



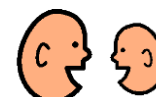
Bilingualism

Information and advice for practitioners and professionals

Bilingualism is when a person understands and/or uses two or more languages. Growing up learning more than one language is a great asset. It can support your child's learning and help them to think flexibly, and can help them to feel connected to their communities and cultures. Some children will be exposed to more than one language from birth. Other children will start to learn an additional language later. Children need to develop strong foundations in their first language(s).



Children who are learning English as an additional language should not be regarded as having a speech and language difficulty. Even children who have had limited exposure to English before nursery or school can become competent communicators in more than one language. Some bilingual children will experience speech and language difficulties, however, just as some children learning one language do. They will have difficulties using and understanding language in both/all of their languages, not just in English.



Speech and Language UK



See [Speech and Language UK](#) for more information and advice for learning more than one language.



Strategies for learning more than one language:

- Encourage parents and carers to speak to their child in their home language(s). Continuing to develop a child's home language(s) will support their skills in English.
- Respect, value and celebrate the child's home language and culture.
- When a child first experiences a new language environment, they may not talk initially. They will be watching and listening to help them to understand and learn. This quiet period is normal and can last several months.
- When learning more than one language, children may switch between languages or use words from both languages in the same sentence. This is normal and is not a sign of confusion or difficulty.
- Model language. Children learning English as an additional language will learn words and sentences by hearing good models. Use short, simple sentences and repeat key words.
- Use real, hands-on experiences to support learning and develop vocabulary.
- Don't correct mistakes in grammar or word order. Instead, repeat back words and sentences the right way. This is called *modelling* and shows your child how to use words and sentences correctly. There is no need to get your child to repeat after you.
- Pause and wait. Pause between sentences to give additional time to process information. Slow down your talking to give your child plenty of thinking time.



- Use visual supports. Non-verbal cues such as gestures and signs, and visual aids including objects, pictures and symbols, can all reinforce what we say.
- Enquire further about the child's skills in their home language(s) and support parents and families using the links below.



For further information and advice:



[BBC Tiny Happy People](#) – for advice on bilingual babies and speaking multiple languages at home



[National Literacy Trust](#) – for bilingualism quick tips in a number of different languages

