

Our multilingual child: a guide for parents



Multilingualism at home and abroad

This booklet is intended for anyone interested in raising their children with more than one language, focussing on bilingualism with Estonian. Maybe you speak Estonian with your children and live outside of Estonia, or you speak another language (or languages) with your children in Estonia, or else you're still deciding what language to use with your child? Whatever your story, we hope you'll find the information, tips and encouragement we provide here useful, as you bravely continue raising your child with more than one language. That decision can be very important to both you and your child.

A child doesn't have to be especially talented to learn more than one language at a time. Early language acquisition is part of the human capacity for learning and adapting to one's environment, but it takes time, motivation and patience. Children's language skills are shaped

by the attitudes they encounter as well as the language(s) they hear. A lot may depend on how multilingualism is viewed by society at large: what kinds of messages are relayed by parents, friends, school, and the media.

Popular notions may lead to ambivalence or confusion on the part of either the parents or the child. Conflicting and even baseless myths abound, and it's usually best not to pay any attention to them. We hope this booklet will help you understand multilingualism and will support all those of you who have the wish and the opportunity to raise a child with more than one language. It's not always simple, but it can be very rewarding. It's worth the effort even if the two languages never achieve equal levels of fluency. Someday your child will thank you for it!

Multilingualism, or speaking more than one language, is just as common as speaking just one. An estimated half

Languages at home

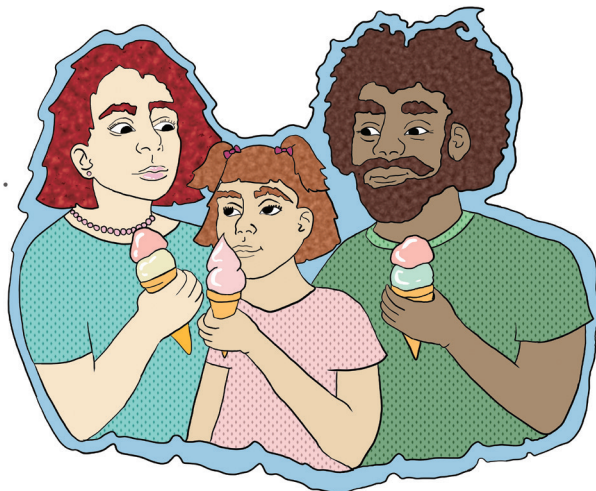
Families can become multilingual in various ways, whether it's by a deliberate plan or simply due to the circumstances in which the family finds itself.

- **One language at home, another outside the home.** When both parents speak the same native language, this is the most natural and useful model for passing the language on. If an Estonian family moves abroad, for instance, they will usually continue speaking Estonian at home in order to support the children's Estonian language skills. Even if the parents don't share a native language, they may choose to use this model. If one language is not spoken in the community at large, both parents may wish to support that language by speaking it at home, with the children and each other.
- **One person, one language.** If the parents speak different native languages, then each one is usually advised to speak to the children in their own language. They may speak either language when speaking to each other, or even a third common language.
- **Multilingual home.** If both parents are multilingual and don't want to choose one language, children can learn to speak each of their home languages even if the parents don't stick to just one.

There is no one right way to do it, since situations, experiences and factors affecting language use vary so widely. Each person could begin by consistently speaking with the child in their own language, meaning the language in which they feel most comfortable. Language alternation in a multilingual home won't usually bother the child: at the dinner table, two languages are often spoken together. Language choices depend on personal preference, family background and the specific situation at hand.

of the world's population is multilingual, meaning they use two or more languages in everyday interactions. Cultures and languages have always intermingled. Languages meet in the marketplace and the mall, on the street and in the home, but also inside a speaker's mind. Languages can affect one another, and sometimes people use words from one language in the middle of a conversation in another.

There are various situations where one might want to use more than one language. People, schools, workplaces, communities, countries can be multilingual. Languages may be in use in a single society in very differing contexts (for example, one language in government offices and another at the corner shop), or else in parallel across different domains. Within one country, different languages may be used by diverse groups or in different geographic regions, or else many languages may be spoken in a given place.



Multilinguals almost never have exactly the same skills in each of their languages. Multilingual children can be expected to know different words and to have different levels of competence in each language.

