

Speech and Language Therapy

Bilingualism advice for Professionals

Additional languages

Bilingualism or EAL (English as an Additional Language) is when someone speaks more than one language. Being bilingual is a positive skill and children do not usually have difficulties learning two or more languages.

The following are indicators of normal bilingual development:

- Children go through roughly the same developmental stages of language acquisition when learning a second language as they do for their first
- In preschool, the child may initially go through a 'silent period' that may last several months
- They will join in with the other children using non-verbal methods of communication, e.g., copying actions
- The child will imitate lines of a song, rhyme or story in English
- The child will understand more English than he/she can say
- The child will mix two languages in the same sentence and may use a few English words for favourite items.

How to help a bilingual child

Keep phrases short and repeat vocabulary often.

Add extra pauses when you talk.

Give the child with English as an additional language extra time to:

- Listen and respond
- Adapt to nursery or school routine
- Become familiar with English.

When the child attempts English words or phrases, model back targets for any errors they make with grammar or speech sounds. Do not directly correct the child as this is likely to reduce confidence and self-esteem and will make them less willing to try.

Peer group interaction is a great way of developing the child's confidence in using both their own language (if there are others who speak it) and English.

Use visual and practical activities and teaching methods to reinforce the language being used. This will enable the child to pick up new vocabulary in the most appropriate way and to link it to the correct context.

Show that the child's first language is important by asking the child to teach you and the other children some words in their language. Label objects in the classroom in the child's language as well as English.

Encourage parents and carers to speak their home language with their child.

This will help to maintain and develop relationships between their child and their wider family. It will also enable the child to become a bilingual adult.

The child will quickly forget their home language if people only speak English to them.

When further support should be requested

If a child shows any of the following features, please contact the Speech and Language Therapy department on telephone number 01925 946 686 for further advice:

- A lack of progress in their home language, and/or parents are concerned
- Being unable to follow simple instructions in their home language
- Being reluctant to communicate with their peers (verbally or non-verbally)
- They are withdrawn or silent for more than the first few weeks in a new setting
- If the child cannot easily express themselves in English, after six months in a new setting, please refer to the speech and language therapy department.