

This document has been developed by members of the BISS team and represents a collation of our professional and practical knowledge and experience. The materials have been developed to supplement BISS strategies.

## Encouraging English as a Second Language (ESL) in Children

Child care professionals rely heavily on the knowledge that children understand most words they say. This enhances social interaction and successful activities in an early childhood environment.

When there is no or little understanding between a child, the other children and adults it is frustrating for all. The child is anxious to please and fit in and the adult keen to support the inclusion of the child in the best way possible.

This document aims to provide opportunities to bridge the language gap between you and an ESL child, facilitate communication and the building of the relationships within the children services environment.

### 1. Promote

Build learning opportunities into your day to day activities and provide openings for the child to hear, observe and use the language.

- ✓ **Focus:** Instead of “*Would you like to go to the toilet?*” Say “*Toilet?*” – make it easy and increase the use of sentences and additional words in line with the child’s ability and use of the language
- ✓ **Demonstrate:** Physically take the child to the toilet to show them the room, the toilet and repeat the word a few times, making sure your facial gestures are happy and pleasant.
- ✓ **Involve:** Wait for the child to try and say it and reward with a smile or nod if they make an attempt. If they don’t say anything after about 10 seconds, just move on to the next part of the day.
- ✓ **Repeat:** If you get a chance and you’re passing by the toilet with the child throughout the day, just get the attention of the child and say “toilet”, while pointing at the toilet. You don’t need to wait for any response from the child, unless they seem like they are trying to say it.
- ✓ **Check:** “Does everyone understand?” or “Do you understand?” these questions encourage ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answers or a nod of the head from a child who is eager to please. In a group environment the child might just follow the answer given by other children. Try to ask questions like ‘Can you show me...?’; ‘Where is the....?’

### 2. Enhance

The more creative, adaptable and sensory stimulating the use of the language is the faster the child will retain the newly learned words and gain confidence in using them!

- ✓ **Gesture** - get the children to say/guess what you are doing “*washing hands*”, “*putting apron on*” and then say “*now you*”.
- ✓ **Mime** – use facial expressions when you try to communicate feelings such as when happy or pleased have a big smile on your face!

- ✓ **Visual Aids** – use language cards and pictures to reinforce what you are saying or books with pictures and stories that reinforce the learned words.
- ✓ **Music** – use songs to reinforce the learned words. Simple songs such as ‘When you’re happy...’, ‘Head, shoulders, knees...’ reinforce learned words.
- ✓ **Arts and Craft** – encourage arts and craft activities in which the words learned are being used such as painting a picture of a child playing outside will give a lot of opportunity to repeat the words learned and give a ‘visual ‘ aid that the child has made him/herself.
- ✓ **Sensory experiences** – use the experience of touch and smell to reinforce what has been learned. Games such as tasting games will encourage the use of words such as sweet, sour, dry ... Any situation that encourages the touching of materials and objects can be used to encourage the use of words such as soft, hard, ...

### 3. Facilitate

Rather than doing the ‘talking’ for the ESL child when he/she experience challenges in the group environment use your leadership to devise situations that allow the child to gain confidence in using the language and socialising with others.

- ✓ **Teach** the correct words to help them overcome the challenge. For instance; ‘can I play with you?’ is used and encouraged by reading a story activity with a book that is about playing etc.
- ✓ **Encourage confidence** by reinforcing that it is fantastic to speak different languages and showing an interest in their language by persuading the child to share their first language with the other children in the group (reversal of the situation shows that the child is not alone in not knowing everybody’s language). This can be done by asking the child if they know a common children’s song in their language and want to sing it, asking for the ‘translation’ of a word into their first language and then proceeding to teach it to the other children using the same methods described in this document.
- ✓ **Create opportunities.** Human nature is to ‘help’ and ‘support’. We often ‘take over’ to make it easier for other people to get where they are going. In the context of supporting the development of ESL we need to create situations that allow the learner the time to use the language. Some avenues of encouraging an environment that will allow the use of spoken language are:
  - Doing it together
  - Watching you do it first
  - Drawing/painting it
  - Guessing it through mime
  - Singing it/chanting it
- ✓ **Use of Positive Reinforcement** can be provided by repeating what the child has said when using English by means of visual reinforcers such as nodding and a big smile when doing so.