

FAQ

1. Will learning two or more languages at an early age harm my child's development in any way?

Not unless your child belongs to a special category of children such as those outlined in the special warning on the Info Guide page. The differences between bilingual and monolingual children are negligible.

2. Will my child be slower to speak than monolingual children?

No. Some children learn to speak later than others - and this goes for monolingual as well as bilingual children - there is no difference at all.

3. My child is mixing his languages, does this mean he is confused and we should just teach him one language rather?

No, this is normal. Your child will sort it all out for himself eventually. Give him the chance. If he started hearing both as a baby, by the time he goes to school he should have sorted out the language patterns in his head and be capable of speaking the two without much mixing.

4. Are there different levels of bilingualism?

Yes. The balance between the first and second language with regards to proficiency may vary considerably. This depends on how often the second is heard, from what age, and how 'rich' the child's environment for learning is.

5. Should we make sure our child speaks one language properly before she starts learning another?

No. Most experts agree that the best way to attain a high level of bilingualism is to experience both languages simultaneously from birth.

6. My child is already 10 years old, is it too late for her to become bilingual?

No. It is never too late. Although high levels of bilingualism are harder to attain as one gets older (so is the accent). So don't leave it any longer!

7. If I speak the minority language at home with my child before she goes to school, won't she end up being behind when he goes to school?

No. A child will always pick up the environmental language very quickly due the high level of exposure to it (school, friends, books, television, games etc). That is why it is always best to concentrate on the minority language as much as possible at home.

8. Recently my son has started refusing to speak my language with me - I notice this is especially so around his friends. Why is he doing this and what am I to do?

Perhaps speaking the first language seems more important to him now as his friends all speak it and this is his way of establishing his identity with regards to them and 'fitting in'. Don't force him to speak your language in front of his friends but encourage him to speak it when they are not around. Try pretending you don't understand him, for example, if he doesn't speak to you in your language.

9. Won't my child feel 'lost' or 'split' if he has two separate languages and cultures to learn - won't his sense of identity suffer?

No. Any adult bilingual will attest to the fact that they feel quite at home with both languages and cultures. Both get assimilated, though not mixed, with a resulting richness in character and culture.

10. Our little boy is 3 and he is bilingual. Can we start teaching him a third language?

Yes, and you needed have waited until he was three to do so. A baby or young child can take in as many languages as come their way, so don't hesitate. Just remember to start slowly and consistently - try repeating what you say in the other language (it is never good to suddenly start replacing a language with another).

11. My baby is one years old and her paternal grandparents are very opposed to the idea of my teaching her my language. They think this will cause problems for them and they won't be able to understand her and her them. Is this true?

No. How it will work depends on your situation. If her father has been speaking the first language to her since birth then she should have no problem understanding his parents. As for them understanding her, she may come out with words they don't understand at first, but she will soon adapt to their way of speaking. What you could do to help, if this happens, is to stay with them and translate the words she says so they understand better and feel less left out. Encourage them to help you in your efforts to teach bilingualism and show them they can play a vital role in the success of it too.

12. My child is bilingual and is now going to school. He has just started learning to read in his first language, can I start teaching him to read in the second one at home at the same time?

If the first and second languages share the same alphabet, it is generally considered to be better to wait until he has learnt to read properly in the first one before you start with second one.

13. We have baby boy of 4 months old. My parents don't want my husband speaking his language to him as they think this will cause the child speech problems. What do I do?

You could explain that, although these fears are understandable considering the 'bad press' bilingualism has received in the past, recent studies show these to be totally unfounded. You could also print out the Info Guide and Practical Guide pages and get them to read it.