

# Raising bilingual children

## Frequently asked questions

### **Why should we raise our child speaking two languages?**

Children who can speak two or more languages can communicate with a wider number of people and understand different cultures. If your children know your home language, they will find it easier to understand your cultural heritage and to communicate with the extended family. Bilingualism gives children more than just communication skills: research has shown that bilingual children have good reading skills, they can learn other languages easily and they think creatively. In addition, knowing two languages will give them more job opportunities in the future.

### **Should my child be equally fluent in both languages?**

Sometimes parents notice that their children are using one language less than the other. It is important to keep in mind that bilinguals tend to use their languages for different purposes (for example English at school, Punjabi at home). Therefore, an English-Punjabi bilingual child may know more school-related words in English than in Punjabi. You can help your child to develop a rich vocabulary by sharing books and using your home language frequently to talk about a wide range of topics. You should not expect your child to be equally fluent in both languages.

### **How and when should I start speaking my home language to my child?**

The best way to introduce your child to your home language is to speak it naturally and to start from birth. Children need to regularly hear and use a language in order to develop it, and the earlier they start the more chances they will have of developing good pronunciation and grammar skills.

## Our family language is Arabic, but we want our child to be able to speak English fluently. Should we start speaking English at home?

You don't need to stop speaking your native language. Both English and Arabic will develop if your child hears them and uses them regularly. There will be plenty of opportunities for your child to use English outside your home.

## Do bilingual children start to speak later than monolinguals?

Some children, whether bilingual or monolingual, learn to speak later than others. Bilingualism has not been found to delay the development of language. Children who start to speak later usually catch up with their peers.

## My child has good language skills in our family language, but struggles with English. Does this mean that s/he is language impaired?

Language impairment manifests in all language spoken by the child. If your child has good language skills in your family language, it is unlikely that s/he has language impairment.

## Sometimes my child uses English and Polish words in the same sentence. Is that normal?

Most bilinguals can easily switch between languages and mixing is normal. Children who mix are not confused, they are just using words they know in different languages. Most bilinguals will use only one language when talking to monolinguals, but they may feel free to switch when talking to bilinguals.

If you would like to ask more questions or find out more about the future events of the Centre for Literacy and Multilingualism, join our mailing list by contacting **Dr Francesca La Morgia**: [f.lamorgia@reading.ac.uk](mailto:f.lamorgia@reading.ac.uk)

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