

How to make your Family Irish again!

This booklet provides future parents with guidelines on how to give your child(ren) the gift of 1st language bilingualism in Irish and English, whether you yourselves are now Irish speakers or not. This is the gift that you were denied. The reclamation of this treasure will give the life you want for you and your child(ren): You will become a full member of the Irish community, becoming whole again after years of dislocation. You will experience the true Irish life that has been concealed. Obviously, some environments will make this easier than others, but it can be done anywhere. One of the most basic things needed for success in this is to know it is possible: this booklet addresses these issues. It also points parents in the direction of sources of support. It is important that parents understand these Guidelines before they make their decision and plans.

The evidence is clear and irrefutable that your child(ren)'s English will not suffer at the expense of acquiring Irish, especially if the two happen simultaneously and are COMPLETED before the age of 5. Indeed, their linguistic ability will be enhanced. A bilingual person can understand language and culture better than a monolingual and therefore has more capacity for acquiring other languages and respecting their cultures.

In Ireland and among the Irish diaspora, all children now have the opportunity to have Irish as a first/co 1 st language. In homes where one or both parents are Irish speakers, this will be fairly straightforward. In homes where neither parent is an Irish speaker, a major factor in parents success is that they both try (and will succeed) to acquire Irish themselves, ahead of their children. We will assist you as much as possible in this. Following the guidelines in this booklet is the surest way of having a family fluent in Irish and using it continuously.

This booklet is a blueprint for parents who want to create or nurture an Irish environment within their home to make sure their child(ren) never have to learn it. It has sections dealing with the 3 main family types i.e. both parents fluent, one parent fluent and neither parent fluent. We have outlined the various

stages and situations parents and their children will encounter on their journey towards full Irish fluency. You and your family only need to do this once - and it's permanent.

If you want your family to have Irish, following the Guidelines in this booklet will make that happen.

1. Ideally pre-birth: Information; all covered and developing on this site – Why Irish? How? (Methods), History, Present, Future (Omn).
2. Ideally pre-birth: decision for yourself and the next generation of your family – ie you give them the gift and the choice.
3. Ideally pre-birth: parents begin/continue Irish acquisition using www.omn.ie.
4. Ideally pre-birth: parents use these Guidelines to agree a 'Family Language Plan'.
5. Birth.
6. Family language management.
7. Your child is full first-language bilingual.
8. Spreads to community and beyond.

This is a holistic, simultaneous process. If you, as potential and expectant parents have decided that you wish your child(ren) to be 1st language (native) bilingual, you should plan for language use, both in the home and outside. The ideal thing to do is to begin your acquisition of spoken Irish as soon as possible, so you have a head start on your child. You can use this site www.omn.ie and our activity sessions to do this.

The objective is to ensure that your child acquires Irish naturally and effortlessly, as a full 1st/co-1st language, through listening, understanding, recognising words and phrases, then gradually moving on to fluent conversation. The pace at which your child acquires Irish will depend on the amount and quality of the language input (s)he gets: the more contact hours and the higher the quality of this input, the better. The more often you and your child(ren) use the language, the better and stronger your fluency will become and the more advantaged you will be in your personal lives and as full Irish citizens. The language and its culture must cross the generations if it is to be a first language.

Parent language courses. The ideal way to acquire Irish

yourself is to use our free online course. This uses the ultimate language acquisition method – a synthesis and progression from all the best current methods, summarised in three words:

Hear/Understand>Speak: you hear and understand simultaneously, then you speak when you're ready. It is based on a range of day-to-day activities and is specifically designed with the home and a young family at its heart. Once the core language has been acquired, parents can start with topics they feel are most relevant to their own situation and interests.

Once you achieve fluency, you can move on to reading and writing, which is time enough until your child starts school, though use of this site will give you reading skills effortlessly anyway.

Our '[Resources](#)' page outlines some of the vast amount of help and support available and will help you to pile in the input, both for yourself and your child(ren). It has Irish stories, games, posters, songs and nursery rhymes, videos, CDs, DVDs etc. for you to absorb, use and pass on to your child(ren). These will be added to regularly to help your understanding and fluency as well as your child(ren)'s. We will help you to create stimulating Irish centred activities within your home and guide you in contacting helpers in your community (see section below). **You, as parents, will acquire Irish ahead of, but alongside your children**, if you are not already Irish speakers, so visit our site often. This will be no labour – our material will let you experience what you've been missing.

Language use, bonding and development. Parents should start using Irish with each other as soon as possible. It is never too early, as a baby acquires language sounds before birth.