Terminology

We use the term **multilingualism** to refer to competence in two, three or more languages, and **multilingual child** to refer to a child acquiring more than one language; this is in contrast to **monolingual children**, who acquire only one language. One subtype of multilingualism is **bilingualism**, in which case a person speaks two languages. When discussing children's language development, it is more common to talk of bilingualism, but in Estonia we increasingly find children who hear and begin speaking three or four languages from the start. The questions surrounding multilingualism and bilingualism are often similar or overlapping. For this reason, we treat them as a single general topic, although there may be specific questions related to one or the other that are not addressed here.

The literature on language development distinguishes between **language acquisition** and **language learning**. A child learning her first language is usually said to be acquiring language, to distinguish that from language learning later, in school. In this booklet, we do not make this distinction, since there are many in-between cases. For instance, a child who begins to learn a second language at age two or three, when his family moves to a different language environment, is more likely to acquire the language naturally, as with the first language, even though the process is slightly different. Likewise, "language teaching methods these days – even for adults – often imitate the methods of natural language acquisition.

Language input: See the box on "Bilingual input", p. 7.

A note on the English text: We use *him*, *her* and *them* to refer to children in this booklet, alternating between them rather than using '*him or her*', which can be awkward to read.

Myth:
“Multilingualism delays development.”

Fact:
Multilingual children are diverse – like monolingual children.

Typical language development

Language development **milestones** are fairly similar across the world, despite large cultural and linguistic differences. Across individual children, however, we see great variability as to when they reach particular landmarks in development. So the typical ages for reaching key developmental points have a wide range. And the differences between monolingual and multilingual groups are no larger than the natural differences between individual children within a group.

Children often start producing their first words around their first birthday, but this can also happen several months earlier or later. Children usually begin putting words together before their second birthday, but they may be within normal range even if their first word combinations begin six months earlier or later. (See milestones, p. 20.)

Many people in Estonia and elsewhere believe that early multilingualism may hinder a child’s language development, but that is not true. While some multilingual children begin to speak later than average, that’s certainly not the case for every multilingual child. In reality, the timing of language development varies considerably among both monolingual and multilingual children, and most multilingual children acquire their languages well within the normal range.

A bilingual three-year-old is likely to have a smaller vocabulary in one language than her monolingual peer. When we count her ‘conceptual vocabulary’, based on both languages combined (that is, count the concepts that the child has a word for in one or both languages), then we are likely to see that her total vocabulary is equivalent in size to that of the typical monolingual child at the same age. This means that the child has learned to name the same number of concepts, but knows some of them in only one of two languages. She may need more time to fill the gaps in

each language. But monolingual children also need time to fill gaps in their vocabulary – in fact, we all continue to learn words throughout our lives.

Some parents worry that multilingual children will be behind monolinguals in language skills when they begin school, and that they won't catch up. In fact, studies have shown that the vocabulary of multilingual children grows faster than that of monolinguals. A multilingual child may begin school with a

smaller than average vocabulary, but he is well able to catch up with his peers. The school environment provides a wonderful opportunity for this! If multilingual children begin with language skills behind those of their peers, then support from the teacher and others with a positive attitude can be hugely beneficial. The most important ingredient for catching up is that the child is spoken to in that language and has ample opportunity to speak it himself.



Myth:

“Children acquire language just like sponges absorb water.”

Fact:

It takes time and effort for any child to learn a language.

The idea that children learn language effortlessly is very widespread. In normal conditions, children do learn to speak their native language(s) considerably more easily than adults learn a second or third language: kids don't need to study or memorise rules, and vocabulary almost seems to grow in and of itself. But even acquiring one language does actually take time, and children put a great deal of effort into it: that effort is part of the process, and part of learning about the world around them. Learning language belongs to the basic activities of a child's life, along with playing and walking.

Children vary, whether they are monolingual or multilingual. In this sense, it doesn't so much matter how many languages the child is learning: children acquire language at different rates, but they have similar developmental



paths. Some children acquire languages easily, others have more difficulty and are slower, but language does not come without effort. Multilingual children do not acquire their languages in identical ways any more than monolingual children do. Language skills depend on the people the children interact with, their experiences and the contexts where each language is spoken.

