool are better than those of other children. Preschool education must give children the tools to enrich their language skills and vocabulary as well as the ability to communicate in various contexts and for different purposes.

Language development is the basis of lifelong learning.

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