Witsuwit’en Hibikinic bï Yets’olhdic
(Let’s Speak Witsuwit’en)
Language Teaching Tips

1. **Give the gift of language.** Teaching your family or community members Witsuwit’en is a gift that can keep on giving. It takes time, passion and commitment, but the rewards are great. It promotes closer relationships, a sense of pride and identity and encourages others to teach and learn. This makes our communities and nation better places for everyone and ensures our cultural survival. Give generously.

2. **Greet learners in Witsuwit’en and help them respond.** Many learners have a hard time getting past basic greetings. If you help them respond, it will build their confidence.

3. **Repeat, Repeat, Repeat. Patience is a language teaching virtue.** Babies need to have words repeated to them often to learn how to speak. This happens more quickly with children than adults. Adults may require between 30 to 50 repetitions to retain a word or sentence. Repeating yourself constantly can be difficult. Though you may feel like a broken record, remember that you are helping to create new speakers and build their confidence. This is what’s needed to revitalise our language.

4. **Say it loud, say it slow.** Language learners need to hear all the sounds you are making and often. Many Witsuwit’en sounds don’t exist in English. This will be challenging to learners who only know English. Sounds can be lost when speaking at a regular pace. Slowly breaking down what you are saying in smaller parts is helpful. Describing where the sounds occur in your mouth can help them gauge what their mouths should be doing. Speed up gradually when learners are progressing.

5. **Point and name.** During everyday activities, point and name the things you want or what you want learners to do. This will help them learn and understand what you are saying. Repeat until they get it or become frustrated. Frustration is rarely motivating. If they get the word, then teach them the sentence you used. These are baby steps towards conversation.

6. **Positive praise.** When learners succeed, offer kind, encouraging words. The same is true when they make mistakes. People often lose their desire to learn when they receive negative feedback. Instead of saying “Say it right,” use “Try again” in a soft, encouraging tone. This will be sound more motivating. If a learner is stuck, you can also say “Let’s practice that again later.” Teach learners Witsuwit’en expressions that mean “Well said” or “Well done.” Be gentle and avoid negative comments at all costs. Losing a future speaker can make all the difference in our language’s survival. Positive praise will create positive relationships, confidence and trust.

7. **Make it fun.** If learning is fun, it’s more motivating. Sharing funny expressions will help learners feel comfortable. If you accidentally laugh about a mispronounced word, which often changes the meaning in Witsuwit’en, explain what you are laughing about and reassure the learners that you aren’t laughing at them. This is a good opportunity to teach about words that sound the same, but mean something entirely different. Learners can laugh about their mistakes when they feel confident. Until then, it may turn them off learning.

8. **Translate little bits at a time.** It’s easier for someone learning to connect Witsuwit’en words and English meanings when they happen close together.

9. **Speak Witsuwit’en at home with your family.** The home is the best and most natural place to teach and learn the language. The more you expose your family members to every day language, the more motivated they will be to learn. Misunderstandings will be uncomfortable, but try to push through them. Pointing or acting things out can help increase understanding. Translating a word or sentence and going back to Witsuwit’en can also help alleviate the situation. Have Witsuwit’en only dinners, cook together in Witsuwit’en, do simple tasks together. This will encourage short conversations. Teach words or sentences for feelings to have more personal conversations.

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Witsuwit’en Language and Culture Society Office and Archive
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Open Tuesdays and Thursdays
8:30am to 4:30pm