

# Raising children in more than one language

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How many  
languages?

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How many languages  
do you speak?

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2 languages =  
bilingual

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3+ languages =  
multilingual

Why be  
bilingual?  
Why your  
language  
is a good  
thing?

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It's normal to speak more than one language in the world

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>20% of Australians speak more than one language at home

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It's natural to use your first language with your child.

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Shared culture and heritage.

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A gift from one generation to the next

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Your right and you are helping your child in life

Is  
bilingualism  
good for  
your  
children?

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Yes good for your child's brain.

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Yes good for the family – it supports communication and strengthens bonds between ALL family members,

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E.g. parents and children, grandparents and children.

Will  
bilingualism  
hurt my  
children?

Some people say it does the following:

- It causes language delay –NOT TRUE
- It causes stuttering –NOT TRUE
- It is confusing for children 'it mixes them up'-NOT TRUE!

Kids are very clever. They can cope with more than one language.

# What about when kids go to school?

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Children learn English in kindergarten programs – counters any potential negative effects

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Children hear lots of English around them in the world

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Bilinguals do better over time

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School problems may be wrongly linked to language – other problems may be at play

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Positive families support positive school outcomes

# The real story:

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Learning languages is natural for children

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Children learn to distinguish between languages at a very young age.

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Sometimes children go through a period of transference, but this is only temporary.

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Language mixing, if it happens, is conscious and done by choice. They like to play with language

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Bilinguals perform well on IQ tests, are divergent thinkers and good at multitasking!

What if  
someone  
criticises a  
parent  
for  
teaching  
their child  
their  
language?

- Have reasons ready and explain them:
- e.g. parent might say: it is important my child speaks my language because I want him/her to communicate with me and my parents in my language



Is it easier  
for some  
children to  
learn  
more than  
one  
language  
than  
others?

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All children are different and  
develop at different speeds.

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Little relationship between how  
quickly someone learns to speak  
and their ultimate success.

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Girls tend to develop bilingually  
slightly faster than boys

# When to start?

- Immediately!! As soon as possible
- It's good to start learning a language early:
  - With children language is "caught rather than taught"
  - children learn pronunciation more easily

When to  
speak  
family  
language  
with a  
child?

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At home (and anywhere else)

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Whenever is possible

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Consistently with the same person  
(eg. One parent, one language)

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With babysitters, family members,  
etc.

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In specific places

## Strategies and tips 1

Learning a  
language  
should be:

- Enjoyable and Fun
- Positive

# Strategies and tips 2

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## The role of the bilingual parent:

- Be positive
- Make sure you use your language.
- Be patient
- Show appreciation and encouragement for your child's efforts and give praise often
- Have fun!

# Strategies and tips for parents 3

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Speak clearly

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Give examples when introducing new vocabulary, sentence structures, and interactive styles

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Repeat yourself and ask questions

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Re-use your child's words

# Strategies and tips 4

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Actively engage with child in family language

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Play language games

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Make sure family language is varied, rich and the right level for your child's age

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What does RICH mean?

# Remember:

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Every child is different. A child may need much more language input and time than others.



How reading  
and telling  
stories/singing  
songs helps a  
child

- It can be a bonding experience: fun and enjoyable activity that you can share – children like it when parents read to them
- It is a good way to build vocabulary
- Books/stories/songs can give ideas for play
- They can be used over and over again

# How reading helps a child become bilingual 2

- Books introduce new ideas and things to talk about
- New words and language structures
- It moves language out of everyday home life and allows the child to talk and think about the world

# The importance of pre-reading (reading without written words)

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- Use pictures to talk in your language, e.g. what can you see? What is that? What colour do you think the flower is?
- This is good preparation for reading words



What if partner doesn't speak family language.

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1. Partner (and family) can provide positive support

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2. Explain reasons to them

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3. They can learn as well

My child  
won't  
speak my  
language?  
What can I  
do?

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A common problem

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Insist – tell your child it's  
important

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Be consistent – always speak  
your language with your child

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Create a need to speak the  
language

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Remain positive at all times!

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What can  
my  
community  
do?

- Community and families can work together to support your language

# Question time



Special thanks to Suzanne Döpke whose knowledge and experience have been inspiring bilingual families for many years.