



Children Who Are Learning Two or More Languages - Advice sheet

A bilingual child is one who hears or speaks two or more languages (multi-lingual).

Many young people successfully learn more than one language in their pre-school years at home. Many children learn one language at home and then go on to learn English as an additional language when they start nursery or school.

Advice for parents of children who are exposed to more than one language:

- Speak your strongest or first language so that your child hears a good language model
- Sometimes if more than one language is used within a home, people will switch from one to the other quite naturally. This will not impact on your child's language but try to be consistent with vocabulary e.g. if they use the word 'roti' they should not then call it a 'chapati' at another time.
- In order to learn any language a child has to hear it often (ideally every day). Talk to your child during everyday activities e.g. bath time, meal times, learning activities and in social situations.
- Encourage all attempts from your child to communicate in any way or in any language whether they are using words, gesture or facial expression. Show them you are interested.
- Children learning an additional language commonly go through a silent period. Don't worry they might not say anything for several months in the new environment (e.g. nursery/school). This is a natural process.
- An environment which exposes children to more than one language should not in itself bring difficulties or cause delay in learning language. There is considerable evidence that learning to speak and use more than one language can benefit a child's overall academic and intellectual progress.