

LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES OR ESL?

Our population is growing in diversity all the time and more and more children are coming from a Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) and have English as a Second Language (ESL). Growing up with more than one language is not all harmful, so how do we know if a child has a language difficulty or has just not had enough exposure to English yet?

Research shows us that after less than five years exposure to a particular language children with normal language skills are able to become proficient in a second language. This means that if a child is born into a ESL family within an English speaking country that English should be well developed by pre-school. If an ESL family moves to an English speaking country after a child is born then within five years that child should have the same capacity to understand and use English as other children from their age who are not from NESB.

When should I worry?

If your child is from an NESB here are some guidelines to help you know if your child does have a language difficulty.

1. Your child is having difficulty with their first language as well as English.
2. If your child is not learning their first or second language as easily as your other children.

3. If your child is mixing up their language and for example, using their first language in an environment when no-one can understand it (it is well recognised that bilingual families often do switch between languages, but only when when people involved in the conversation understand both languages).