Language bonding consists of developing social interaction and communication which feels natural, comfortable, loving and familiar. Irish bonding between a parent and child only happens when that parent uses Irish with their child(ren) at all times, preferably from the child's birth. This Irish bonding is fragile, though and needs a consistent positive and enthusiastic attitude. Your child(ren) will be influenced by the way you treat the language. For example, if you have a superficial or uncommitted

attitude towards Irish, using it only as and when it takes your fancy, your child(ren) will treat it in the same dismissive way. You are the most influential people in your child's life: the fact that you commit yourselves to giving your child(ren) this gift will create strong and permanent language, family, and emotional bonds. You can be confident from the outset that your child(ren) will get perfect English from others without any effort on your part. Whether you, as parents are fluent now or not, you should make an effort to acquire, improve and maintain as much Irish as possible as a support to your child(ren). This is a long term commitment, requiring patience, consistency, flexibility, sensitivity, humour and good will, **but is so precious to be worth it all and only needs to be done once.** Up to now, this has been made seem like hard work and a waste of time. The more you experience your true culture, however, the more you will realise this was a carefully created illusion.

A framework of language use should be agreed and consistently adhered to, so your child(ren) will feel secure and confident.

With some imagination, planning, and use of our facilities, you can create and develop Irish-centred activities and pastimes for your child(ren), making it as enjoyable and varied as possible.

You and your family only need to do this once.

DIFFERENT FAMILY SITUATIONS.

1. Homes where both parents are Irish speakers.

This is obviously the ideal and easiest home situation. Both parents should always use Irish with the child(ren), everywhere you go and especially in the presence of non Irish speakers . If one parent is very fluent, while the other is less so, it can be very helpful for the less fluent Irish speaker, for (s)he will be living in an environment where Irish is dominant and will soon catch up. This is not such a big issue as is made out: the rising tide lifts all boats!

2. Homes where one parent is an Irish speaker.

In a family where one parent is an Irish speaker and the other is not, the aim is to have the non Irish speaker fluent as quickly as

possible. The non Irish-speaking parent should attempt to speak Irish as much as possible, **acquiring the language alongside, but ahead of the child(ren) in the home**, where you will pick up those important everyday words and phrases. This gives the child(ren) supportive company during the acquisition process and the non fluent parent has an opportunity to get high quality fluency. Parents should be consistent and aware of speaking only Irish in front of their child(ren). It is best to use Irish all the time. Prior agreement will be needed in the case where one parent uses Irish, while the other is reluctant to speak the language. This can make Irish contentious in the child(ren)'s eyes and should be avoided.

Parents of type 2 and 3 families may well continue to use English at other times. This is not a problem and 'internal domains', both of place and time can be agreed: e.g. begin by 'declaring' the child(ren)'s bedroom an Irish-speaking area, then extend this naturally to the kitchen, etc. as your child(ren) grow and expand their range and your own fluency develops (eg, as you cover each theme on our video course). This 'Room by Room, or 'enlarging domestic domain' concept expands and reinforces the language's use for your child(ren) and between you, the parents and others. It also allows less than fluent parents a 'buffer': one Irish area/room is declared first, leaving the rest of the house effectively an 'other languages area' (LTE). (See 'Our Methods')

Arrangements should be made so that your child(ren) hear enough Irish each day. Parents can agree an informal schedule, so the fluent parent is able to spend a reasonable amount of time with the child(ren) to maintain the language bonding. The time spent together using Irish should be regular and substantial. Consistent Irish bedtime stories, reading, songs, etc. using our 'Resources' will help this.

3. Homes where neither parent is an Irish speaker.

In families where neither parent is an Irish speaker, the aim is to have at least one parent (preferably both!) fluent as quickly as possible. Use the videos on www.omn.ie and our activity sessions to bring Irish into your daily home routine. Acquiring

the language together will open up a whole new world – to yourselves, as well as to your child(ren). Our parent/child videos cover many topics, including the language of affection, songs and lullabies, play in and around the home, feeding, crying, washing, changing, health issues, food preparation, clothes, etc. There are numerous other topics which parents can add to this list and these will be given to you by the best native speakers. This is the soul of our language and its culture.

We also run a special language acquisition course for parents with young children. As parents, you can do a great many things to help your Irish fluency, finding your own unique ways of deepening and strengthening your Irish. Everyone grows together and it all gets easier as more pieces go into the jigsaw. Use your Irish as much as you can – especially within earshot of your child(ren). For example, when doing ordinary household chores, such as washing dishes, cooking, changing beds, cleaning, etc., also when visiting or when friends call. This will set Irish in an everyday context. It is no good to talk in English about using Irish – we lead by example. When you make this decision, it should be acted on. Children will sense any tokenism!

