



**CANADIAN
PARENTS
FOR FRENCH**

**HELPING YOUR CHILD
BECOME BILINGUAL:
A GUIDE FOR MEMBERS**

SAMPLER



As a committed parent you want to do all you can to support and encourage your child's French as a second language learning. By joining Canadian Parents for French you have opened the door to a wealth of information and tips that will help you and your children to get the most out of Canada's world-renowned French as a second language education.

You will also learn how Canadian Parents for French supports, promotes and creates opportunities for all students in Canada to learn and use French as a second language, and how you can be part of the action. We are a nationwide, research-informed, volunteer organization that champions the opportunity to learn and use French for all those who call Canada home.

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PARENT INVOLVEMENT LEADS TO SUCCESS: FRENCH NOT REQUIRED

These days we hear a lot about the parent's role in education. We also know that a child's learning doesn't begin and end at the school door, but is strongly influenced by what he experiences at home and in the community. In fact, from kindergarten through high school, your child will spend only about 16% of his total waking hours in school!

Your child is learning all the time and chances are you are already doing all the right things in the natural course of family life. A mundane household chore such as setting the table can be a math lesson, a trip to the country a geography lesson, dinner conversation an opportunity to develop analytical and debating skills. And we all know cardboard boxes can foster imagination!!

Long before school begins, your child is developing language skills – watching and listening to gain meaning, making sounds to express wants and feelings, and so on. He will rely on these skills to help him learn his second language. As his second language develops, he will constantly transfer skills learned in one language to the other. By giving your child lots of opportunities to experience his first language when he is young, and encouraging him to read, write, and express his thoughts and ideas as he grows, you will be helping him to develop his skills in both languages.

- Read to and with your child in English every day. Read stories and poems. Include fantasy and real-life topics, humour, fact and fiction. With an older child, include newspaper articles, take turns reading parts in a play, read and answer riddles and trivia quizzes together.



THE RIGHT PROGRAM FOR YOUR CHILD

To make the right choice for your child, or to help your older child choose, is to know what you (and your child) want your child to achieve and to understand what each program offers. There are several French as a second language (FSL) programs in Canada. Not all programs and variations are available in every school district or community.

Core French/Basic French is taught as a subject for one period a day or a few periods a week within a regular English program. The goal of the program is for students to gain a good foundation in French in order to communicate at a basic level and gain insights into and an appreciation of francophone cultures. The beginning grade level and amount of instruction vary widely among school districts.

Extended/Expanded French programs provide core French students with additional exposure to French by using it as the language of instruction for one or two subjects in addition to a French language course. This option becomes available to students between Grades 4 and 8 and may continue throughout secondary school.

Intensive French programs have a concentrated period of French instruction during one half of a school year, usually in Grades 5 or 6. At the end of the five-month period, students can sustain a conversation, with some spontaneity, on familiar topics. The curriculum is “compacted” and students complete it in English in the second half of the school year, while continuing a one-hour period per day in French. Intensive French is a one-year program — students need appropriate follow-up programs, in order to maintain French language gains.

FRENCH IMMERSION

Early French Immersion (EFI) students are almost completely immersed, learning all subjects in French during their first few years of school. English is gradually introduced and French instruction is reduced from 80 and then further to 60 per cent. In high school two to four subjects are taught in French, in addition to a French language course. By Grades 11 and 12, students generally take only one or two courses in French.

Middle French Immersion (MFI) programs typically begin in Grade 4 or 5. Like the early immersion program, students are immersed in the French language at the beginning of the program and, over time, the amount of material taught in French is reduced. There are relatively few middle immersion programs offered in Canada with most participating school districts offering only early and late immersion options.

Late French Immersion (LFI) programs commonly begin in Grade 6 or 7. Instruction is almost exclusively in French at the beginning and, as in early and middle immersion programs, the proportion of French-language instruction is gradually reduced.

Early Partial Immersion (EPI)/50-50/bilingual programs, begin in Kindergarten or Grade 1, with classroom time evenly divided between French and English instruction for the duration of the program.



THINGS TO CONSIDER, CHOOSING A PROGRAM

FSL AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

Parents and educators may be concerned that studying in French will prevent students from developing good English language skills. Forty years of research, however, have shown that students can add a second language without compromising their first language proficiency. This is known as additive bilingualism because languages are interdependent and skills developed in the second language are available for learning and use in the first language and vice versa. English language arts are introduced in school by the middle elementary years, while family and community also reinforce first language skills.

LEVELS OF FRENCH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Immersion programs have generally produced better French proficiency results than traditional language teaching methods.

By the end of elementary school, research indicates that immersion students have native-like levels in listening comprehension and reading in French, although they are still less proficient in speaking and writing. High school immersion graduates should be able to work, or pursue post-secondary studies, in their second language. In fact, many attained an intermediate or higher level of second-language proficiency on Public Service Commission of Canada tests. (Lazaruk, 2007)

INSTRUCTIONAL TIME AND INTENSITY

Generally, EFI students achieve higher French proficiency than MFI students who, in turn, are more proficient than LFI students. It is important to note, however, that the FSL programs associated with the highest levels of proficiency offer extensive instructional time in French and, most importantly, provide intensive instruction in French at the beginning of the program. Research has shown that intense instruction in French is more effective than programs offering the same or more instructional hours over the course of the program.