Yet multilingual contexts may be very diverse indeed. In order to learn language, language must be heard and used, but the experience of a multilingual child is inevitably more limited in each language (see box on the right). In general, this doesn't hinder their language development if the child's input doesn't fall below a certain level. Scientists do not yet know exactly what that threshold is, but if a bilingual child's language balance is around 40% to 60%, then they are likely to develop, even in the weaker language, at least a passive vocabulary (number of words that they understand) equivalent to their monolingual peers. For developing an active vocabulary (words that they use themselves), it is crucial to be able to practice speaking the language, not just hearing it. In the case of more than two languages, the amount of input for one of them will inevitably be below the threshold. In this case, that language should be actively supported, and parents should seek opportunities for the child to hear and speak it.

Bilingual input

Input is the language that children hear spoken to them, which forms the basis for language acquisition. If part of a child's language input is in one language and part is in another, then a bilingual child will necessarily be exposed to less input in each language than a monolingual child. **For example**, if a child living in Sweden is spoken to by the mother in Estonian and by the father in Swedish, then the child will hear half the amount of Estonian that a monolingual Estonian child will hear (more or less, depending on the amount of time spent with each parent). If the child also attends a Swedish nursery school, then the Swedish input is increased. If the family spends social time with Estonian-speaking families, then that increases the Estonian input.

Even monolingual children are not exposed to identical amounts of input – which means that some bilingual children may actually hear more input in one of their languages than some monolinguals do. Studies have shown that the amount and quality of input is directly related to a child's language development. The greater the amount and diversity of the input, the better the child's language skills are likely to be. See p. 21.

Myth:

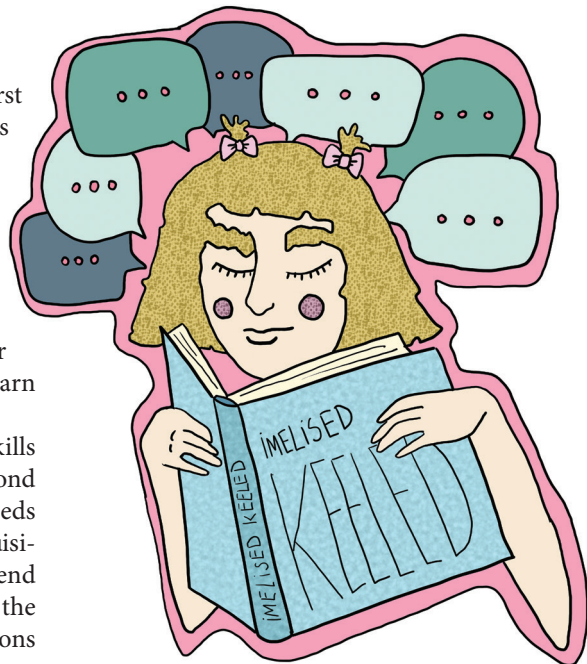
“You have to learn language early in order to speak it fluently.”

Fact:

You can also learn a language later in life and learn to speak it well.

It's true that learning a second language in the first years of life is easier than later on, both for parents hoping to transmit their language to their children, and for the children themselves. But the motivation to learn the language is even more important than age. The need to communicate is the most important source of motivation for language learning. A natural environment where the language is needed for interaction with other people is an excellent opportunity for a child to learn a language and speak it fluently.

It's also possible to develop excellent language skills starting later. A child who begins to learn a second language in school can learn it very well, but he needs time for it. It's unrealistic to expect language acquisition to take place overnight. Language skills depend on many different factors, including exposure to the language, interest in speaking it and the emotions



associated with it. Parents should stick by their language choices, but they should also be prepared to offer emotional support if their child struggles with new challenges in language learning.

If a child is exposed to a second language later on – for instance, at school or because of a family move – there is no need to be concerned. The child’s development is best supported if the second language doesn’t replace the first but instead adds to it. So it’s important to continue speaking the first language even as the child is dealing with a new language.

It’s beyond doubt that the more a child hears and speaks a language, the better she will learn it. Likewise, the richer the language input, the better the child’s language competence will be. Interacting with diverse speakers and hearing the language in diverse contexts helps develop language skills. In any case, it’s wise to be armed with patience and perseverance! Language learning is a long process and will inevitably involve some easier and some more difficult periods.

Critical or sensitive period?

The “**critical period**” refers to a theoretical period during which language can be learned at a native level. However, scientists have been unable to clarify when the critical period might end. Studies have shown that the optimal period for language learning doesn’t come to an abrupt halt. The later a new language is acquired, the less likely a speaker is to achieve native-speaker-like competence. But nativeness and accentless speech may not be the most important elements of language acquisition. Communicative competence is more important, meaning the ability to comprehend the language and use it with other speakers.

