

Supporting Bilingual Speech and Language Development

- Read books in both languages
- Use songs to encourage imitation and engagement
- Talk about the activities you are doing
- Speak in your native language or the language(s) in which you are most comfortable
- Participate in community activities to allow your child the opportunity to practice communication skills in social situations
- Encourage your child to speak in any language in which s/he is comfortable

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Facts and Myths about Bilingual Speech and Language Development



Key Terms

Second language acquisition - process of learning a second language once the native language is established

Monolingual - a person who speaks only one language

Bilingual - a person who speaks two languages

Sequential bilingual - a person who learns a second language after the first language has been established; the second language is typically introduced after age 3

Simultaneous bilingual - a person who learns two languages at the same time; both languages are introduced typically before age 3

Code switching - instances when bilingual speakers switch from one language to another within the same sentence

Language transfer - may be evident with bilingual speakers; happens when an error occurs in the second language due to the direct influence of the first language



Bilingual Myths

1 **Myth:** Learning more than one language causes children to be confused and/or delayed.
Fact: Bilingual children reach their developmental milestones at the same time as monolingual children. If a child has a speech or language delay, it will be present in both languages, but is not caused by learning the two. Mixing two language does not imply a child is confused.

2 **Myth:** Parents of children with language delays or disorders should only speak to a child in one language.
Fact: Children with language delays or disorders can learn to communicate in two languages. Parents are encouraged to speak to their children in any and all language in which they are comfortable.

3 **Myth:** A child should learn one language fully before s/he can learn a second language.
Fact: Learning both languages can occur at the same time.

4 **Myth:** Children who mix languages early in their development will continue to do so as they age.
Fact: Children will stop mixing both languages as they increase their vocabulary and are able to express themselves fully in one. Mixing of languages is actually a way of getting their meaning across by using both languages. Children who speak only one language do not have this advantage and will often use gestures to fill in for the words they do not know.

5 **Myth:** Parents who only speak one language will have a hard time raising a bilingual child.
Fact: Children learn language through repeated experiences and by using language to express themselves. As long as they have these opportunities, they will learn both languages even if a parent is still learning a second language.



Speech and Language Development in Bilingual Children**

At approximately 12 months, a bilingual child should say his/her first word (such as “mama” or “dada”). At approximately 18 months, a bilingual child should have a vocabulary of 20-50 words and be understood by parents and unfamiliar people approximately 25% of the time.

At approximately 24 months, a bilingual child should be using two-word phrases to communicate (for example, “mommy come”). A bilingual child should have a vocabulary of 200-300 words, be understood 50-75% of the time by parents and be understood approximately 50% of the time by unfamiliar people.

Between 3 and 3-1/2, a bilingual child should be using three-word phrases to communicate and have a vocabulary of approximately 1,000 words. A bilingual child should be understood 75-100% of the time by parents and be understood approximately 75% of the time by unfamiliar people.

Between 4 and 4-1/2, a bilingual child should be able to answer basic, open-ended questions (e.g., what, where, when questions). A bilingual child should be understood 100% of the time by unfamiliar people.

*** It is important to remember that bilingual children may mix grammar rules for both languages and/or use words from both languages within a sentence. This is considered acceptable in bilingual language development.*