



## SLT facts and advice for supporting Bilingual & Multilingual language development

- Approximately half of the world's population are bilingual. According to the most recent census in Ireland in 2016, thirteen per cent of the Irish population speak more than one language.
- Some children will learn more than one language from birth e.g. when each parent speaks a different language to them (simultaneous bilingualism), and some children will learn a second language after developing a single home language e.g. when they move to a new country or start a school which uses a different language to their family (sequential bilingualism).
- Being bilingual does not affect a child's speech or language development. **Speaking more than one language does not cause language delay or difficulties.** However, children who are bilingual/multilingual are as likely to have language difficulties as monolingual children.
- Code switching/ mixing languages is a common feature of normal bilingual language development and involves combining vocabulary from two different languages in one utterance. Transferring grammatical rules from one language to the other is also common in bilingual language development.
- It is normal for children learning a second language to go through a silent period. This can last up to a year or more in

younger children who are learning an additional language while they are focusing on listening and comprehension.

- Children with developmental disabilities (e.g. ASD and Down Syndrome) can develop more than one language (simultaneously or sequentially).
- Being bilingual or multilingual can have many advantages such as maintaining important family and cultural connections, linguistic development, creative thinking, and developing meta-cognitive skills (e.g. attention, planning, monitoring, processing, self-awareness, reflection, problem solving).
- Parents are always advised to **speak to their child in the language they are most comfortable with** using (even if it is not the language of the wider community) as this will give your child the best language models.
- Being consistent in your choice of words to name objects can be helpful for vocabulary learning.
- Research shows that children who have a strong foundation in their home language more easily learn a second language.
- Children can go through phases of preferring one language over another or responding to you in the community language. Keep speaking your language because this will help develop your child's understanding.
- If your child is learning an additional language and going through a silent period allow them to use a Total Communication Approach (using a combination of spoken language, signs/gestures and picture symbols to express themselves.)
- If you are concerned that your child is experiencing difficulties with developing their languages you should speak to one of our Speech and Language Therapists for advice.
- Find out more information and advice about bilingualism and multilingualism at [www.talknua.com](http://www.talknua.com)