

Key facts

- A bilingual child not using English does not necessarily have a communication difficulty. However it is possible for children to be bilingual AND have a communication difficulty.
- 1 in 10 children will have difficulties with talking regardless of how many languages they are learning.
- It is important to assess your child's language skills in their preferred language (or in the case of two or more equally dominant languages, across all languages).
- Learning more than one language is very beneficial for your child and WILL NOT cause or worsen a language difficulty.
- It is best to speak in your home language with your child regardless of which languages your child may be exposed to outside of the home.

Concerned about your child's talking?

Contact Sam (Specialist Speech and Language Therapist at Chatty Chipmunks) to arrange a FREE no obligation 15 minute wellbeing chat to discuss your concerns and how we can help.

Phone: 07425 914487

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Bilingualism:

A guide for parents of children learning more than one language



What do we mean by bilingualism?

Bilingualism is when a child or adult uses more than one language. There are many myths surrounding bilingualism and ways to support bilingual children with their communication development. Below I have listed some of the more common questions alongside current advice.

Question	Answer
Will learning more than one language cause my child to talk later than other children?	No. Bilingualism does not cause speech and language difficulties. Occasionally first words may appear slightly later but children should continue to meet communication milestones on time.
Will learning more than one language be more difficult for my child than just learning one language?	No. Children can start learning more than one language from birth. Young children will be able to learn more than one language more easily than older children and adults. Bilingualism can offer social, educational and employment advantages.
I speak more than one language. Which one should I use when talking to my child?	Parents and caregivers should speak in their strongest language, regardless of which languages the child is exposed to elsewhere. Speaking in your home language will provide your child with good language models, essential for communication development.
Is it important for my child to learn English before they start nursery or school?	No. It is important that your child has good skills in their home language before learning English. Typically developing children should pick up English quickly once they start nursery or school.
How can I help my child learn our home language?	Talk and play with your child throughout the day. Singing songs is a great way of supporting language development. Using gestures and signs alongside talking can support a child's understanding and provide a way for your child to communicate before they can use the word.

My child has started school and now uses English at home instead of our home language. Why?	Children will use the language that they hear the most. Children will still understand your home language even if they do not use it. You can help to keep your home language alive by continuing to use it with them.
Should I reply to my child in the same language that they used?	Not necessarily. Continue to speak to your child in your strongest language. This will help keep your home language alive while also providing your child with consistently good language models. Research shows that school children who continue to use their home language may have greater educational success. If your child continues to use their home language this will enable them to communicate effectively with members of their wider family.
My child is mixing up his languages. Is this normal?	Yes. All children acquiring more than one language will mix up their languages to begin with. It will take a few years for your child to separate their languages. Even bilingual adults sometimes use more than one language when speaking. This is called "code switching".
My child is better at different languages in different contexts. Is this normal?	Yes. Your child will naturally be better at languages in the context in which they have heard them spoken the most. You may find for instance that your child prefers speaking English when talking about school work but uses your home language when cooking. When assessing their speech and language development it is important to look at their words and sentences across all dominant languages.
My family speaks different languages. Which one should we use?	Each member of the family should speak in their strongest language. This provides children with good language models at home, enabling them to learn other languages more easily.

