

LearnEnglish Family



*learning
together is fun!*



**Helping your child to learn English
– practical tips**



English sessions

Young children learn English differently from most adults. Most have an innate ability to pick up English while taking part in activities, by making sense of what they are doing and picking up the adult's language that accompanies the activity.

You can find out more in the British Council booklet 'How young children learn English as another language', available on the parents pages of the LearnEnglish Kids website.

Planned English sessions

You can plan regular sessions which will usually take place:

- at home
- on regular days
- for about ten to twenty minutes adjusted to fit your child's increasing English ability and ability to concentrate
- as a planned programme that reviews and builds on known activities and introduces new ones.

Short English sessions

These are more informal and can take place:

- any place – in the car, at bathtime, in a supermarket queue
 - any time
 - in response to a mood or special experience.
- As your child's English ability increases, short English sessions tend to occur more frequently. Once your child understands more English, you may include an English phrase in a home language conversation.





Planning English sessions

Programmes should follow the same structure each time, as knowing what to expect lightens stress and enables children to concentrate their efforts on picking up English.

Basic programme

- **Warm up** – rhymes, counting or singing to get used to hearing English and making the different sounds.
- **New language presentation** – re-present and add onto previous language and then introduce new language.
- **Activities** – game, craft, family activity.
- **Ending** – sharing picture books.
- **Follow-up** – such as adding a drawing to the English corner.
- **Involving the family** – showing work, singing a new song, saying a new rhyme or playing a game together, if there is time.

Introducing new materials or games

Effectiveness of materials depends on how you bring them to life. Adapt them and personalise them to match your child's needs and interests, which makes it easier for your child to absorb the new language.

Home-made or customised materials are often more effective as they fit language needs better, especially in the early stages of learning. Making materials together at home adds something special, including a feeling of achievement.



Records

Keep a written record of your sessions together, as it helps you to see what you have done, what you can plan for the next one and evaluate what you have done over a period of time.

Keeping it going

If your child says 'it's too difficult, I don't want to do it', don't give in and don't switch into home language. Quietly change to an easy-to-play game you know they have enjoyed. Have fun and if possible make sure your child wins. It is important that the English session ends with your child 'feeling good' about him or herself and learning English.

Later, it may be good to discuss with your child why they found it difficult. Consider what you could change next time, such as the amount of new material or how it was presented. In the meantime, go back to using easier materials for several sessions to help them regain their confidence.

English corner or English table

An English corner (or table) provides a focus for anything related to English sessions. It is the display and storage place for:

- games
- a mini-library of picture books
- displays of English culture such as pictures, flags, etc.
- displays of drawings, home-made books or craft work.



Ideas for activities

Craft activities tend to be best when they have a purpose.

- **Celebrating family birthdays and festivals**

Making birthday cards is a fun activity. Birthdays and family festivals are good occasions to give small shows and to play games with family and friends who also speak English.

- **Collage pictures**

Cut out photos relating to themes such as 'five blue things', 'where I want to go on holiday' or 'what I would like for my birthday', sport, and weather.

You can personalise these pictures by getting your child to add a drawing of him or herself or the family hidden in the picture.

- **Simple puppets**

Speaking through a puppet helps if your child is a little shy speaking English. Make simple puppets from an oval-shaped piece of card and a stick secured by tape. Make the puppet come alive: 'My name is ...I am six'. This can lead on to making puppet shows with invitations, programmes and tickets.

Family activities

Switching to use English for family activities works well if your child feels there is a reason to use English - packing a bag for a holiday or making a typical English dish copying a recipe from an English cookbook. Try decorating some biscuits with different faces.

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Rhymes and songs

Rhymes exist in most cultures and from a very young age most children seem to be able to pick them up and enjoy saying them aloud, especially when they are supported and encouraged.

You can find out more in the British Council booklet 'Learning English through sharing rhymes', available on the parents pages of the LearnEnglish Kids website. You will also find a selection of rhymes to listen to.

You can use rhymes within your English sessions:

- warm up by saying one or two rhymes your child knows
- introduce a new rhyme, once you feel your child has warmed up – explain it and then repeat it
- at the next English session say the new rhyme and let your child, if they seem ready, join in with the actions or say some words or phrases
- over the next few sessions build up your child's confidence, step-by-step, to say the rhyme themselves by encouraging them to add:
 - the final word to a line
 - then the final phrase
 - then a line
 - then another line until they can say a complete simple rhyme with a little prompting from you.
- end every rhyme session by saying a well-known favourite rhyme.

