

# Learning more than one language



Speech and Language Tips

## Children can learn more than one language at the same time.

Anyone can learn more than one language. Learning more than one language doesn't hurt speech and language development. Your child will develop speech and language skills in the same order and at the same time as a child who speaks only one language. There are many benefits to speaking more than one language. Children can learn more than one language in many ways.

- Some children learn two languages right from birth. Some learn a second language later.
- Some children speak one language at home and a different language at school or in the community. This is called a home language.
- It's best to talk to your child in the language or languages you feel comfortable using.
- Children who speak their home language can learn another language more easily. When your child knows the rules of one language, it's easier to learn another one. There are also other benefits when children keep their home language.



Learning another language takes time. When learning more than one language, a child may combine and mix up the languages they're learning. This is called code switching. This is common and doesn't mean your child is confused.

If your child already knows one language and is learning a new one, they may not use their new language right away. This is called a silent period. This can last for months but your child should start talking in their new language after this period.



For more information scan this QR code or visit: [ahs.ca/talkbox](https://ahs.ca/talkbox)

Learning more than one language at the same time does not slow down a child's language learning.

Minimize time spent on a screen. To learn more about screen time, ask a healthcare professional or visit [caringforkids.cps.ca](http://caringforkids.cps.ca)

# How children learn language

Any activity that you do together is a chance to learn language. Talk, read, and sing with your child in the language, or languages, you use at home. You play a big role in your child's learning. How you talk and respond to your child makes a difference. Taking back-and-forth turns with your child in everyday activities will help build your child's language.

## Parents and caregivers make the difference

To learn any language, a child needs to hear good examples and use it with others. There are many things you can do to help your child learn more than one language. Here are some ideas to make learning language easier:

- **Talk to your child in the language, or languages, you feel most comfortable using.** Mixing languages won't confuse your child. You don't need to use the language used at school or in the community.
- **Provide opportunities to use it.**
  - Cultural celebrations and gatherings with friends and family or visiting with other children will provide opportunities to both hear and use the language.
  - Language used in conversations and play is best. Time on a screen, like watching television, is not the best way to learn language.
- **Tell stories, read books, and sing in the language, or languages, you're comfortable using.** Do this every day.
  - Tell stories and sing songs and rhymes. Use traditional ones, ones that you know from your childhood or make them up.
  - Visit your local library. Ask about books in your home language.
  - You don't always have to read a book. Talk about the pictures or make up your own story to go with the pictures.
- **Help language stand out for your child by speaking slowly, using actions, and repeating important words and phrases.** Make your language stand out during everyday activities like bath time, bedtime, eating, dressing, going to the park, or cleaning up.



## When to get help

Use the Talking and Listening Checklist to help you keep track of your child's language learning. When completing the checklist, think about all the languages your child is learning. If they can do a skill in any language, you can check it off. Reach out for help if:

- your child is having trouble communicating in the language, or languages, they use most often.
- your child isn't doing what's expected for their age in the language they use most often.
- you have concerns about your child's communication.

## Where to get help

Are you concerned about your child's speech and language development? Speech-language pathologists can help. For more information go to: [ahs.ca/pedrehab](http://ahs.ca/pedrehab)