



Bilingualism

Bilingualism is the use of or the ability to understand two languages. Use of more than two languages is called Multilingualism. Bilingualism is a description of the person's language ability, not a diagnostic label. Bilingualism never causes or contributes to a communication disorder (Afasic 2007).

Can being bilingual be beneficial?

Bilingual children have been shown to have certain academic advantages compared to those who only speak one language, for example:

- Better at problem solving
- Demonstrate greater creativity
- Multilingual children can go on to outperform monolingual children at secondary school.

Are bilingual children slower to start speaking?

There is no evidence that bilingual children learn to speak later. Some children, whether bilingual or monolingual, learn to speak later than others.

When should I refer to Speech and Language Therapy?

If there are concerns about the bilingual child's communication in their first language (mother tongue) - Please check with parents or if possible a bilingual staff member.

Should I talk to my child in English as this is the language used at school?

- Speak in whichever language you feel most comfortable. This will probably be your mother tongue. Your child will then have a good understanding of their first language which makes it easier to add another language at a later date.
- Don't be afraid to speak to your child in your home language – this allows the child to communicate at home, with wider family and community. Close relationships with grandparents for example, are more difficult to establish if child and grandparent do not speak the same language.
- Do not suddenly switch to speaking only English. If your child has learnt to talk in another language he will think in that language. If he loses his first language too early it could affect his learning at school.



Why does my child refuse to speak their first language at home and insist on speaking English?

Children quickly find out which language is useful in which situations and it is likely they are being exposed to English throughout their day (e.g. at school) and therefore are opting to use English as it is the language they are encountering the most. Adults can help by emphasising the importance of mother tongue. It's important to keep speaking your first language, even though your child answers in English. Children will understand what has been said and continue learning the language. You could also tell stories and sing songs with your children and borrow books in your language from the library.

Does speaking two or more languages cause language disorder?

- Learning more than one language at a time does not cause language disorder.
- Continue to use your home language with your child as it will benefit your child's development, confidence and emotional state.

My child speaks a mixture of languages within the same sentence. Is this a problem?

As children become better at both languages they can mix the two together. This is a natural process which requires a high level of language skill.

How can I help my child?

- Use your own language – don't mix up 2 languages. For example, if Mum speaks Polish and Dad speaks Urdu, each parent should use their own language with their children.
- Create opportunities for your child to use all of the languages they hear. For example, let them join in community activities where they will hear your language, as well as taking them to toddler groups where English is used.
- Encourage attempts from your child to communicate in any way or language – show them you are interested!
- Don't make a language an issue – don't punish your child for using a particular language.
- Children need time to think and quietly take in the language around them.
- They may need some "time out" from English to think their own thoughts. Imagine spending a whole day with people speaking a different language – it's so tiring!



- Share a simple list of 10-20 commonly used words in your home language with nursery/school, and friends.
- It is okay for children to speak in their home language when they are at school
- Use visual cues (facial expression, gesture, signs, symbols, pictures etc.) to support verbal messages. This can help support and link languages across home and school.

Useful Links:

<http://www.londonsigbilingualism.co.uk/advice.html>

www.ican.org.uk (search 'bilingualism')