Making your home an Irish-speaking area, room by room.

Your Irish-speaking home can start in your child(ren)'s bedroom and gradually extend to the kitchen and to the rest of the house, to neighbours, to the community to which you belong, etc. The best place to acquire a language is in the home – it is where we all acquired our first language! In the home, language acquisition is made much easier, compared to the often very formal surroundings of a classroom where writing and grammar wrongly precede spoken language acquisition.

Parents who are fortunate enough to have the resources (i.e. model speaker(s)) can hold Irish sessions in their own and others' homes. The point of holding such sessions on a regular basis is so that Irish can be heard and used in a familiar, everyday setting.

Finding and getting help and support from Irish-speaking Role-Models in your community.

This is the most effective way to back up your commitment. The ideal would be to encourage high standard 1st language (native) Irish speaker(s) to 'adopt' your child(ren), visiting regularly, acting as language role-models who your child(ren) will imitate perfectly: the higher their standard and commitment, the better the end result will be. Children who get the language this way (i.e. using high standard models from birth) will develop a rich accent and full 1st language (native) competence without any problems. We will be pleased to help parents locate fluent Irish speakers and supporters who will help and guide them, speeding their progress. There are support mechanisms, information and guidance available on this site. You are not alone. Not only can language be transmitted between parents and child, the process can also occur with grandparents, relatives, neighbours, friends, etc. You should inform people around you – especially other parents – about what you and your family are doing and why. The Irish speakers in your community can help, backing up your children's Irish language routine and giving them an opportunity to mix with more fluent Irish speakers and hear the language used casually and naturally. (See next section.) Invite Irish speaking friends to your home and ask them to converse in Irish with your child(ren). Arrange babysitting, visits, etc. in fully Irish speaking homes: this should all be done voluntarily, as is all genuine community cooperation. Parents can bring Irish into the home in a variety of ways. Be pro-active. Take your child(ren) to places where Irish is spoken naturally. Check out what is available in your own community. No matter where in the world you live, you will be surprised how many people have Irish. Where you are fortunate enough to have relations, friends and neighbours, work colleagues, doctors, nurses, health visitors, library staff, etc. who are Irish speakers, encourage them to use their Irish with both you and your child(ren) on every possible occasion. The more people you use the Irish with, the better. If you use Irish with your child(ren) all the time, they will see that the language can be used naturally in a wide variety of places. Your group of supporters will get bigger as time goes by. By contacting and

bringing together these local Irish speakers, you will be joining/creating an Irish-speaking community (see 'Community' section in 'Our methods') which will make it easy for you and your child(ren) to meet and socialise with other Irish-speakers. Before involving any of the people mentioned in this section, it is worth considering their attitudes and finding out how supportive they would be of what you are doing. **Avoid as much as possible those who are negative or actively against your plan, for obvious reasons. They will oppose you, denying your right to choose.** You should satisfy yourselves as to whether people you meet speak Irish and how well and if they are willing to use Irish with your child(ren) all the time. Anything less will undermine rather than help what you are doing. This will tell you whether they can help or just support. When approaching non-Irish-speakers, the following guidelines should help. Tell them that you have decided to bring up your child(ren) to be Irish speaking, which will mean that as much as possible Irish will be spoken, everywhere and at all times. Let them know what it will be like in your company from now on, so they do not feel surprised or excluded. Explain to the child and to your friends that you will both continue to speak Irish to each other while the friends or visitors are present. Do this as early as possible so as no one will feel alienated or ill at ease. This explanation will do much to help avoid confused language exchanges between English and Irish. Ask for their patience and understanding, further explaining that you and them can use English, but when you speak with your child(ren) it will always be in Irish. Seek the contact's help in this: fluent speakers and non speakers can both help, though not in the same way of course. If this is done with tact, sensitivity and consideration, they will almost certainly respond in a very positive way. **And if they are negative, do it anyway!** Explaining things to people will establish the range of where and when Irish is spoken in mixed-language situations. There will then be no need to start conversing in English on the occasion of an outing or visitors calling due to a dislike of appearing rude by excluding a visitor from the conversation. It is not rude as long as it has been