Still, a young language learner has advantages. The human brain develops fastest in the first years of life. Because of the plasticity of the young brain, a child finds it easy to learn – but also easy to forget! This is why it is especially important to continue to speak the home language even when external circumstances change.

Myth:

“Mixing languages is a sign of confusion.”

Fact:

Code-switching and language mixing are natural for bilinguals of any age.

„They gave out *auhinnad* during the *õuevahetund*.“ If a seven-year-old says sentences like this one, it may seem like lazy or improper language usage, or it may appear like the sign of language confusion. Actually, though, for a bilingual child, this is a perfectly natural way to speak. If a word doesn't come to mind right away in the right language, then a multilingual child has an excellent opportunity to make use of their other language.

The use of words from one language in the middle of a sentence or conversation in another is known as **code-switching**. This kind of language usage isn't a sign of confusion, and there's no reason to condemn it. Quite the contrary, in fact: studies have shown that this sort of code-switching is socially motivated and usually follows systematic grammatical patterns. Multilingual children are generally good at knowing what language to speak with whom, from very early on. If the context allows it and the person they're speaking to understands their other language too, then the child has no reason to avoid code-switching. In fact, bilingual children may learn to code-switch from their parents – even in cases where the parents

Reasons for code-switching

Why do people use two languages in one sentence or conversation?

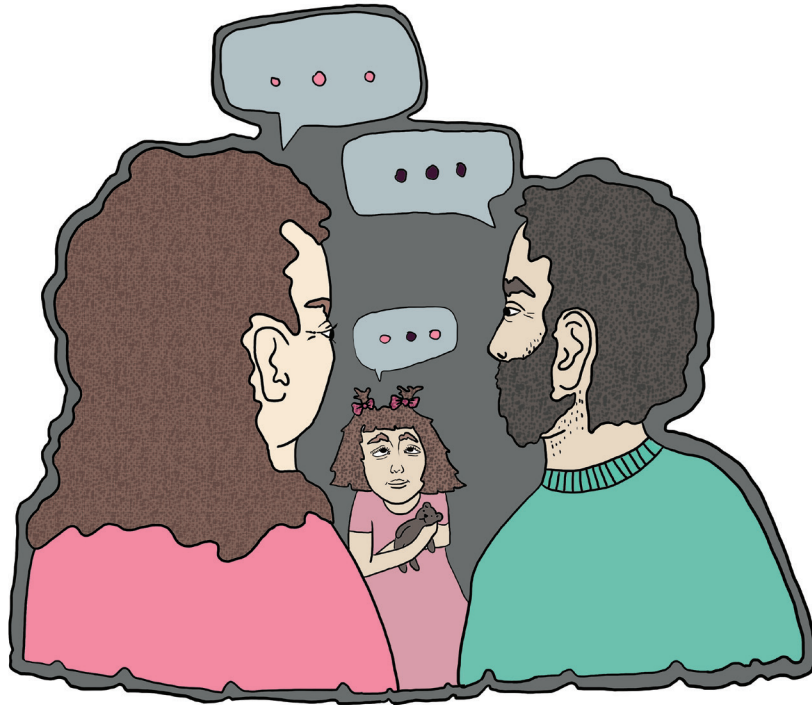
Various reasons, including:

- To support a conversational partner's comprehension;
- To adapt to a conversational partner's language use (“I can speak that language too!”);
- To express concepts learned in a specific language (such as school vocabulary: *harilik* ‘pencil’, *kontrolltöö* ‘test’, *keka tund* ‘P.E. class’);
- To express phenomena specifically associated with one language or culture (such as *jaanipäev* ‘Midsummer/St. John's Day’, *laulu-pidu* ‘Song Festival’, or *kama*, a flour mixture);
- To make things easier (some words come to mind faster in one language – especially for children with two languages, which are still very much works in progress).

themselves don't notice that they occasionally use the languages together.

