

English as an additional language



Do bilingual children start to speak later than children speaking one language?

Not usually. The evidence shows that all children start to speak around the same time and that young children learn two languages as naturally as learning one.

My child is bilingual will this cause language difficulties?

No – being bilingual alone does not cause language difficulties. What you will notice is that if your child is struggling to learn and use their home language(s), they will also have difficulties learning and using English.

My child is bilingual and mixing up languages. Are they confused?

When children learn two or more languages, they may often use a word existing in one language in the other; especially if they don't know the word in the other language! This is called code-switching. This is the usual way that children use their languages; they literally switch between different languages.

How can I tell if my child has language difficulties?

Your child will be finding it difficult to understand and speak their home language. They may find it harder to understand instructions and may not say as much as other children the same age. You can go to www.talkingpoint.org.uk to find out more about the stages of children's talking.

What should I do if I am worried that my child has difficulties talking?

- You can go to the Progress Checker at www.talkingpoint.org.uk and see how your child is doing in your home language.
- You can also call the [I CAN Help](http://www.ican.org.uk/help) Enquiry [Service](http://www.ican.org.uk/help) to speak to a speech and language therapist about your concerns.
- You can refer yourself to your local speech and language therapy service for an assessment - find out how on the Talking Point website. You will also find tips and advice on things you can do at home to help your child's talking on this website.

I CAN Help enquiry service www.ican.org.uk/help

Call 020 7843 2544 to arrange a free phone call from one of our speech and language therapists or email enquiries@ican.org.uk

Talking Point www.talkingpoint.org.uk

Visit this website for information about children's communication.

Should we stop speaking our home language and switch to English to help our child?

No. It is important that you carry on using your home language to speak with your child for many reasons:

- Your child needs to keep developing their home language skills to give them a strong foundation for learning other languages. This then helps them develop their skills in understanding and using English.
- You will be more confident and relaxed using your home language.
- If you start using English your child may lose their home language and not develop competent English skills.
- Your child may lose their home language and be isolated from their family and community.
- You can also help your child's reading skills by reading books in your home language.

How can we help our child when they start school?

You can give the school as much information as you can about the language(s) you and your child speak. It can often help to work with the school and provide some keywords in your home language that they can learn to help your child settle in more quickly, and feel more comfortable. They will have lots of opportunities to try out their new language skills at school.

How long will it take them to learn English?

It depends what the starting point is for your child. If they have grown up hearing two languages, they will be at a different point from a child that has never heard or learnt English. There is no exact answer but recent research suggests that it can take a child up to two years to learn enough English to get by socially and in the playground, and five to seven years to develop their skills to GCSE level.

My child has been referred to a speech and language therapist as they aren't saying many words. Will the therapy be in English?

You are entitled to have an interpreter at your appointment if you wish; you just need to ask so that your speech and language therapist can arrange this. This will help you express your concerns. It will also help the speech and language therapist see how your child is doing in their home language.

You can carry out any tips or advice at home in your home language.

You don't need to speak English to see a speech and language therapist.

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**My child has difficulties talking and is seeing a speech and language therapist.
Should we stop speaking our home language and speak English instead?**

Keep speaking your home language with your child. They will need to be supported by people who are using their language confidently so that they have lots of good models around them. They are also more likely to make progress in their home language than if you suddenly switch to English, which you and your child are less comfortable and confident with.

For more information go to:

www.talkingpoint.org.uk

www.wordsforlife.co.uk/bilingual

www.londonsigbilingualism.org.uk

www.talkingpoint.org.uk

www.afasicengland.org.uk/publications/glossary-sheets/

www.bilingualism.co.uk

I CAN also run the [Enquiry Service](#), an information line run by qualified speech & language therapists. If you have any questions about the speech, language or communication skills of a child you know, call us on 020 7843 2544 to book arrange a call back at a time convenient for you.

You can also email your questions to help@ican.org.uk .

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