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Rhyme cards

In the early stages of learning it is fun to make rhyme cards of rhymes your child knows. Write out or print out the rhyme on a card and let your child decorate it. Store it in the English corner so that, in their own time, they can take it out and look at it as they say the rhyme aloud to themselves.

Rhyme books

When you have made five or six rhyme cards, photocopy them to make a book of rhymes for your child. A book is easy to carry around and they may want to take it in the car, to school, to bed or to show it to others.

Songs

Introduce new songs in English sessions. You can gradually build up a selection of songs you can sing together, along with a CD or MP3 player. **You can find a selection of songs on the LearnEnglish Kids website.**

Many traditional songs can be adapted to fit different activities and circumstances. Adapting is fairly easy to do once children know the tune. For example, 'if you're happy and you know it' can be changed to 'if you're hungry and you know it, eat an apple' or 'if you're dirty and you know it, wash your hands'. Adaptations like these can add fun to daily home routines.

You can also use actions or props to help bring a song to life.

Alphabet Song [to the tune of Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star]

1. Make cards for the 26 capital letters and 26 small letters.
2. Before you sing, put the small letter cards, writing face-up, on the table.
3. Sing the song once and the second time, as you all sing a letter, each person in turn picks up the matching card.
4. Later do the same for the big letters and finally pick up two cards each time, the big and small letters.



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Sharing books

When selecting picture books to share with your child, focus on those with limited, clear text that are engaging and fun to read.

You can find out more in the British Council booklet 'Learning English through sharing picture books', available on the parents pages of the LearnEnglish Kids website.

Selecting books

When you are selecting books ask yourself:

- Is the text short – about five or six double pages? If more, you need to introduce the story over a number of English sessions.
- Is the print clear?
- Are the illustrations interesting and easy to understand?
- Does the book have some interaction in the text (e.g. a refrain) or novelty interaction through flaps, etc?
- Do you like it and can you transfer your enjoyment to your child?

Look out for DVDs of storybook characters. They can be useful, but are most effective if you watch them together at first, making the experience interactive.



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Reading aloud

- Practise reading the picture book aloud and decide how you are going to bring the story to life.
- Introduce some of the new words before reading the book.
- The first time you introduce a new book, be ready to whisper a translation of any word that your child does not already know or cannot work out from the pictures.
- As you read, point to each word in turn so your child begins to get used to looking at the shape of the words.
- Try to read books in the same way each time, as this will make picking up the English easier.
- Try not to introduce a book you don't like. Your child will soon detect how you feel and reflect your attitudes.
- When your child becomes familiar with a story, encourage them to join in by pausing to let them finish off phrases or sentences.
- Try to avoid asking too many questions; you might spoil the magic of the book.

Making your own story books

After your child has shared many books with you, they might like to make their own story book:

1. Staple together some paper to make a short blank book.
2. Discuss the possible content – theme, characters, location, etc, but ensure that the book is created from their ideas.
3. Ask them to draw some pictures and tell you the story and you can then write the text if they are not confident doing this.
4. Add their book to your collection and read and enjoy it together.



Playing games

Playing games adds excitement and fun to learning English and supports children's holistic learning and development.

Playing games may even change the attitudes of some children who find learning English difficult as it gives them a chance to win. In playing games, unlike in many other activities in English, success is not only measured by how well you can speak English.

Types of games

Games can be loosely grouped into:

- **starting games** – quick games used to select one person for a leader or chaser
- **physical games** that involve movement and space
- **card games**
- **board games**

Starting games

These are quick to organise and get a result. They may need no equipment and can be played almost anywhere. Rhyme games help with saying sounds and gaining fluency.

Rhyme starting games

Counting between two people or around the circle. One count to each word. The last person counted wins.

*Red, white and blue.
All out but YOU!*





Counting out around the circle using one count to each word. The last child counted is out and it begins again from the next person. The remaining person wins.

Acker backer soda cracker
Acker backer boo!
Acker backer soda cracker
Out goes you!

Alphabet starting games

Counting between two people or around the circle. One count to each word. The last person counted wins.

A E I O U You!
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S
T U You are it.

Physical games

Simon says

Make sure your child knows the names of parts of the face and later the parts of the body. You are Simon and give instructions. Your child has to listen and do exactly what 'Simon says'.

