

Bilingualism

Paediatric Community Speech and Language Therapy

What is Bilingualism?

Bilingualism is the ability to understand and/or use two or more languages. Children all over the world learn more than one language without developing speech or language problems.

Families should use the language they are most confident in. Using only English will mean that your child only speaks English and will lose their home language.

If your child has speech, language and communication difficulties, this will be present both (all) their languages.

The research shows bilingualism does not cause speech and language difficulties. You should never feel guilty for being bilingual; your child may have experienced difficulties no matter which language or languages they spoke.

If you need an interpreter during phone calls or appointments, please tell us.

How to help

Advice for parents/carers

- Talk to your child in your strongest language(s). This will provide a solid foundation upon which additional languages can be learnt.
- Make sure your child knows the names of the languages he/she speaks.
- If your child prefers to use English words, you can still respond and repeat back what they have said in your own language.
- Have 'special time' with your child. Get rid of any distractions e.g. TV, radio, phone etc. Watch your child, avoid asking questions and talk about what they are doing with their toys. This will help them learn words. Model language rather than pointing out their errors e.g. If they say "We went swimming" just say back "We went swimming" and then carry on the conversation.

Advice for nursery / school staff

- Speak to family about what languages are spoken at home, how long have they been exposed to English?
- Use visual support to support spoken communication e.g. use pictures, photographs, non-verbal clues, Makaton signs, speak clearly and at a normal pace, making sure child is opposite you.

- Provide opportunities for child-child interactions as children are more likely to communicate with each other than when an adult is there.
- Children may need lots of listening time before they feel confident enough to speak. Allow them to be silent if they want to be. The ‘Silent Period’ is a normal stage all children go through when they are learning more than one language
- Re-cast/re-model language rather than correcting errors e.g. “We wented swimming” could be re-stated as “You went swimming”

Remember to...

Praise your child when they take part or put effort in
Say your child’s name before you speak
Keep modelling language rather than correcting errors

Helpful links

[Tiny Happy People: Bilingualism](#)



[National Literacy Trust: Tips in 19 languages](#)



[Video about Bilingualism](#)



[Kent NHS: Bilingualism Information](#)

