

How Children Learn Language

Learning an Aboriginal language from an early age helps children develop socially, emotionally and intellectually. It helps their academic achievement too. Once they have a strong first language, they can learn to speak another language easily. Children can learn several languages at one time when they are young.

“I speak Cree to my toddler at home and my husband speaks English. She can now say words in both languages. She is so excited to speak in both languages.”

Here are some ways that help children learn language.

- **Children need to hear the language.** Each language has different sounds. Children need to hear those sounds. This way they learn the rhythm and sounds of the languages.
- **Children copy what they hear and see.** If they see and hear people talking the language, they'll do the same.
- **Children learn by playing.** They talk to dolls, puppets and other toys. They play and learn at the same time.
- **Children often have a 'silent period'.** They're listening to the sounds and getting ready to speak. They'll speak the language when they feel comfortable.



Celebrate Aboriginal Languages Month

- **Children make mistakes.** This is a natural part of learning a language. Sometimes it's difficult for children to make certain sounds because their mouth, tongue, throat and lungs are still developing.
- **Children learn by repeating things.** Children often want to read or hear the same story over and over again. They like it when they can try to tell the story themselves.
- **Children love rhymes and songs.** Rhymes and songs use a different part of the brain than talking, so children often learn the words to songs faster than the speech we use for everyday speech.
- **Children sometimes mix up languages.** It doesn't take them long to sort things out and put the pieces together. It just takes time, and lots of listening and practice.

