



# Language in the Home

## Introduction

All living languages are typically passed on by parents, family members and/or caregivers speaking the language to children in the home. This natural process is known as *intergenerational language transmission*. The health of a language depends on it being passed on naturally to children in the home.

The residential school system directly attacked this process by removing children from the home and preventing natural language transmission. As a result, most First Nations languages in B.C. are not being passed on in the home, though this is starting to change with parents who participate in programs like Mentor-Apprentice and make an effort to speak the language



*Qaqaualas Language Nest*

at home with their children. The use of First Nations languages by families within the home represents one of the biggest challenges to language revitalization, but only a return to First Nations language use in the home will ensure the full revitalization of these languages.

## Why should First Nations languages be spoken in the home?

Language learning needs to occur in the home so children have the opportunity to learn the language in a natural way and at an age when language learning is easiest (under five years old).

“A crucial element affecting the long-term viability of a language is simply how many people speak it at home. The language that is most often spoken in the home is more likely to become the mother tongue of the next generation.”

- Mary Jane Norris (2009)

## HOW TO BRING LANGUAGE INTO YOUR HOME

- Label household items with vocabulary, phrases and actions associated with each item (for example: in the bathroom, post notes that translate words like “tap” and “sink” and practical phrases like “I am washing my hands”).
- Learn basic phrases in your language that you use every day. Make a list, record a proficient speaker saying them, practice them, and use them.
- Invite a fluent speaker to your home on a regular basis for language time.
- Create time for family language learning using tools such as FirstVoices.
- Speak the language *to* and *with* your children, not at them.
- Create rituals in the language, such as getting ready for bed or setting the dinner table.
- Have fun and be patient with yourself! Stay committed to learning the language; it will get easier with practice.

It is also important for First Nations children to identify with their language and culture. Even if children are learning the language at school or through community language programs, they will not maintain proficiency if the language is not used in their everyday lives. Creating opportunities for children to learn and use their heritage language in the home will strengthen the language, culture, identity, and wellness of First Nations communities.

## What can you do to bring language into your home?

The more children are exposed to the language at home, the more likely they are to actively use it. Even if you are not fluent in your language, you should consider using what you know at home with your children. Don't worry about being a second language speaker because your children will still be able to learn the language from you. Increase language use in the home by creating family language plans

### ACTIVITIES TO DO IN YOUR LANGUAGE

- **Play games:** Try playing UNO or bingo in your language.
- **Reading or storytelling:** If you do not have books in your language, cover up the English in picture books and talk about the pictures in your language.
- **Traditional arts, crafts and skills:** Try berry picking, beading, or carving.
- **Music:** Learn to sing traditional songs or make your own songs.
- **Cooking and eating:** Talk about food, how it tastes and how to cook.
- **Chores:** Wash dishes, clean the house, do laundry, and other chores.
- **Go outside:** Be active with sports and outdoor activities on the land.

that set goals and make language learning a fun activity for the whole family. Include community-based language programs if they are available.

Use your language as often as possible. Being consistent will increase your comfort with speaking your language in different situations. Once you have mastered one area of language use, such as cooking, then you can move on to the next!

### KEY TERMS

- **Intergenerational language transmission:** the natural process of passing on language by speaking it to children.
- **Family language plan:** a specific plan for language use that determines the who, how, when and where of language use in the home.
- **Community-based language programs:** programs offered in the community that provide language learning opportunities.
- **Second language speaker:** an individual who has learned or is learning another language in addition to the first language he or she learned in childhood.

### WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE?

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