



*Are you worried about a child's speech and language development?*

- Growing up learning more than one language will not cause speech or language problems.
- It takes an average child between 3 to 5 years to learn to speak a second language as well as a native speaker.
- It is important to discuss with parents the child's use of their first language.
- If the child's first language is developing appropriately, the child is likely to develop English without difficulty. However, be aware that rates of learning may vary between children.
- Additional information on supporting your child to become bilingual is available on [aistearsiolta.ie](http://aistearsiolta.ie)

*If you think a child could have a speech or language difficulty you can refer the child to your local HSE Health Centre to see a Speech and Language Therapist.*

*Advise parents to speak to their child in their first language*



**Childcare  
Committee**  
County Kildare

Coiste Cúram Páistí Chontae Chill Dara



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive

HSE St Marys,  
Craddockstown Road,  
Naas Hospital,  
Naas,  
Co. Kildare -  
Telephone 045920000

# SUPPORTING BILINGUAL CHILDREN

*A guide for  
Early Years  
Practitioners*



Developed by HSE Community Speech and Language Therapy Dept. Waterford in partnership with Waterford Childcare Committee.

## WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN A CHILD IS LEARNING MORE THAN ONE LANGUAGE:



**These features are typical and not a cause for concern.**

- Their language skills may be slower to develop at first.
- They may know or use more words in one language than the other.
- They may mix languages in one sentence or conversation.
- They may prefer to speak one language more than the other.
- When learning a new language e.g. English, they may go through a 'silent period' where they listen but don't talk very much. This could last up to 6 months. The younger the child the longer the silent period may last.
- They memorise whole phrases e.g. 'All gone' 'I don't know'.
- They may make grammatical errors.

## HOW CAN EARLY YEARS PRACTITIONERS SUPPORT SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS?

### General support strategies:

- Promote the use of the family's first language at home – this lays a solid foundation for the development of a second language.
- Assure parents that their children will learn English in the language rich environment of the setting through interacting, play, the daily routine, songs and books.
- Make the child feel comfortable in their new surroundings – learn a few common words from the child's first language e.g. hello, goodbye, snack, toilet.
- Make sure the children experience success at tasks where language is not needed e.g. blocks, jigsaws, physical play and helping an adult.
- Explore and celebrate multi-cultural events and food.
- Learn how to say the child's name properly. Children's names are an important part of their identity.



### Specific support strategies

- Encourage face to face 1:1 interaction Use clear facial expressions.
- Use gestures, miming, acting out to demonstrate and support understanding
- Lead by example.
- Shorten instructions.
- Emphasise important words.
- Use repetition.
- Reduce your rate of speech.
- Focus on basic vocabulary using real objects or toys.
- Allow extra time for the child to process and instruction or respond.
- Talk about what is happening in the here and now.

