

Top 20 Strategies to Support Children Learning EAL who are New to English

Find Out

All children arrive in your class with their own personalities and different experiences of the world. Find out as much as you can about their background so you have a better understanding of them as people. Try and find out the answers to questions like: Have they recently arrived in the area or in the country? Where have they moved from? Which language(s) do they speak? Do they have any experience of education? If children have been in your setting a little while, speak to the staff who have previously taught them to ensure a smooth transition into your class.

Value Home Language(s)

Try and learn a few key phrases in the child's home language, such as 'hello', 'good morning', 'yes' and 'no', and display these around your classroom. Seeing and hearing a familiar language will help the child and their parents/carers to feel welcome. If you are aware of a new starter who will be joining your class soon, try and teach your class some key phrases too. Once the child has settled in and if they are happy to, provide them with opportunities to be the teacher or expert, where they can teach the class some key words, a song or how to count to 10.

Survival Vocabulary

Ensure children are able to communicate their basic needs with you, such as needing the toilet or feeling poorly. Consider strategies such as communication fans or hand signals to help with this. Also, think about how you will communicate simple instructions to them, such as 'sit down', 'listen' or 'line up'. You could use picture cards, communication fans, hand signals or actions. Establishing a communication channel early on will support both the child and staff members to build a positive relationship.

Buddy Up

Children will understandably feel anxious in a new environment, especially if it is their first experience of being in an educational setting. Help the child by pairing them up with other children who will be good role models. Perhaps the buddies can help them by showing them around the school, helping them learn routines and showing them where things belong. It's important to choose a few buddies as this means the responsibility does not just lie with one child. It will also give the new starter several different language role models.

Talk

Listening to others talking and providing opportunities for children to talk is very important. Talking in partners or threes will help children to gradually build up their confidence. It will also enable them to hear English being spoken by their peers. Children may be reluctant to speak in front of larger groups or a whole class straight away so be mindful of this and consider other ways children could participate in the lesson.

Praise Participation

Always praise children for their participation - perhaps they've answered the register, joined in with circle time or spoken in front of the class for the first time. These may seem like small things, but they are big achievements.

Build Vocabulary

If children are new to English, start with the basics. Teach them vocabulary that includes everyday objects, feelings, parts of the body and colours. If children have more vocabulary, consider how you teach language specific to particular subjects and topics which they may be unfamiliar with. Perhaps provide them with a word mat or a word bank, or encourage them to record new vocabulary themselves by letting them make their own word book or glossary.

Pre-teach

Pre-teaching is a useful strategy as it gives children a head start on topics or lessons which are coming up. It also gives children a chance to familiarise themselves with vocabulary, an idea/concept or a story, etc. before they come across them in the lesson. Letting children use resources from the pre-teach session in the actual lesson will help children link their learning. Pre-teaching activities could include introducing and playing games with new vocabulary, watching a video or reading a story.

Visual Clues

Provide children with as many visual clues as possible. Use a visual timetable to help children see what is coming up so they become familiar with routines. Also have a visual version of the school/class rules and examples of children following them displayed in your classroom, which you can easily point to when needed. If reading a story, perhaps give children a copy of the books or pictures/puppets of the characters. Use word or topic mats, topic displays, graphic organisers or concept maps to help children link their learning.

Model and Scaffold

As educators, we model and scaffold all the time. This extends children's learning and builds on what they already know. It is important that children learning EAL always have the language modelled to them - for example, if children give one word answers, praise their effort and model a simple sentence to show them how they could extend their vocabulary. Use scaffolds, such as sentence starters, to help them structure their responses and answers.

Building Sentences

Encourage children to think about their sentence and give them lots of opportunities to orally rehearse it, before they try and write it. To help with sentence structure, children could also write each word of their sentence on a separate card and then use all the cards to physically build their sentence. Include punctuation on separate cards as well so children can practise how to use it accurately. Teach children different sentence starters so they learn to use a variety of these.

Recordable Audio Resources

There are lots of great recordable audio resources available, such as whiteboards, photo albums and pens. Children enjoy being able to record and play back their own voices and it may also help them develop confidence to speak in larger groups. Some resources also enable you to pre-load content in different languages, which children especially enjoy listening to and are a good learning tool.

Barrier Games

Barrier games are great for supporting children with developing their speaking and listening skills. They also encourage children to extend their vocabulary and are particularly useful for practising prepositions and positional language. If you are struggling to find a suitable barrier, just ask the children to sit back to back.

Comprehension

Provide children with lots of opportunities to develop comprehension skills. This will help them to contextualise things and understand meaning. Looking at pictures and discussing what they can see and asking questions is a good starting point. As their reading develops, move on to simple sentences and then simple texts.

Graphic Organisers

Think about how the information you give out in class is presented. Consider using graphic organisers, which can break down the information and present it in a more visual way. Also think about giving children graphic organisers to record their learning. This may seem less daunting to them than a page full of empty lines.

Displays

Think about having a whole-class display with all kinds of information about members of the class (including staff) on. Think about including family, likes and dislikes, languages spoken, favourite subjects, etc. Use your display to celebrate and value diversity. Also consider a display that values different phonetic scripts and languages.

Dual Language Resources

Explore sharing some dual language books with the children. These could include stories and bilingual dictionaries, which are a particularly useful way of developing children's vocabulary. Sending children home with these books is a good way to involve parents and carers in their child's learning. It is also valuable for all the children in the class to see and hear stories in a variety of languages. Consider inviting children, other members of staff or parents and carers in your setting to share stories in a range of languages.

Engage Parents and Carers

Try and involve parents and carers in school life as much as possible. Ensure they feel welcome in school, are familiar with important information and are introduced to key members of staff. You could involve parents and carers in their child's learning by sending visual word mats, key words, bilingual dictionaries and dual language books home. Sharing photos of their child's learning at Parents' Evening is another good way to help parents and carers feel involved.

Research

Educational settings are most likely to have someone who can advise you on supporting children that are learning EAL. This may be an Inclusion Manager, EAL Lead or EAL Coordinator. Find out which person has a similar role in your setting and speak to them. Most Local Authorities also have a department which specialises in EAL. Some Local Authorities may provide related courses and training or may have a resource lending library. They may also have consultants who can come into your setting and offer support. Find out what support your setting and Local Authority offers. NALDIC is the National Subject Association for EAL and is a good source of information too.

Be Patient!

As you know, children are all different and so will acquire language and develop understanding and confidence at different rates. Be patient, put yourself in their shoes and think about how you would feel in their situation.