

Enhancing Interactions with Young Dual Language Learners: *Connecting with Dual Language Learners*

CONNECTING WITH MEI-MEI

What are some ways we can connect with dual language learners?

Interact warmly and responsively.

- Communicate and interact consistently during routines and transitions to allow dual language learners to easily follow what is going on and know what to expect next.
- Observe closely and sensitively respond to what children say and do. When a child gestures for more milk, label the action, “It looks like you’re trying to tell me you want more milk,” then respond to the nonverbal request rather than requiring children to “ask” for more.

Enhance verbal communication with additional supports.

- For children who speak very little English, use body language such as facial expressions, gestures, or pointing to objects.
- Learn words in the home language that are important to the child, such as “mom,” “dad,” “blanket,” or “sad.”

Provide opportunities for children to use their home languages.

- If you speak the home language, have extended conversations or offer small-group activities in the home language.
- If you do not speak the home language, ask children or family members to provide key words in the home language. Invite family members or staff members who speak the home language to talk, read, and sing with children in the home language.

Scenario: *Mei-Mei is in her second week in a new preschool. She speaks only Mandarin at home, and her first exposure to English is in preschool. As Mei-Mei builds in the block area, she looks at Alexis and says, “Jiā.” Alexis replies, “Uh-huh,” and walks away.*

What happened here?

If you were coaching Alexis, what might you suggest to turn this interaction into an opportunity to connect with Mei-Mei?

Beyond this interaction, what are other ways Alexis can provide opportunities for Mei-Mei to use her home language?
