

Bilingual and Multilingual Development

Many children grow up learning more than one language. Here are some top tips to help support bilingual children.

<p>1</p> <p>Being bilingual is an advantage</p>	<p>Being bilingual helps your child to maintain links with family culture and heritage and to feel secure in their identity.</p> <p>Being bilingual can help improve thinking and learning skills.</p> <p>Being bilingual does not make it more likely that a child will have speech and language problems.</p> <p>Young children are capable of learning more than one language if the language is presented at their level.</p>
<p>2</p> <p>What language should I speak?</p>	<p>Parents should speak the language they know best and feel most confident in – your child needs to learn a good model of language in their home language, no matter what this language is.</p> <p>Once children understand words in their first language(s), they will be able to apply this understanding to other languages which they later need (e.g. English)</p> <p>If parents are also bilingual, it is natural to switch between the languages in conversation. If you can, try and keep the language you use at the right level for your child (e.g. simplifying sentences, using words your child can understand).</p> <p>If parents or carers use different languages, they can continue to do this – children need to hear enough of each language in everyday situations (talking about what you are doing together) to be able to develop skills in each one. Watching TV or DVDs is not enough – your child needs you to talk to them in your home language(s).</p> <p>Encourage your child to be proud of their languages.</p>
<p>3</p> <p>What if my child keeps speaking in English...</p>	<p>That's ok – this can happen when children hear lots of English at nursery or school. Accept all attempts at communication from your child in any language (or using gestures etc)</p> <p>It is important that parents keep speaking the child's first language with them to allow children to keep learning and understanding their language. This can feel like hard work, but please keep speaking your home language.</p> <p>Children sometimes mix words from all of the languages they know – this is normal. It does not mean the child is getting it 'wrong' – they are making use of all the words they know to express themselves.</p> <p>Sometimes words might only be learned in one language (e.g. 'school' words like 'maths' might only be well known in English, food words might be better known in home languages).</p>

<p>4</p> <p>But I really want my child to learn English...</p>	<p>In our society, English is very important.</p> <p>BUT, if your child learns a good model of language in their first language(s), it will be much easier for them to learn English when they get to nursery or school.</p> <p>It is important for your child to be able to communicate at home and to develop strong skills in their first language, so focus on this.</p>
<p>5</p> <p>I'm worried...</p>	<p>Growing up bilingual does not mean your child is more likely to have difficulties with their speech, language or communication.</p> <p>However, any child can have difficulties with these areas and if you have concerns about your child's talking, understanding or interaction in their home languages, Speech & Language Therapy can help. Contact the SLT Helpline for advice.</p> <p>Please note: Speech & Language Therapists do not help with learning English as a second or additional language. Your child's school may be able to help with this.</p>