discussed first. You, as parents, should ALWAYS use Irish with your children , so as not to limit its use or seem to be ashamed of it. The results will be as effective as the sincerity and commitment of your actions make them. It is important to remember that if you, as parents do not maintain the “Irish only” rule in the company of non Irish speakers, your child will come to believe that you are ashamed of using the language in public. **Once Irish is seen in such a negative light by the child, it will be very hard to change this perception.** When out in public, therefore, make sure you are not self conscious about speaking Irish. This is more likely to come from you than your child(ren) – they will only pick up your attitude, be that positive or negative, so parents should develop an active and committed Irish awareness. This means giving serious thought, planning and action to applying Irish to every conceivable situation. Novice speaker parents will often find that fluent speakers are surprised at being asked to speak with their child in Irish. This is because many fluent speakers, especially older ones, find it difficult to believe that a child can be more fluent in Irish than their parents. **It is also difficult for some to realize that at an early age, a child does not understand ANY language.** It is only by their input that this will change and **this can happen in two or more languages without any problems.** Parents will need to be conscious of language usage in the following and other situations: at home with non Irish speaking visitors, staying with friends and family, meeting friends and neighbours, on the street, shopping, visiting doctors, dentists, going on outings, trips, holidays, etc. Prior planning and agreements will ensure all goes well. Consider holidays in areas where Irish is likely to be spoken or holidaying with families who speak Irish. You should find out what level they actually do speak Irish and how much they use the language and ensure Irish is the only language used in the child(ren)'s presence, as described above. If you have older children, you should explain things to them as soon as possible. This inclusion will most likely add to their motivation by avoiding them feeling pressured and resentful of joining in with something in which

they had no initial say. You can create activities whereby all the children speak Irish to each other, thus enabling it to become and remain the family language.

Putting it all together.

The date for beginning this process will be decided naturally by your child's birth. You will have a few months of a head start on the child with our language video series. This will leave you well enough ahead to ensure success. Before the child is born is the best time for starting to use Irish, as it is difficult to change the language spoken to a child once a pattern is established and the child may resist such fundamental change. Where both parents speak Irish fluently, the home is the preserve of Irish, with the community acting as a support. Much of the language you acquire is associated with the place where you acquired it and no external group or institution can replace the parental role in language acquisition and usage. Mistakenly, some parents assume that if their child goes to an Irish (pre)-school, they can neglect to use Irish in the home. Unfortunately, no school can do anything for the language bonding between parent and child and the lack of this will result in Irish ceasing to be a meaningful language and children will come to regard it as just a daytime school language. **Children having learnt Irish in any institution are very likely to use it only in these places** and will not, without other support, carry it into the home or the wider community. It will not be set deep enough – especially if parents have not tried to become part of the process. The language must travel from the home to the community. It does not work well in reverse.

A short guide to the stages in this process follows below.

From pre-birth to three years old, no matter what your level of fluency is, use Irish as much as possible! This is the crucial stage where Irish can be set as your child's first language and this chance, if not taken, will NEVER come again. Your child will get English as a co-first language from others and you need not worry about this. Try to create a stimulating Irish environment within your child's bedroom or playroom, with a

range of facilities which will help your child(ren) develop at their own pace. At this stage of your child's life, (s)he will begin to move from just understanding the language to actually speaking it. When speaking to a child, always stick to one language. **Do not translate** Irish into any other language, or the other way round: this slows up the acquisition process, as the mind has to keep moving from one language to the other. Your child will become frustrated by this mental juggling and delays and may well give up the language which is seen to be secondary, always deferring to the dominating language. When having difficulties, use non-verbal communication. It is surprising how well it works with children who can grasp meaning much quicker than you think. (see 'No translation' section in 'Our methods').

In the second and third year of a child's life many changes take place. Parents will want to keep ahead of their child as long as they can. This is best accomplished by parents starting, or becoming part of a network of speakers, as explained above. Remember: praise, encouragement, confidence-building. Be supportive, interested and impressed by the child's efforts in using Irish, no matter how small the gesture may be: many small steps lead to success. The child whose self confidence is raised will be happy and proud of the accomplishment. On the other hand do not go overboard, praising to the point where a child becomes embarrassed and may even suspect that you are not sincere. During the three to five year-old period, rapid progress will occur in your child's acquisition of Irish, especially if (s)he has experienced a community language Role-Model and any locally available groups. Parents who have a child coming up to five years old will have to decide which school system they intend for their child. If an Irish school is available, it is the obvious choice, but do not become complacent just because your five year old child is fluent in Irish. If no Irish school is available, the inherent swamping effect of a dominating language environment, coupled with the lack of support and incentives to sustain fluency, will mean that more effort will be needed at home. Irish-speaking children can lose their command

of Irish in an alarmingly short time once immersed in an English-speaking environment such as a school. They may even turn against Irish because of peer-pressure and other factors. If you look positively at this, however, it is at the school stage that children may overtake parents. Do not stop now. The situation is now reversed in some ways: you will now be picking up things from them – enjoy...

