



Multilingual and bilingual children: questions and answers

Key points

- **If you're bilingual, you use 2 languages. If you're multilingual, you use more than 2.**
- **Raising multilingual or bilingual children can create strong family and cultural bonds. It can also be good for children's learning.**
- **Raising multilingual or bilingual children is a long-term commitment.**

Raising multilingual and bilingual children: good for children, families and communities

[Raising multilingual or bilingual children](https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/connecting-communicating/bilingualism-multilingualism/raising-bilingual-children-tips)

(<https://raisingchildren.net.au/newborns/connecting-communicating/bilingualism-multilingualism/raising-bilingual-children-tips>) is good not only for your child or children, but also for your family and your community.

Children: benefits of multilingualism and bilingualism

For your child, speaking and using more than one language regularly might be linked to:

- better academic results
- more diverse and interesting career opportunities later in life.

Also, if your child grows up speaking more than one language, they might have a **better sense of self-worth, identity and belonging**. This comes from:

- feeling good about their heritage
- feeling confident about communicating and connecting with extended family members and people who speak their heritage language
- learning and hearing stories directly from family members
- being able to enjoy music, movies, literature and so on in more than one language.

Families: benefits of multilingualism and bilingualism

For your family, multilingualism and developing your language in your child:

- improves communication among your family members
- enhances emotional bonds
- makes it easier for you and your child to be part of your culture
- boosts your family's sense of cultural identity and belonging.

Communities: benefits of multilingualism and bilingualism

For your wider community, when children speak more than one language, it means that:

- everyone in the community gets a better appreciation of different languages and cultures
- children can more easily travel and work in different countries and cultures when they grow up
- children understand and appreciate different cultures
- children have increased empathy for other ways of understanding the world.

Things to think about when you're raising multilingual and bilingual children

Raising multilingual or bilingual children is a long-term commitment. To make multilingualism work for your child and family, there are things you can do each day and might need to think about over the long term. These things include:

- sticking with your heritage language, even when there's pressure to choose English
- reminding yourself that using your heritage language helps to strengthen family bonds
- using your heritage language to play games, read books, cook food and do other fun things that make it positive for your child
- helping your child understand the benefits of multilingualism and bilingualism
- making sure your child gets plenty of chances to hear and use their heritage language

- talking to your child's teachers and getting their support for your efforts
- getting support for yourself – for example, by talking to friends and family who are raising multilingual or bilingual children and finding resources in your community, like bilingual playgroups.

Multilingualism and bilingualism: frequently asked questions

Can children understand the differences between languages?

Children can understand the differences between languages from very early on. They can learn 2 or more languages at the same time without getting confused. For example, they realise very quickly that they need to speak German to Grandma and English to the teacher.

How does multilingualism and bilingualism affect the way children learn English?

Children who grow up in a family where parents have only limited English do better at learning English in school if they keep speaking their heritage languages at home. That's because a solid base in their first language makes it easier for them to learn a second one.

How does multilingualism and bilingualism affect literacy skills?

Multilingual and bilingual children who are exposed to more than one written language – for example, Spanish and English – or even different writing systems – for example, Chinese and English – can read and write English at high levels. Learning more than one language helps children understand language structures, and they're more likely to become literate in all the languages they use.

How does multilingualism and bilingualism affect academic learning?

Being multilingual or bilingual often helps children learn at school because it helps them with problem-solving, multitasking, creativity and flexible thinking. These children can also have good focus.

How does multilingualism and bilingualism affect speech development?

All children develop speech at different rates. Learning more than one language at the same time won't affect how early or quickly your child learns to speak. Children exposed to more than one language from birth become native speakers of all their languages.

Do parents need to worry if multilingual or bilingual children mix their languages?

Multilingual or bilingual children sometimes start a sentence with one language and finish with another language. This is natural part of bilingual development. Children stop doing this with age and experience.

Languages other than English

- [Arabic](#)
(https://raisingchildren.net.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/102970/Multilingual-and-bilingual-children-benefits-and-challenges-Arabic.pdf) (PDF: 143kb)
- [Dari](#)
(https://raisingchildren.net.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/102971/Multilingual-and-bilingual-children-benefits-and-challenges-Dari.pdf) (PDF: 135kb)
- [Dinka](#)
(https://raisingchildren.net.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0021/102972/Multilingual-and-bilingual-children-benefits-and-challenges-Dinka.pdf) (PDF: 136kb)
- [Hakha Chin](#)
(https://raisingchildren.net.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0022/102973/Multilingual-and-bilingual-children-benefits-and-challenges-Hakha-Chin.pdf) (PDF: 162kb)
- [Karen](#)
(https://raisingchildren.net.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/102974/Multilingual-and-bilingual-children-benefits-and-challenges-Karen.pdf) (PDF: 133kb)
- [Persian](#)
(https://raisingchildren.net.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0024/102975/Multilingual-and-bilingual-children-benefits-and-challenges-Persian.pdf) (PDF: 136kb)
- [Simplified Chinese](#)
(https://raisingchildren.net.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0025/102976/Multilingual-and-bilingual-children-benefits-and-challenges-Simplified-Chinese.pdf) (PDF: 203kb)
- [Swahili](#)
(https://raisingchildren.net.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0026/102977/Multilingual-and-bilingual-children-benefits-and-challenges-Swahili.pdf) (PDF: 133kb)
- [Tamil](#)
(https://raisingchildren.net.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0027/102978/Multilingual-and-bilingual-children-benefits-and-challenges-Tamil.pdf) (PDF: 130kb)
- [Vietnamese](#)
(https://raisingchildren.net.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0028/102979/Multilingual-and-bilingual-children-benefits-and-challenges-Vietnamese.pdf) (PDF: 144kb)

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External links

- [Colorin Colorado \(http://www.colorincolorado.org/\)](http://www.colorincolorado.org/)

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