It's expected for the languages to affect each other and sometimes mix. One useful parental response is to provide the word the child is looking for without correcting her, by repeating the sentence: "Oh, they gave out *awards* during your *recess*?" But it may not be worth your while to pay much attention to the child's code-switching, which may partly come from a period of not having all the words needed in both languages. Instead, encourage your children to talk as much and as well as they are able to. If the context changes, children tend to quickly adapt to the new sit-

uation. For instance, when a young child visits monolingual grandparents, she doesn't take long to figure out that her grandparents don't understand words from the other language, and she will adjust her language accordingly. A four-year-old is already skilled at differentiating his languages, and will generally code-switch only when speaking with other bilinguals. The important thing is to encourage the child's confidence in speaking the language. Practicing a skill is the only way to perfect it.



Myth:

“You should speak to children in the language they’ll need at school.”

Fact:

Bilingual children do better in school when both their languages are well developed.

Well-meaning friends or even teachers may tell you that you should speak with your child in the language spoken at their school, thinking that a child needs to have the best possible command of their school language. Parents are sometimes advised to stop speaking other languages to their child in the name of supporting the child’s academic performance. Actually, this is a dangerous piece of advice.

Skill in a second language supports a child’s cognitive development as well as their self-image and cultural identity. Parents who speak the language of school and society *in place of* their own native language end up limiting their child’s skills in the heritage language. It is more useful to stick with your chosen language in speaking with your child. Children will learn the language of society at school, and their skills in that language will be supported by the environment, by teachers and classmates.

Giving up your own language is a risky decision. Emotional closeness, trust and intimacy between a child and a parent are important for the child’s development. It’s easier to forge this closeness when speaking in your own language with your child. The

Multilingualism supports learning

How can skills in a different language be useful for school, where that language isn’t used?

- The home language broadens a person’s worldview and gives additional context for what’s learned at school.
- Proficiency in a second language makes learning other languages easier too.
- Literacy in one language can be transferred to another language.
- Using more than one language strengthens the ability to direct attention overall, a useful skill for studying and learning.
- Diverse, contextually appropriate language better supports a child’s holistic development (linguistic, social and psychological).
- People who speak other languages and know other cultures make interesting conversation!

child benefits when parents and guardians speak to a child in a language they are comfortable with, which means that they can share their internal landscape. It's also beneficial for the parent to share their own language and connect the child's experience with their own world.

There may be periods (for example, during adolescence) when the child resists and no longer wants to interact with their parents in their language. If at all feasible, the parents should continue to speak it. In that way, the child's passive language skills will per-

severe long enough to allow him to decide later about his own interest in the heritage language and culture, from a more mature perspective. If his family gives up their language, it will be much more difficult to resuscitate those language skills later on, in order to forge ties with the heritage culture – and then he may reproach his parents for not passing the language on!



Myth:

“Bilingual children are smarter than monolinguals.”

Fact:

There are no known differences in the intelligence of monolinguals and bilinguals.

About a century ago some studies reported that bilingual school students were less intelligent than their monolingual peers. These studies were not well designed, based on what we know now, and they were biased by the political climate of the time. They compared monolingual and bilingual immigrant children in the United States based on testing in English only. Since the bilinguals in the studies had only recently arrived, their English language skills were at a rudimentary level and their knowledge of American culture, which was assumed in some of the tests, was also limited. Later studies have repeatedly shown that multilingualism does not lead to lower intelligence, nor does it hamper a child's academic achievement.

Later – at mid-century – this view came to be replaced with the opposite myth, that bilinguals are smarter. It is not always clear whether bilingualism is believed to lead to higher intelligence, or rather that only highly intelligent people can cope with the acquisition of two languages. Either way, these beliefs are exaggerated. Newer studies show that multilinguals perform better than monolinguals in certain very specific tasks (See box on right) – and that monolinguals outperform bilinguals in other tasks. In general, however, no notable differences

Cognitive advantage

The **“bilingual advantage”** can be witnessed in certain language games or situations in which the participant has to ignore minor distractions in order to focus on relevant information. Bilingual children perform better in a picture sorting task where they are first asked to sort a pile of cards based on the color of the images, and then switch to sorting them again based on the shape, this time ignoring the color.

Why? Multilinguals are used to situations where a single concept can be expressed by several words. They only need the word in one language while they're speaking, but the relevant word in the other language may also come to mind. Hence, the multilingual brain is trained to ignore irrelevant information. This is a very specific advantage. We don't really know how well the results of these sorts of experiments translate into everyday situations or whether multilinguals are also better at switching between other kinds of tasks or activities than monolinguals.