When the time comes to consider secondary education, Irish-medium is again the obvious choice. This age group requires a lot more age-related activities than most: individual and team sports, music, drama, computer-related activities etc. should, as much as possible, be in Irish. Parents should regularly review their child(ren)'s progress and update and modify their methods to suit current needs. **It does not end! First we get our language back, then we develop it and our community. You and your family only need to do this once - and it's permanent.**

The magic formula, to use if your child ever refuses to speak Irish.

This section is intended to reassure and support those parents who have made the commitment to help their child(ren) to acquire Irish as a first language.

Often, for no apparent reason, a child may refuse to speak Irish. Some of the most common reasons for this are listed in the next section, but the solution is simple, though requiring some resolve to maintain the language in these difficult circumstances. You should tell the child (in Irish, of course), that you are absolutely delighted that (s)he speaks English, as you yourself can also. But you must get the message across that Irish is your choice of language, because you are Irish. You can explain this in whatever way suits, but you will need to be firm and insist that the child speaks Irish to you all the time. (S)he can use whatever language (s)he wants with others, but (s)he will use only Irish with you. If (s)he does not comply, then (s)he will be ignored until (s)he does. It is crucial that this should take place immediately, for if it is delayed the language bonding

between you and your child will be severely damaged by this 'victory'. You could explain that being able to speak a second language is an indication of a very special extra skill, something to be proud of, pointing out that 65% of the population of the world are bilingual, many speaking languages other than a dominating one. This crisis will not last long – probably only a couple of minutes and is unlikely to be repeated if dealt with immediately, effectively and sensitively. It will be a warning, though, that you will need to develop closer, stronger and more energetic bonds through Irish-centred activities. You allow other sources to use English, but you are always the upholder of Irish in the eyes of your child, preserving your now well-established Irish bonding. This is the mainstay for keeping your child's Irish as strong as possible. You can be reassured that you need use only Irish, as English will be got from others. You and your family only need to do this once.

The most common reasons why a child refuses to speak Irish.

1. Parents, believing that there is a shortage of suitable Irish bedtime story material, resort to English books and stories. This is particularly damaging, as a most intimate part of life enjoyed through language is drowned in an ocean of English, which is seen as the source of all fun and enjoyment. Use our 'Resources' to cure this. This 'Resources' page is in an early stage of development and needs much work...
2. The child's initial pleasure in having a skill that their parents may not have has lost its appeal.
3. Outside the home and school, most children are overwhelmingly immersed in play activities, friendships and social interaction through English. Irish is seen to have very little to offer a child. Parents who play games, sport or any other pleasurable activity with their children must be pro-active, ensuring these are done through Irish. Videos of these will be available on our 'Resources' page when the time comes.
4. Sometimes a child will use English as a weapon to test parents. This has particular power for the child if parents are very enthusiastic for them to use Irish. Avoid scenarios where

the language becomes part of a power play between parent and child. Be firm and constant: this phase is a normal occurrence in children. Use the same 'magic formula' as above.

5. Sometimes a child will lapse into English, subtly trying to test your resolve. You may be caught off guard and reply in English. As soon as you realise it, though, gently return the conversation to Irish, maybe talking about a favourite topic. Once the talk returns to Irish, then only respond when your child uses it.

6. On the occasion of visitors arriving, many parents wrongly believe that it can do no harm if everyone starts speaking in English during the visit. Nothing could be further from the truth, for here again what is really happening is that the language bonds, so carefully built and nurtured, are being tested, damaged and possibly broken entirely. You are also demonstrating your language's deference to English. You need to establish and defend your Irish environment. Irish is not the dominating language and as such should be cared for with more respect than you would with English. **Be aware of what you are trying to achieve and do not allow your efforts to be spoiled by others who, if they knew your aims, would probably support you. You and your family only need to do this once.**

A child only gets one chance to become a first language Irish speaker. You can give or deny that gift.

The choice is easy, the action is a new beginning!

Bail ó Dhia ar an obair.

Parent Log.

Keeping a journal recording your thoughts, experiences, successes, failures, problems, highs, lows, what worked and did not work in your household will have immense value not only for you and your family but will also be a guide to others who will have an opportunity to experience your account.

Buíochas:

This document is a synthesis of the work of several experts combined with 9 years in-depth research of my own. This research is also the foundation for an **18 year plan** that will

ensure the future of the Irish identity. This plan differs from others in that it exists in fact as well as in words.