

Frequently asked questions about bilingualism



Will speaking two languages with my child cause a language delay?

- No. Research indicates that speaking two languages with a child will **not** cause speech and language problems.
- Research has shown that a child's total vocabulary (when both languages are combined) will be at least the same size as a child who only speaks one language.
- A child's brain can learn more than one language. In many places around the world children grow up learning more than one language.
- If a bilingual child is delayed in his/her language development, a speech and language assessment is recommended. For more information about when to refer for a speech and language assessment please visit, [http://www.rvh.on.ca/UserFiles/File/trayliner07\(1\).pdf](http://www.rvh.on.ca/UserFiles/File/trayliner07(1).pdf)



If my child has a speech/language delay, will speaking two languages make the delay worse?

- No. There is **no evidence** that children with a speech and language delay will be more delayed if they hear two languages.
- Research has shown that children with a speech and language delay who hear two languages will have the same difficulties in both languages.



If I don't speak English well, is it okay for me to speak my native language with my child?

- Yes! Some parents speak to their child in English even when they don't speak it well. They believe that speaking with their child in English is necessary for their child to learn English. Research however does not support this view.
- Research has highlighted that it is important for parents and caregivers to speak with a child in the language that feels **natural** and **comfortable**. Speaking with a child in a language that is not comfortable may have negative consequences for parent-child connections.
- Maintaining one's native language may be important for a number of reasons. There may be family members who only speak their native language. Also, there is a risk of losing one's native language if it is not supported at home.



How can I help my child learn more than one language?

- Research says your child needs **repeated** and **consistent** exposure to each language. Some parents use:
 - “one parent-one language”: one parent speaks one language to the child; the other parent speaks the other language to the child.
 - “one place-one language”: one language is spoken at home; the other at daycare or at school.
 - “two languages mixed throughout the day”: one or both parents speak both languages to their child throughout the day.

No one approach is best. Parents should speak to their child in a way that feels comfortable for them. The key is to provide their child with many opportunities to hear, speak, play and interact in both languages.



What if my child mixes both languages?

- Mixing languages is **not** a sign of language delay or difficulty in children learning two languages.
- Mixing languages is **common** for children learning two languages. It is natural and should be expected.



What about putting my child with a speech and language delay in a French Immersion program?

- There is very limited research in this area. It seems that children with language impairments may do just as well in bilingual education settings as in English only settings. Keep in mind that children with language impairments need **more support** with learning language in general **both** at home and at school.

References

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