

ABOUT RAISING YOUR BILINGUAL CHILD



Bilinguisme en Ontario : cas de trouble ou de développement typique chez les enfants

Bilingualism in Ontario: Communication disorders and Typical development

Bilingualism is very common around the world and continues to increase globally. It has been estimated that more than half of the world's population is bilingual (Grosjean, 2000).

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There are emotional benefits associated with your child learning the family's heritage language. Children who can communicate fluently in their heritage language tend to develop closer ties to family members (Bilingual Kids Rock, 2016).

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Reading aloud to your child regularly from an early age strongly impacts their language development as well as their interest in books and literacy. Reading aloud to your child in the heritage language is an effective means of fostering your child's bilingual development (Bilingual Kids Rock, 2016).

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Raising your child bilingual is hard work so it is important to make the experience enjoyable. Using the heritage language during fun activities (e.g. story-telling, playing games, etc.) is an effective way to motivate your child to learn the language (Multilingual Living, 2016).

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Two factors that have a tremendous impact on your child's language development are: amount of exposure to each language and the quality of language input. The more you talk to your child, and the more you read aloud to your child, the more active they will become in using that language (Genesee, 2004; Genesee, 2001).

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Contrary to popular belief, raising your child in a bilingual environment will not cause confusion. In fact, infants are able to distinguish between words of different languages around 7.5 months of age and use grammatical rules specific to each language at 2 years of age (Staniforth, 2012).

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Raising your child bilingual does not cause delays in their speech or language acquisition. Even if your child has already been diagnosed with some kind of speech delay, bilingualism will not result in a more pronounced delay (Paradis, Crago, Genesee, & Rice, 2003).

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Since bilingual children are learning two languages to communicate, they may appear to be progressing more slowly in early language development. However, early communicative milestones of bilingual children occur at ages similar to monolingual children. If a true delay exists, it will be present in both languages (Genesee, 2009).

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Experts suggest that the best way to maintain bilingualism is to develop a pattern of exposure to each language that is consistent. Clear boundaries for where each language is spoken and with who should be established (Fierro-Cobas & Chan, 2001).

Learning two languages will be more meaningful to your child if they perceive a need for them. Exposing your child to the two languages in ways that are personally relevant to their real life will increase the value your child attributes to them (Multilingual Parenting, 2016).

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Second language (L2) proficiency varies among children and depends on numerous factors, such as: age of initial exposure to L2, amount of L2 input, quality of L2 input, child's motivation to learn L2, the variety of contexts of language exposure and opportunities for language use, and the similarities between the two languages (Staniforth, 2012).

Children who are raised bilingual are more likely to show tolerance for other cultures at a young age. This allows them to play more easily with children who do not speak their language. As a result, they are more likely to show an interest in socializing beyond their established circle (Bilingual Kids Rock, 2016).

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According to experts, the optimal time to raise your child bilingual seems to be from birth to 3 years. However, it is never too late to raise your child bilingual. Studies show that new languages are stored in a separate area of the brain after puberty, so children have to translate or go through their native language as a path to the new language (Baby Center, 2016).

Studies show that bilinguals have increased mental flexibility and creativity. When you learn there is more than one word for an object, it stretches the mind in new ways and allows you to see the world from two perspectives (Leikin, 2013).

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Knowing more than one language helps your child feel at ease in different environments. It creates a natural flexibility and adaptability, and it increases their self-esteem and self-confidence (Bilingual Kids Rock, 2016).



Parents should use their dominant language to speak to their child even if it is not the community language. Some long-term studies have shown that conflict and intimacy between parents and children in their teenage years are influenced by language choices when the child is younger. Research shows that by keeping the home language going, intimacy is increased and conflicts are decreased (Toppelberg & Collins, 2010).

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It is common for parents to believe that dropping their heritage language at home will help their child better learn the community language. The quality of language input is crucial when learning a language. Speaking the heritage language at home does not take away from the development of the community language (Grosjean, 2000).

Most children who are raised bilingual will mix words from their two languages as they are sorting them out. This phenomenon is known as code-switching and it typically disappears when the vocabulary in each language increases. However, it is important to keep in mind that children model what they see and hear. If it is common for parents to mix the languages in their environment, it is expected that their child will do the same (Multilingual Children's Association, 2004).

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Most bilinguals are not equally proficient in both languages and it is expected that most bilingual children will have a dominant language. Language dominance is often influenced by the quantity and quality of language input, and by the value of each language within the community (Meisel, 2006; Valdés & Angelelli, 2003).

Although it is easier for children to learn a new language the earlier they are exposed to it, it still requires hard work and can take a few years. Introducing a second language to your child requires structure, patience, and consistency (Baby Center, 2016).

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Chantal Mayer-Crittenden, 2016.

..... **BE PATIENT, IT'S WORTH IT!**



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