Other advantages. Multilingualism:

- Can strengthen the speaker's self-image and identity;
- Opens doors to other cultures;
- Expands social skills;
- Supports the development of tolerance and awareness of cultural differences;
- Facilitates learning further languages.

have been found between the intelligence of monolinguals and multilinguals.

The effect of multilingualism on the elderly has also been investigated. Studies have found that the onset of dementia may be postponed in multilinguals, perhaps because speakers of two or more languages cope better with the effects of dementia in the early stages. This may be an advantage of speaking more than one language, or may also reflect the life experiences that follow from the skill. In any case we can say that a multilingual mind is rich, and multilingual children grow up with several advantages – even if there is no reason to think that they are smarter than their monolingual peers.



Myth:

“Bilingual children are at greater risk for language delay and impairment.”

Fact:

Multilingualism does not cause or aggravate any developmental disorder.

This misconception is allowed to spread because of a general lack of awareness in society about both multilingual children and language disorders. Developmental Language Disorder (DLD, See box, on the right) occurs with the same frequency among monolinguals and multilinguals. Multilingualism itself cannot increase or decrease a child’s risk for DLD. DLD emerges early and affects the acquisition of each language.

Children with DLD usually babble less than average, learn words more slowly and start to combine words significantly later. Not all late babblers and late word learners are at risk of DLD, however, and there are various possible reasons for a late start: about half of those children with early language delay will have caught up with their peers by age three or four.

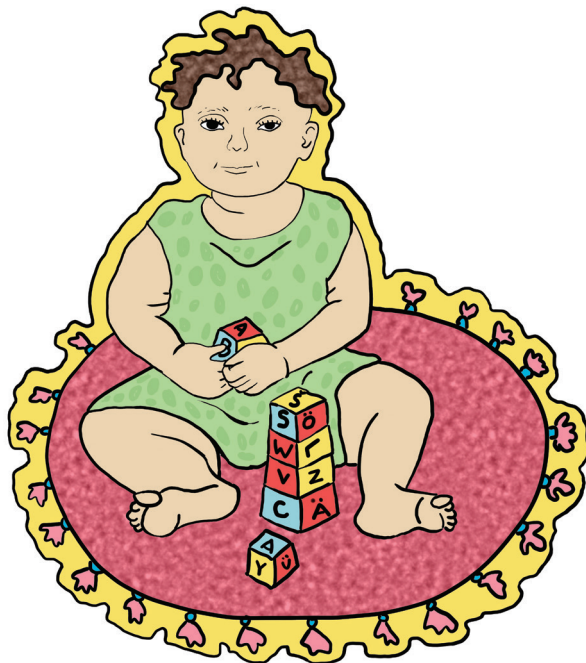
Developmental language disorder

Developmental language disorder (DLD), also known as specific language impairment (SLI), is diagnosed when language deficit is persistent (doesn’t resolve itself), primary (doesn’t occur with other known conditions) and developmental (emerges early but symptoms change with development). DLD can affect pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and language use, and it can occur as a receptive or expressive disorder, or both. DLD is reported to occur in about 7% of children.

Secondary language disorders, resulting from other conditions (such as autism spectrum disorder or Down syndrome), occur even more frequently.

- The notion that multilingual children begin to talk later than monolinguals is sometimes true, but even monolingual language development varies greatly. The same milestones apply to monolingual and multilingual children (see p. 20), but the vocabulary of multilingual children is likely to be smaller in at least one language than that of their monolingual peers (see p. 4). If the vocabulary is smaller, then the ability to combine words into sentences can be expected to come later too.
- It's not true that bilingualism can trigger language impairment. Developmental language disorder is not connected with language input, but rather manifests in any language being acquired – speaking more than one language will neither cause nor worsen DLD.
- Many people think that children with DLD will have difficulties learning a second language. This is true for some, but not for all children with DLD. It's not necessary to avoid a second language with children who have DLD. One advantage of learning two or more languages is that a child has that many more resources for communicating. If more than one language is used in the family, then the child also has a real need for those languages. Leaving one language aside does not eradicate the disorder and it may create an unnecessarily complicated situation in the family.

A small child is developing all the time. It's important to track the child's communicative skills, including gestures. If parents suspect that their child is unusually slow to develop, they should consult a Speech and Language Therapist (SLT, Est. *logoped*). The SLT should be given complete information on the family's language background. In evaluating a multilingual child's language development, it's not appropriate to compare the child with monolinguals or even other bilinguals: the child should be compared only with other children with a similar social, economic and language background.