YOUR CHILD’S CORE, INTENSIVE OR EXTENDED FRENCH PROGRAM

FSL programs use “communicative” and “action oriented” approaches, meaning that language is used to communicate and interactions are based on meaningful, real-life experiences. Students learn the language while focusing on the message and become motivated to use French to get things done. Students soon learn to communicate successfully: their vocabulary and fluency grow, they become more confident, and their use of language becomes more sophisticated. The teacher assesses student progress to provide feedback and decide how to advance learning appropriately. Listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing and representing are all elements of the students’ experience.

YOUR CHILD’S FRENCH IMMERSION PROGRAM

In any French immersion program, French is learned by using it in meaningful ways: to communicate and to learn subject material. This means the French immersion classroom, at any grade level, is often a noisy environment, with talking, videos, music, visitors and lots of hands-on activities and interaction, as the teacher provides a variety of opportunities for students to learn the language by using it.

A period of concentration on French language development at the beginning of early, middle and late immersion programs allows students quickly to gain sufficient French proficiency needed to read and to learn subject material (such as math, social studies, sciences, etc.) taught in French.

All three types of immersion programs produce students with high levels of French language proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Generally, however, when the various types of immersion programs have been compared, students who have had the most hours of instruction in French have the highest achievement. Early French immersion students, who represent a more diverse range of abilities than students in the other programs, have consistently scored highest in speaking and listening skills and have been found to have greater confidence in using French.

I DON’T KNOW FRENCH — CAN I STILL HELP MY CHILD?

Don’t worry — parents are not expected to understand or speak French. Research shows that students whose parents have positive attitudes to French achieve more, and that FSL programs are suitable for every child.

Help by making homework a part of home life

If you treat homework seriously, it will rub off on your child!

Provide French reference material

Your child's teacher will be able to offer advice on what French references will best support your child's learning at different grades.

Helping with French language arts

Listen to your child read in French. Encourage comprehension by asking questions, but don't ask for a translation. Try questions like: What is the boy doing? Why do the people in the picture look happy or sad?

Math in French

Math skills don't depend on language. You can help your child with math computations in English and using the same techniques you normally would, such as adding or subtracting using marbles or Smarties.

Science, social studies and school projects

By the time your child is getting this type of homework, she will be able to explain what she is learning and receive your help in English, even when the subject matter is French.

Make French a part of your child's life

Additional exposure to French is important to achieving the program goals. Experiencing French at home and in the community will enhance his abilities in French, his understanding of francophone culture, and your child's confidence in using the language. Many of these activities are fun for the whole family and give you the chance to hear your child use French.

TIPS FROM EXPERIENCED PARENTS

EXPERIENCED CORE FRENCH PARENTS OFFER THESE TIPS:

- Get to know your child's core French teacher. Discuss the program and find out what you and your child can expect.
- Encourage your child to talk about his experiences in core French class. What project is he working on? What does he enjoy most?
- If your child is taking extended core, or a more intensive form of core French, she may need extra encouragement in the first few weeks or months. Some frustration is normal at first.

EXPERIENCED IMMERSION PARENTS OFFER THESE TIPS:

- Don't be surprised or worried if your beginning learner doesn't speak a word of French at home for the first several months! This doesn't mean he isn't learning French.
- Don't expect your child, even in high school, to do word-for-word translations. However, after a few years in the program they should be able to explain to you, in English, what they are learning or watching on French TV.
- Avoid comparing your child's progress with that of children in other classes. Instead, compare how he is doing today with how he did last week or last month.

IF YOU HAVE CONCERNS

As in any program, concerns may arise from time to time. If your child is experiencing difficulties in school, whether it's low marks, learning difficulties or behaviour problems, it might seem insurmountable in an immersion program. Yet transferring to an English program is not necessary and may, in fact, be doing your child a disservice.

Research findings suggest that immersion is suitable for students experiencing academic difficulties and for those with learning disabilities. Students with a wide range of difficulties, including learning disabilities and behavioural problems, will do as well in an immersion program as they would in an English program if they receive the same assistance as they would in the English program. Students who transfer to the English program because they are performing below grade level or grade average in immersion usually don't perform any better in the English program.

If you have concerns:

- First, get involved with your child at school, learn what is happening in the classroom.
- Talk to your child's teacher and work together to assess the problem and find possible solutions.
- Get the information you need to understand your child's difficulties and your rights as a parent, and to work with the school in finding the best solutions for your child.
- Explore the alternatives before making any decisions.

THIS IS ONLY A SAMPLER!

Looking for more information to help you make an informed decision? Read or download the **full guide** on the resources page of our website at cpf.ca.

The full guide provides more information on the various French as a second Language programs available in Canada, as well as more tips on how to help you and your child decide on the right FSL program. The full guide also has information on post-secondary options for your child.

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