

What You Should Know About Learning Two Languages*

Learning to speak more than one language can be a very enriching experience for a child. Exposure to another culture creates opportunities for exchanges, travel, and the ability to communicate with people from other countries. Sometimes parents have questions or concerns about exposing their child to more than one language. Here are some facts that may be helpful.



How A Second Language Can Help With Learning

A child raised with more than one language will develop a larger vocabulary. He/she also develops a greater awareness of how words sound and rhyme which helps when learning to write and spell.

Evidence shows that children who have strong skills in their first language are very likely to become strongly skilled in English. They also do better in reading.

How To Learn Two Languages

There are many good ways for a child to learn two languages. A child can begin learning two languages right from birth or he/she can learn the heritage language (the language spoken by the parents) at home, and then English in another setting, daycare or kindergarten.

In a family where each parent speaks a different language a child can be raised bilingual from birth. In this case it is important that each parent speaks a lot of his/her language and doesn't mix languages when talking with their child.

A parent's reasons for choosing one way over another may be influenced by the language they and/or extended family speak or personal feelings about maintaining their heritage language at home.

Children learn language best:

- From people who are fluent in that language. Parents who speak the language they are most comfortable with, expose their child to a variety of words and well formed sentences.
- When they have a good relationship with their parents. This relationship is closer when the parent communicates in his/her most fluent language.
- When they are highly exposed to the language in all daily situations. For example, through play, books, music and the people in their lives - parents, relatives, caregivers.
- When parents don't confuse their children's language learning by mixing words from two different languages in one sentence.

Should A Child With A Language Delay Be Exposed To Only One Language?

There is no clear evidence to show that a child with a language delay should be exposed to only one language. This is true even for children with a severe language delay. A Speech Language Pathologist can check a child's speech and language skills and help parents decide what options are best for their child.

*Adapted with permission from The Hanen Centre, from "Some Things to Know About Children Acquiring Two Languages" by C. Watson and J. Cummins. First printed in Wig Wag, a newsletter for Hanen Certified Speech-Language Pathologists published by The Hanen Centre. For information about Hanen Programs, please contact The Hanen Centre, 1075 Bay Street, Suite 403, Toronto, Ont. M5S 2B1. Tel: (416)921-1073, web: www.hanen.org, e-mail: info@hanen.org.

Parents, trust your instincts and call us if you

- have questions or concerns about the way your child's speech and language skills are developing
- want to refer your child for a speech and language assessment
- want more information on other topics related to speech and language development



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A DIFFERENCE!**

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