1. If you say 'Simon says touch your nose', your child touches their nose.
2. If you say 'Simon says don't touch your mouth', your child freezes where they are and does not touch their mouth.
3. If your child makes a mistake and touches their mouth, they lose one of their three points.
4. When they have lost all three points, they are out and the game finishes.



Where's the bear?

Introduce a soft toy like a teddy bear or similar. Make sure your child knows 'on', 'in', 'behind' and the names of some furniture.

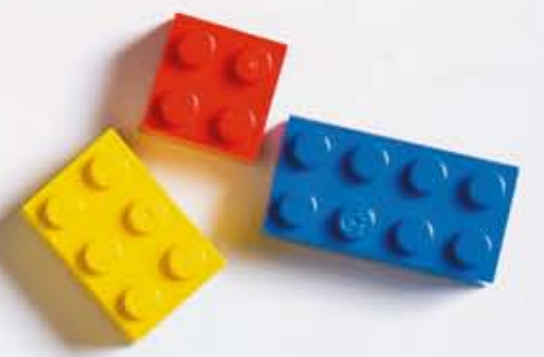
1. While your child shuts their eyes and you both count to five or ten, you hide the bear under a chair.
2. After counting, say 'Open your eyes. Where's the bear?'
3. You can then talk to your child as they look for the bear using words such as 'on', 'under' and 'behind' and name furniture in the room.
4. When the bear is found, you can swap roles.



Outdoor games

Farmer, farmer, can I cross the water?

1. Players ask this question while standing on a pretend river bank, wanting to cross the river to the other side.
2. The farmer replies 'Yes, if you have got something yellow.'
3. Anyone with something yellow replies 'Yes, I have got something yellow' and walks across the river.
4. Anyone who has not got something of the right colour, races across trying not to be caught.
5. Anyone caught has to drop out and wait until the farmer has caught everyone.
6. The game restarts and each time the farmer selects another colour.
7. When everyone has been caught the farmer then selects the next farmer and the game restarts.



What's the time Mr Wolf?

1. Mr Wolf stands in his house in a marked corner.
2. The players, who are sheep, approach Mr Wolf and ask him 'What's the time Mr Wolf?'
3. Mr Wolf replies 'One o'clock.'
4. The sheep get a little closer to Mr Wolf's house and ask again 'What's the time Mr Wolf?'
5. Mr Wolf replies 'Two o'clock.'
6. The game continues until the sheep are quite close and then Mr Wolf replies 'dinner time,' and chases the sheep.
7. Any sheep caught stay in Mr Wolf's house for one turn.

Card games

You can make cards for these games or you can download picture cards from the [LearnEnglish Kids website](#).

I went on safari

Make 12 cards featuring animals you might see on safari – or any other animals.

1. Each person, in turn, has to say 'I went on Safari and I saw [they turn over a card and say what is on the card] an elephant.'
2. They put the card, picture down, on another pile.
3. The next player says 'I went on Safari and I saw an elephant and [turns a card and adds the name of the animal] a parrot.'
4. Each player, in turn, adds the name of an animal.
5. If they forget any of the animals in the list, they are out of the game.
6. If the list grows to more than 12 animals, the game begins again and anyone, who is already out, can re-join.

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Memory game

Make 12 pairs of identical picture cards of the same items and place them face-down on a flat surface.

1. The first player turns over a card and says 'a bus', then turns a second card.
2. If it is the same they say and 'a bus, two buses' and keeps the two cards.
3. If the card is different they replace both cards from where they took them.
4. The aim is to find two cards (a pair) with the same picture.
5. When no more cards are left, count the pairs.
6. Add more items to these cards, once your child knows the names and plurals of the first 12 cards.
7. Later change the theme of the cards; for example, to clothing (a pair of socks, a red T-shirt, etc.).

Board games

Board games such as snakes and ladders or ludo are easy to make and provide lots of opportunities for sharing English together. You can make them to match your child's ability and needs.

We hope you found the tips in this booklet useful and that you and your child continue to have fun while learning English together.

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<http://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/parents>

One of a series of booklets commissioned by the British Council to support parents:

- *How children learn English as another language*
- *Speaking English with your child*
- *Learning English through sharing picture books*
- *Learning English through sharing rhymes*
- *Helping your child to learn English – practical tips*

Practical tips from this booklet are also available on a DVD from the British Council

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Designed and produced by The Burst Proof Bubble Limited, Manchester
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