Raising a Bilingual Child

Frequently Asked Questions

Can I teach my child a second language even though I only speak one?

Yes! Some options are:

1. Hiring a bilingual nanny
2. Enrolling your child in baby language classes
3. Making play dates with friends who have bilingual children
4. Enrolling your child in a bilingual daycare or preschool

The key is exposure. You need to have good quality and consistent exposure to both languages. If your child just gets a little exposure to the second language, it isn’t a bad thing. But, the chances of being fluent will be less.

If I don't speak English to my child at home, will he be behind in school?

No. Many bilingual children are sequential language learners.

Talk to your child in the language you know best. You can offer richer vocabulary, correct grammar, and more complex language. Many language skills are transferable.. For example, if your child learns decoding, phonological skills such as phonological awareness, or narrative structure in Spanish, those skills apply to English as well.

Will my child ever be proficient in both languages?

Yes! If you raise a bilingual child from birth, there will not be any noticeable difference in speech and language development.

Even though your child gets 1/2 the exposure of each language, research has shown that he will learn and be proficient in both languages.

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My child constantly switches back and forth between her 2 languages. Is that confusing or bad?

No! This is called code switching and it is NOT bad.

It is normal in all children raised bilingually and actually shows mastery of both languages. In order to code switch, a child has to understand vocabulary and grammar rules of both languages.

If my child has a speech or language disorder, should I only talk to him in one language?

No! Actually, the opposite is true. Learning 2 languages helps develop language skills.

I am embarrassed to say that I was not always aware of this fact, and I have even advised parents in the past to only speak one language when their child was diagnosed with a language disorder.

Learning two languages DOES NOT cause a speech or language disorder. Therefore, speaking only one language WILL NOT fix the problem. If a child has a speech or language disorder, he will have difficulty in both languages.

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