

Speaking More Than One Language

What is bilingualism?

Bilingualism means being able to understand and use two languages.

Multilingualism means using more than two languages.

Learning more than one language does not cause speech or language problems.

Is being bilingual a good thing?

Being bilingual has many benefits:

- It helps with problem-solving, thinking and memory.
- It can make children more creative and flexible.
- It can support learning and reading in both languages.
- It helps children/young people build relationships with their families and connect with their cultural identity.

Do bilingual children start talking later?

No. Bilingual children learn to talk at the same time as children who speak one language. They may know some words in one language and not in the other language, but their total language knowledge is the same. All children learn to talk at different speeds — this is normal.

Should parents speak English at home because it's the school language?

No. It's best to speak the language you are most comfortable with. A strong first language helps children learn English later. Suddenly stopping your home language can confuse your child and affect how they feel.

Why might some children prefer to speak English?

Children often use the language they hear most — like at school or with friends. But it's still important to speak your home language. This helps your child stay connected to your culture and keeps both languages strong. Even if your child answers in English, keep speaking your home language — they are still learning it.



Does speaking two or more languages cause problems?

- No. Speaking two or more languages does not cause speech or language problems.
- If a child has a speech or language difficulty, it will show in all their languages — not just one.
- Speaking your home language helps your child's learning and development.

Is mixing languages (code-switching) a problem?

- No. Mixing languages (called code-switching) is normal for bilingual people.
- It shows that your child's brain can use both languages well.

How can parents/carers support their child's bilingual development?

- Use your home language often and confidently.
- Speak it in everyday situations like playing, shopping, or watching TV.
- Read stories, sing songs, and talk in both languages.
- Let your child meet and speak with others who use both languages.
- Don't correct every mistake. Just support your child's effort to speak.
- Share a list of home language words with your child's teacher. This can help them support your child at school.

When should I refer to Speech and Language Therapy?

If you are worried about your child's communication in your home language, it's a good idea to ask for advice. Speech or language difficulties should show in both languages, not just English. Talking to teachers or bilingual staff can help decide if your child needs support.