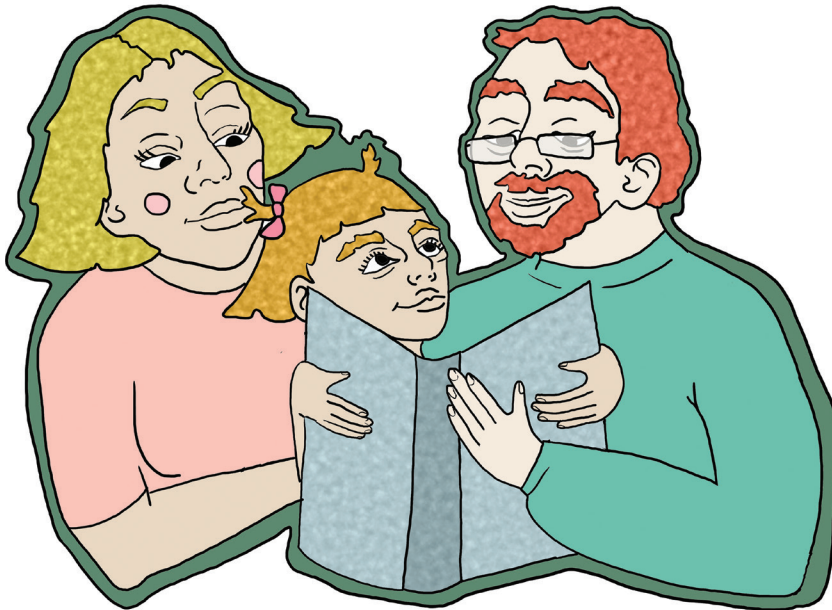
How can you support your child's language development?

First of all, take some time to think about your 'language policy' and why you are following it, and discuss it with other family members. Maybe you simply feel that speaking in your native language with your child is your only choice. Besides this instinctive feeling, though, there are other good reasons for using your language with your child, and it's useful to remind yourselves what they are and spell them out. Among other possible reasons, you may feel strongly about cultural identity, parent-child intimacy, your child's ability to communicate with distant family and friends, supporting your child's self-confidence and

awareness, or broadening your child's future options in life.

You should also make it clear to yourselves that raising a child with more than one language can be challenging. Managing two or several languages in the home can cause tensions. Your child may develop a negative attitude when she notices that the other language makes her different from her friends. If one language is weaker than the other, she may resist the effort and quit trying.

What can parents do to support multilingualism? The most important recommendation is to **speak**



with your child as much – and on as many different topics – as possible. If, for instance, you want your child to grow up as an Estonian speaker abroad, or a speaker of other languages in Estonia, it's important to think creatively about how to provide opportunities for the child to talk with as many different speakers of the home language as possible. Visits to Estonia are an invaluable way of supporting language development. The longer your child spends in an Estonian environment, the easier it will feel for him to speak Estonian himself. The more he needs Estonian for communicating with people around him and making connections with Estonia and Estonians, the greater his motivation. Digital media make it much easier to support language usage these days, regardless of where you are.

Be patient! Remember that language acquisition is a lifelong process. If your child is learning in a different language at school, then it's important for her to hear and use her 'heritage language' at home. She will be exposed to less of the home language over time, as she grows older and friends and society become more

important to her. The attitudes and experiences she's absorbed from an early age are extremely important in determining how she adjusts. These will build a foundation which can survive periods of resistance or regression, during the teenage years, for example, when the home language and culture may face competition from new interests and hobbies.

As a parent, it might seem obvious to you that speaking a second language is valuable in and of itself, but your child may not see it that way. A language becomes important to the child when it's acquired in a **meaningful context**: if he has a strong habit of communicating with his parent(s) in the language, or if he has other interests and needs for using the language. For parents, it'll be important to remain persistent, but there's no single set of rules which suit everyone. As is true more generally when raising a child, the main ingredients are love, time and attention.

