

# Bilingualism (0-6 years)

---

## What is bilingualism?

Bilingualism means being able to use two or more languages. Most children will learn a second language at school, but it is easier for children to become bilingual if they speak another language at home.

## Why is bilingualism important?

Raising bilingual children has lots of benefits – for example, it can help to create strong family and cultural bonds. Speaking more than one language is also linked to:

- better academic results – because often bilingual children can concentrate better, have better analytical skills and are better at multitasking.
- better sense of self-worth, identity and belonging – this includes feeling good about cultural heritage, and being able to enjoy art, music, movies and literature in more than one language.
- better communication and connections with family members.
- diverse career opportunities later in life – because bilingual children often find it easier to work in different countries and cultures.

## Raising a bilingual child

There are two main ways of raising bilingual children. Your choice depends on what language you and your spouse speak.

If you and your spouse can speak different languages, you can each speak your own language to your children. For example, if your native language is English and your spouse's is Mandarin, you can speak English to your children and your spouse can speak Mandarin to them. It is ideal if you understand each other's languages so neither of you feels left out when you speak your native language to your children.

If you and your spouse both speak the same native language, you can both speak that language to your children. For example, if you both speak Malay, you can speak Malay to each other and to your children at home. Your children can also speak another language, for example English, with their friends and teachers outside the home. This way your children hear, speak and use your native language a lot at home, because you and your spouse are both using it.

When you're raising bilingual children, you need to:

- stick with your choice of language.
- make sure your child gets lots of chances to hear and use her second and other languages.

- give your child plenty of encouragement and support.
- get support for yourself – for example, by talking to friends and family who are raising bilingual children.

### **Tips to help your child become bilingual**

Play, games and entertainment are good ways to give your child practice with your native language. For example:

- Read and tell stories in your native language, and encourage your child to join in. Use dress-ups and be creative!
- Play games in your native language – for example, ‘I spy’, bingo or memory.
- Sing songs, dance and play music in your language. Children love music, and melody is a great way to help them remember things.
- Go to the library and borrow CDs, DVDs, picture books, junior fiction and magazines in your native language.
- Listen to radio programs in your first language, including popular music programs.
- Think about what your child is interested in – for example, soccer, cooking and so on. Try incorporating your native language into these interests. For example, you could find your child’s favourite recipe or a typical recipe from your community and cook it together using only your native language.
- Organise playtime with other children who speak the same minority language.
- Visit countries where people speak your minority language if it is possible for you. This can boost your child’s interest in the culture and ability to speak the language.
- Look out for cultural activities that you and your child can go to together to tap into your family’s cultural heritage and identity.

Do not give up! Some days it might seem like your child does not want to speak in your native language. But just hearing you speak your native language will help your child learn it.



## Recommended Reads by the National Library Board

**Recommended Reads**

- [Puteri Hazima](#)
- [Ennāl ēra mutiyum! = I can climb!](#)
- [The Little Prince](#)

Engage your child with simple activities at home! Check out some of these things you can do together:

- [Rhymes and Songs Sing-Along \(Mandarin\)](#)
- [Rhymes and Songs Sing-Along \(Malay\)](#)
- [Rhymes and Songs Sing-Along \(Tamil\)](#)