

**Welcome to GAP:
Tips for non-German speaking parents, from one of our English families**

I don't speak German and neither does my partner, so it has been tricky explaining to some folk why we've enrolled our son at the German Australian Playschool. I quickly learned to sum up our reasons as:

1. The benefits for children learning a second language are well-documented, and if we can give our son this wonderful opportunity, shouldn't we?

and

2. He has an extended German-speaking family, including two grandmothers here in Australia, and a truckload of cousins in Switzerland and Austria. German will give him future travel, work and social opportunities.

If you're considering enrolling your child at GAP, or have just started there, you probably have similar reasons. And you may have some doubts. It can be frustrating explaining over and over, why your child is going to a German language playschool, when *you* don't speak German! Before my son started at GAP, I had no doubts that we were making the right decision, but I did wonder sometimes whether we would be able to sustain the commitment. After all, how do you encourage your child's language development when you can't understand them?

The following are some simple ideas that have worked for us at home. I'm pleased to say we've managed to keep up with our three year old's German education...so far!

Ensure your child is happy and comfortable at GAP.

There is some heart-warming advice about settling in your child (and yourself!), on the Spielwelt website. I have been truly impressed with the care and effort that GAP staff put into my son's happiness and comfort each week. It has been a warm and compassionate transition from home to 'school' for him.

Let your child teach you.

Children want to share with their parents what they learned at playschool, what they played with and what they made. In the context of GAP, it is hugely encouraging for your child if you can understand the new words they're learning – numbers, colours, animals – and continue to use them at home. After his first day at GAP, my son began using the German words for "washing hands", so that is what we all use in our home now. Very natural, very easy!

Occasionally, you won't understand your child's German-English language mashing, but it's worth making the effort to find out, especially if you hear them using it unprompted at home. Ask the GAP staff what they think the word is. Ask how to use the word at home, and how it is spelt. German doesn't make sense to me until I have the correct spelling, and it also means I'm parroting it back correctly. Believe me, you want to know the German word for toilet break, when your child insists on using it outside GAP!

Follow the theme.

Find out what your child will be learning each week at GAP by checking the sign-in book when you drop them off. What themes will they be talking, playing and singing about? Take a few minutes to borrow books with the same theme from Spielwelt's extensive library.

Reading German books with your child will not only reinforce what they've learned, but also teach you! Remember, it's just the basics you're after, and a good picture book is an extremely useful learning tool.

Use the internet.

My son quickly learned a favourite song at GAP, to which I could only mumble along, because I couldn't understand the words. A minute's internet search found the song on YouTube, and my son can now play it on my phone at any time. He just loves it, and because I saved and learned the lyrics, I can now sing along with him. Without any effort, I've also learned new German words.

Play German CDs in the car.

Spielwelt has a huge collection of German CDs for children. Ask the GAP staff or Director to point you in the right direction and select a few of the best for you. Alternatively, you can buy cheap German children's music CDs (and books) from the American Amazon website. The site is in English, but more importantly, so are the product reviews, which are often written by non-German speaking parents. It's an invaluable guide for finding out what other children enjoyed listening to and what their parents thought was most effective.

My son will only listen to "GAP music" in the car now and spontaneously sings these German songs when he's playing at home. Even if you learn "GAP music" by default, it's great fun to be able to sing along with them.

Check out the Spielwelt online resources.

Spielwelt has an entire webpage dedicated to tips and resources for helping you help your child learn German. Take the time to read through it and download or print what you think might work for you in your home. There's a PDF called "Parenting auf Deutsch" you can download and it has a selection of choice phrases (with English translations and pronunciation guides) for things you say every day with children.

Some of the lyrics and tunes for the songs they sing at GAP are on the Spielwelt website, too.

Be assured.

While it is a commitment for *you* and your child, enrolling them at GAP is most definitely worth it. When you have doubts, dive into all the resources about bilingual education on the Spielwelt website. Let the experts explain exactly why you've made the right decision. It will boost your confidence – what a great parent you are! – and maintain your enthusiasm – you can do this!

Right now, my son is having fun learning German, and that's how I feel it should be for me as well. So what if I don't know my *ders* from my *dies*? I can sing *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes* in German!

If you'd like to know more, I'm very happy to discuss my English-speaking experience with the German Australian Playschool, and can be contacted through Spielwelt.

Ann Penhallow