Language development

Milestones for both monolingual and bilingual children with typical language development:



Supporting language skills: recommendations for parents abroad

	Passive	Active
Spoken language	<p>Listening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make diverse material available in the language. • Read to your child! If parents speak different languages, then bedtime stories can alternate between languages. • Watch films and cartoons together in the language. • Listen to audiobooks and children's music together. • Listen to the language on the radio (over the Internet) in the background, while you do other things. • When visiting a place where the language is spoken, go to the theater. 	<p>Speaking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If possible, connect with other speakers and get together regularly to give the child a chance to speak with a variety of people. • Find a child care provider who can speak the language. • Speak with your child about diverse topics, from everyday life to what's happening in the world and society. This helps build vocabulary. • Read poems and sing together. • Play board games together. • Visit places where they speak the language as much as possible, if you can, so your child can speak with various people in a natural context.
Written language	<p>Reading</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read books in the language with your child and encourage her to read to herself. • Furnish your home with storybooks, reference books, magazines and textbooks. Support your child with reading more difficult texts. • Help find web-based games and apps in the language. • Use subtitles in your language if you can, even when watching films in other languages. 	<p>Writing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing has to be taught separately: it strengthens your child's connection with his culture. • If possible, let your child attend any kind of language classes, "Estonian schools" or other language schools to spend time with speakers and the language. • Encourage activities that support literacy, like keeping a journal, writing postcards, letters and emails. • Encourage your child to write down their dreams or other stories in your language.

Useful references 2021

In English

Web resources:

welivelanguages.com/ (videos, courses and information for raising bilingual children)

www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/life-bilingual (psycholinguist François Grosjean's blog)

Books:

A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism. Colin Baker (1995). (Note: Also translated into Estonian, M. Hiiemäe, 2005).

Bilingual: Life and Reality. François Grosjean. (2010).

Raising a Bilingual Child: A step-by-step guide for parents. Barbara Z. Pearson (2008)

In Estonian

“Lapse kõne arendamine: praktilisi soovitusi kõnelise suhtlemise kujundamisel.” Merit Hallap & Marika Padrik (2008).

Available at <https://dspace.ut.ee/handle/10062/58894>

Useful links for supporting Estonian language learning:

E-courses for learning Estonian: www.keeletee.ee

Digital Estonian school Üleilmakool: yleilmakool.ee

Learning Estonian abroad: www.hm.ee/et/tegevused/eestlased-valismaal/eesti-keele-ope-valismaal

Integration Foundation: www.integratsioon.ee

Tagasipöördumistoetuse ja nõustamise teave, www.integratsioon.ee/tagasipoordumistoetus

Väliseesti noorte keelelaagrid: www.integratsioon.ee/valiseesti-noorte-keelelaagrid

Õppematerjalid: www.integratsioon.ee/oppematerjalid

Estonian Association of Speech and Language Therapists: www.elu.ee

Bilingualism Matters (a community supporting bilingualism):

www.bilingualism-matters.ppls.ed.ac.uk

social media: @BilingMatters

Note:

This booklet is a translation of the original Estonian version, which was commissioned by the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research in 2019 and is available online https://www.hm.ee/sites/default/files/meie_lapsel_mitu_keelt_fin.pdf.

This publication is also available in Russian and can be found at the Integration Foundation website www.integratsioon.ee/raamatukogu. The text is based on various academic studies. If you are interested in further information about a particular question or wish to find academic references, please write to the author and translator: virve.vihman@ut.ee.

Table of Contents:

Multilingualism here and abroad	2
Myth: “Multilingualism delays development.”	4
Fact: Multilingual children are diverse – like monolingual children.	
Myth: “Children acquire language just like sponges absorb water.”	6
Fact: It takes time and effort for any child to learn to speak.	
Myth: “You have to learn language early in order to speak it fluently.”	8
Fact: You can also learn a language later in life and learn to speak it well.	
Myth: “Mixing languages is a sign of confusion.”	10
Fact: Code-switching and language mixing are natural for bilinguals of any age.	
Myth: “You should speak to children in the language they’ll need at school.”	12
Fact: Bilingual children do better in school when both their languages are well developed.	
Myth: “Bilingual children are smarter than monolinguals.”	14
Fact: There are no known differences in the intelligence of monolinguals and bilinguals.	
Myth: “Bilingual children are at greater risk for language delay and impairment.”	16
Fact: Multilingualism does not cause or aggravate any developmental disorder.	
How can you support your child’s language development?	18
Language development	20
Supporting language skills: recommendations for parents	21
Useful references	22



