

# A Guide to Parents about Speaking more than one Language

## "It is an advantage to speak more than one language."

Children learn to talk by interacting, talking and listening to the people around them talk.

The most important thing is that children hear a 'good language model'. This means that they hear people talking the language they know best, so that they hear the correct words and grammar.



The best way to support your bilingual or multilingual child is to be consistent with the language you use when talking to them. In general, there are two ways children learn more than one language:

- by learning the languages at the same time
- by learning one language, and then another (e.g. at school). If a child has good language skills in their home language then they will learn an additional language from their new environment.

## When children are learning an additional language:

Look for progress! Children progress at different speeds.

It is typical for the child to have a 'silent phase' where they talk less and use more gestures and pointing in their new environment. This can last for a few months but, if the child has good home language skills, will usually pass.

Using signs and gestures can sometimes help bridge the gap while children are learning an additional language.

If your child has good language skills in their home language, then they should be able to learn English once they start preschool/school.

## Bilingualism is an **ADVANTAGE!**

Here are some reasons why:

- Children can communicate with people in their extended family/community. They will feel secure in their cultural identity and will experience a sense of belonging.

- It helps learning because children can think about ideas in both languages and use information in new ways.
- It helps them think more flexibly and creatively meaning they will be able to come up with solutions to problems more easily, and be better at multitasking.
- It can help their overall language development.
- It helps them to learn other languages.
- There may be economic advantages later on in life.

### **What if my child's speech and/or language is delayed?**

If your child's speech and/or language development is delayed in their first language you should talk to your speech and language therapist. They will give you ideas about how you can support your child's skills in their home language.

Boosting their skills in their home language will help them to then learn other languages later. A child is only considered to need speech and language therapy if there are difficulties in the child's primary language as well as English. There is no evidence that being bilingual makes it harder for children to talk, or causes them to have a delay.

### **Points to remember:**

- Learning more than one language is a common and normal childhood experience - the majority of the world's population is bilingual!
- No one language is more difficult to learn than another
- When learning more than one language, children will switch between the languages