



The benefits of talking with your child in your home language

Speaking more than one language

Learning more than one language is beneficial to children.

English is one of many languages spoken in the UK. It is the language used for our education system and the prime language used in many documents. However, more than half of the world's population speak at least one other language – estimates vary from 60 to 75 per cent.

Recent research indicates that being bilingual, or speaking more than one language fluently, provides a vital way of communicating, alongside the following benefits:

- better understanding of other people's views and situations (empathy)
- physically bigger parts of the brain (the anterior cingulate cortex)
- greater verbal and non-verbal IQ
- delaying symptoms of dementia by approximately four to five years
- better recovery of brain function from diseases such as stroke
- increased mental fitness
- better financial and employment opportunity

Should I talk to my child in language/s other than English?

If English is not your home language, you should **definitely** talk to your child in your home language. There are a range of reasons for this:

- 1) You will be providing the best language model for your child to learn from
- 2) You will be giving them a good strong base language for them to learn other languages
- 3) Your child will be able to communicate with other people in your family
- 4) Being bilingual boosts their brains and provides other opportunities for them.

How should I use my home language?

If the language you feel most confident speaking is not English, you should use your home language to talk to your child and to support your child learning to talk. Once they have learnt your home language well, they will have a strong base to learn English from English-speaking adults and friends later.

As with all children who are learning to talk, there are [tips](#) for what you can do to help. Remember to communicate with your child in the language you feel most confident using. This is the best way for them to learn to talk.

What if I speak a different language to my child's other parent?

It is best for you to talk to your child in the language you feel most confident, even if that is a different language from your child's other parent.

Children can learn two different languages at once, and often do. This is known as simultaneous language learning and is what very many people around the world do, without a problem.

The advice is that each parent should speak to the child in the language they feel most confident in.

How will my child learn English?

Your child will learn English best from adults and friends who speak English as their home language. You can help by providing these opportunities:

Outside the home:

- Take your child to places where they can hear and use English – for example parks, clubs and playgroups
- Help your child to listen out for new words and phrases while you are out, for example 'the green man' and 'the red man' when crossing the road, names of fruit and vegetables at the supermarket.

At home:

- Make sure your child's play areas and toys include words in English that they can read or listen to (as well as words from your home language).
- Encourage your child to watch and listen to suitable programmes on television, radio and the internet where they will hear English. It also helps to talk together with your child about these programmes with your child.

(advice taken from the [Scottish Government 2020](#))

What if my child refuses to speak our first language?

It is normal for children to prefer one language over another at different times, especially outside of the home.

Most people respect and value your first language and it is important for children to feel proud of their language and culture. Explain the importance of being bilingual to your child and keep speaking to them in the language you are most confident in.

(advice taken from the [Bell Foundation 2020](#))

What if I am worried about my child's speech, language and communication development?

Children who are learning a different language from English as their first or simultaneous language may progress with no difficulties. Or, just like any other child, they may have some difficulties learning to talk. This is not to do with them learning more than one language. Children who speak more than one language are no more likely to find it difficult learning to talk, or understand words and sentences.

If you have concerns about your child's speech, language and communication development, you can discuss this with your child's health visitor, teacher, or early years practitioner. Or you can contact a speech and language therapist directly.

Keep talking to your child in your home language and use the [strategies](#) that are known to support good language development.

If your child needs a specialist assessment, the specialist will need to find out how much of their home language they are able to understand and use. It would be useful if you could note down word for word some of the sentences your child uses. For example, if they say '*teddy gone*', note this down rather than '*The teddy has gone*'. This will help the specialist build up a picture of how your child's skills are developing. Also, keep a note of any words or sentences your child uses that you do not understand.

Remember, if your child does have a speech, language and communication need, you should carry on talking to them in your home language. They can learn English later, once they have the basics of learning to talk.

More questions and answers can be found [here](#).

Useful links:

<https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/the-many-benefits-of-being-bilingual>

<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20160811-the-amazing-benefits-of-being-bilingual>

<https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/the-bilingual-brain>

<https://ealresources.bell-foundation.org.uk/parents/speaking-your-home-language>

<https://enquire.org.uk/for-professionals/tips-supporting-children-english-additional-language-eal/>

<https://education.gov.scot/parentzone/additional-support/specific-support-needs/learning-environment/english-as-an-additional-language>

<http://www.londonsigbilingualism.co.uk/pdf/2.pdf>

<https://ican.org.uk/i-cans-talking-point/parents/resources/>

<http://www.thecommunicationtrust.org.uk/resources/resources/resources-for-practitioners/eal-case-studies/>

Resources for supporting language development – available in non- English languages

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/early-years/bilingual-quick-tips/>

<https://ican.org.uk/shop/talk-together-booklet-pack-of-25/>

TALK Derby information for practitioners regarding the benefits of children learning their home language first

Click [here](#).