Raising Bilingual Children

Speech Pathology Australia

TIPS FOR USING MORE THAN ONE LANGUAGE WITH YOUR CHILD

Most children are able to learn two (or more) languages at the same time without difficulty. The more exposure a child has to each language, the better they will be able to learn the language and communicate.

TIP 1: Talk to your child in the language you are most comfortable with more often (or all the time if you desire).

TIP 2: Give your child many opportunities to speak and hear both languages in different situations and with different people.

TIP 3: Help your child tell the difference between the languages by having clear boundaries (e.g. using home language with family and English at the shops).

TIP 4: Read your child's favourite books and/or tell them stories in both languages. Listening to stories many times helps language development.

People who use two languages are often referred to as bilingual and those who speak more than two languages may be referred to as multilingual. A second language can be learnt either simultaneously (at the same time) or sequentially (preferred language first, then second language).

Should I speak one or more languages to my child?

It's up to you! Culture and language form an important part of children's identity and community. Therefore, it is appropriate to teach your child your home language along with English. Children often learn an additional language easier than adults. Some of the benefits of bilingualism include:

- Educational benefits - increased attention, memory, thinking, decision making and planning.
- Social benefits - bilinguals are able to form relationships with speakers of their home language, such as grandparents. They can also participate in cultural activities that take place in the home language.
- Emotional benefits - maintaining the home language can support the development of a strong cultural identity and self esteem.
- Economic benefits - Australians who are fluent in more than one language are more likely to be employed, have post graduate qualifications and earn a higher income.

How do I teach my child two or more languages?

To be successful in teaching your child two languages it is essential to have a "family language policy". This is a plan for who will talk to your child in what language and in what context. For example, some families have a "one parent, one language" policy meaning that one parent speaks only in one language (e.g., German) while the other speaks only in English to the child. There are some tips for using more than one language with your child on the other side of the page.

Will learning several languages cause my child to have communication difficulties?

No. Children successfully learn to speak more than one language around the world. In fact, the majority of the world's children are multilingual.

Things to remember when your child is learning more than one language.

Bilingual children generally develop language the same way as single language speakers (monolinguals). They may progress through a series of learning stages:

- Initially they may go through a silent period while they are listening and learning new words.
- They will develop language at the same rate as children learning one language i.e. first words around one year and joining words together around two years of age.
- When learning to talk, children may mix grammar rules or their sentences may contain words from each language.

When to seek help

Some children experience difficulty with their speech and language regardless of how many languages they speak. If a child has a speech and/or language difficulty it will be present in each of their languages. If you feel your child is having difficulty with their speech or language skills you may need to seek help from a speech pathologist.

For more information about raising your children bilingually see:
www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/bilingual
www.youtube.com/SESLHD

How do I become a speech pathologist?
Speech pathology is an accredited undergraduate or entry level masters degree. To find out more go to **www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/education-and-careers/university-courses**

How do I find a speech pathologist in my area?
Go to **www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au** and click on "Find a Speech Pathologist".

For further information contact **Speech Pathology Australia** – the national peak body representing speech pathologists, the professionals who work with and advocate for people who have a communication disability and all Australian consumers of speech pathology services.

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