

LENA's 14 Talking Tips are research-based techniques for increasing early interaction. **Adult-child interactions are one of the most important factors driving brain growth for young children, and learning more than one language has even more benefits!** Use these strategies to help the dual language learners in your care:

- Feel a sense of belonging.
- See you respect their home language(s) and culture.
- Experience more teacher-child interaction.
- Appreciate the value of speaking more than one language.

There's no better way to understand a child's needs than to talk with their family. Ask questions related to language preferences and cultural traditions, and be intentional about using this information to inform your actions.

1. Talk about what you're doing and thinking.

Learn a few key words and phrases in every child's home language. Encourage everyone in the classroom to use them.

- "Time to change your *pañal*. Your diaper!"
- "Hello, it's great to see you! *Nǐ hǎo!*"
- "Thank you, that's so nice! *Shukran!*"



2. Comment on what they're doing or looking at.

Make a plan to use consistent, simple language when describing everyday routines. Repeat those key words and phrases often.

- "It is time to *line* up. I am going to stand *behind* my friend. Let's *line* up now!"



3. Name things that they're interested in.

Add labels, signs, and pictures to objects and spaces. Include every child's home language. Use these visual cues to support conversation.

4. Get down to their level: face to face.

Good things happen when you simply spend time together. It doesn't matter what language you speak! Children understand the value of your attention.

5. Touch, hug, hold.

Every child, family, and culture shows affection in different ways. Sometimes children don't want to be touched — consider offering other ways to let them know that you care: a wave, high-five, fist bump, or something else of their choosing.

6. Tune in and respond to what they look at, do, and say.

Listen to their words but also watch for gestures, eye contact, physical proximity, and other nonverbal cues. Even if you don't understand, show a child that you care about what they say.

- "I see you looking at the barn. Would you like to show me some animals? Let's see who is in the barn today."





7. Wait for their response.

Young children need extra time to process language. This may make whole group lessons especially challenging for some dual language learners. Replace whole group with small group activities, where teachers can practice patience and children have more time to communicate their ideas.

8. Imitate them, and add words.

Speak clearly and at an appropriate speed. When adding words, be intentional with your word choice. Match the complexity of your sentence to the children's level of understanding.

- "La flor es bonita. *It smells nice!*"

9. Make faces, use gestures.

Nonverbal cues are just as important as verbal ones, especially for dual language learners. Point to each word as you read. Be as expressive as possible.

10. Take turns — don't do all the talking.

Make it clear to children that conversations can happen in any language or combination of languages. Regardless of what you say, encourage children to respond in whatever language they prefer. Pay attention to their gestures. Think of a response, even if you don't fully understand.

- "Tell me more about your picture!"
- "是云! 你可以在底部看到我的房子!"
- "Oh, I really like the color of the house!"



11. Repeat and add to what they say and do.

Try to repeat their phrasing and add on in the language you know best. Speaking the language you know very well provides children with a deeper, fuller language experience.

- "*Le ballon!* The ball! You have a *little* ball. We can roll the ball together."

12. Follow their lead, do what interests them.

Families can help you understand more about a child's interests and favorite topics. Use that information to develop play-based projects that focus on language interactions and exploring new vocabulary through natural repetition.



13. Encourage them, be positive.

Support child-to-child interactions during free choice time or pretend play. Build language skills by providing prompts, modeling conversation, and encouraging conversation between peers.

- "It looks like she wants to play with you! What can you say to her?"

14. Be silly! Relax and have fun!

Laughter is a universal language! Use music, singing, and chanting! Add movement! Ask families what activities bring their child joy. If they are comfortable, ask a child or family member to teach the class their favorite song in their home language.