



Benefits of bilingualism or multilingualism for kids and families

Key points

- If you're bilingual, you use 2 languages. If you're multilingual, you use more than 2 languages.
- Benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism include strong family and cultural bonds.
- Bilingualism or multilingualism can also be good for children's learning.
- Raising multilingual or bilingual children is a long-term commitment.

Why multilingualism and bilingualism is good for children, families and communities

Being multilingual or bilingual (<https://raisingchildren.net.au/babies/connecting-communicating/bilingualism-multilingualism/raising-bilingual-children-tips>) is good for your child. It's also good for your family, your local community and the wider community.

Benefits of multilingualism and bilingualism for your child

For your child, speaking and using more than one language regularly has been linked to:

- improved literacy and other language skills
- original and creative problem-solving
- better results in other academic subjects
- the ability to see the world from many perspectives
- more diverse and interesting work and travel 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.

Benefits of multilingualism and bilingualism for your family

For your family, being multilingual and developing your heritage 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.

Benefits of multilingualism and bilingualism for your community

For your wider community, when children speak more than one language, it might mean that more children and adults in your community:

- appreciate and understand diverse languages and cultures
- have more empathy for diverse ways of understanding the world.

Things to think about when you're raising a multilingual or bilingual child

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. You might also need to think about these things 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.

Frequently asked questions about multilingual and bilingual kids

Can children understand the differences among languages?

Multilingual and bilingual children understand the differences among languages from an early age, especially when families use models like one parent-one language, and one environment-one language. For example, they realise very quickly that they need to speak Arabic at home and English outside home. And they can even switch to English to tell a special story at home, while continuing to use Arabic at other times.

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

Speaking a heritage language or other languages to children in the home doesn't negatively affect how children learn English. In fact, children who grow up in a family with limited English do better at learning English at school if they keep using 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.

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 often become highly skilled speakers of their various languages.

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

Multilingual or bilingual children sometimes 'mix' their languages within the one sentence or during conversations. This is a natural part of multilingual and bilingual development. Children learn early to keep their languages separate.

Languages other than English

- [Arabic](https://raisingchildren.net.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/102970/Benefits-of-bilingualism-multilingualism-Arabic.pdf) (https://raisingchildren.net.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/102970/Benefits-of-bilingualism-multilingualism-Arabic.pdf) (PDF: 143kb)
- [Dari](https://raisingchildren.net.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/102971/Benefits-of-bilingualism-multilingualism-Dari.pdf) (https://raisingchildren.net.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/102971/Benefits-of-bilingualism-multilingualism-Dari.pdf) (PDF: 135kb)
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