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BILINGUALISM FOR PROVIDERS

There are different patterns of dual language learning: simultaneous vs. sequential bilingualism.

- Simultaneous learners learn both languages at the same time.
- Sequential learners learn one language first, then the second. Sequential bilingualism is often the case for Latino children in the U.S., as they may not become bilingual until after they start school.¹

Early exposure to two languages DOES NOT lead to delays.

- The human brain is able to learn two languages as easily as one.
- When children learn two languages simultaneously the overall milestones are the same.
- The initial vocabulary in each language may be smaller, yet when both languages are included, the child's total vocabulary is usually the same as monolingual children of the same age.
 - ◊ A two year old, who should have a minimum of 50 words, may know half of them in English and half in Spanish. She should also be saying two-word phrases, though again, each word may be in a different language.
- When children have delays, their problems are of equal severity in each language, and they have the same delays as monolingual children.¹

There are important advantages to bilingualism (besides being able to communicate with more people).

- These include increased cognitive flexibility and metalinguistic ability, which allows the bilingual speaker to think about and play with language. Bilingual individuals also have slower memory loss with aging.^{2,3}

Bilingual code-mixing (using two languages in the same phrase) is not a sign of confusion.¹

- Code-mixing often aids in communication. When adults or children code-mix, the two languages are used appropriately; there is no repetition, verbs are used as verbs, subjects as subjects, and the code-mixing is grammatically correct, e.g. “quiero milk” not “milk quiero.”¹
- It is not necessary to insist that bilingual children separate their two languages; they will learn to separate them over time.
- People code-mix to fill gaps in their proficiency, or when they cannot think of the right word.
- Code-mixing is typical in families; when children do this they are actually reflecting what they hear at home. The more the parents code-mix, the more the children will do so.
- Sometimes there's no good translation; for instance, taco, empacho, etc.
- It is not necessary to separate languages by person (e.g. mom speaks English, dad Spanish), although this can help increase the child's exposure to both languages.¹

Strong HOME language skills facilitate English learning.

- Oral language skills acquired in early childhood, in the home language, including vocabulary and knowledge of the world around them, lay the foundation for later literacy development and academic achievement.

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- These skills include critical thinking, problem-solving and telling stories.
- It is not necessary for parents to start talking in English with their children early to help prepare them for school success in the US.^{1,2}

Language learning is an active and INTERACTIVE process that takes time and depends on the quality of the learning environment (affected by parent education and SES).

- There are wide (innate) individual differences in rates of language learning, mediated by individual working memory, attention, temperament, etc.¹

When should I become concerned that a child might have a language delay or a learning disability?

Red flags that should prompt you to further evaluate and/or consult a speech therapist or developmental expert include:

- ◊ No words by 12 to 15 months, not pointing by 15 to 18 months, wondering whether or not the child can hear, does not know colors and numbers by age 4
- ◊ A history of language issues or a learning disability in Spanish
- ◊ Family history of reading, writing or learning difficulties
- ◊ Parent reports the child is having difficulty distinguishing the parts and patterns of words, e.g. beginning and end sounds (low phonological awareness) in either language.
- ◊ The child's teacher has relayed concern to the parent about the child's rate of progress in comparison to other English Language Learners in the classroom.

Children who have speech delays are still capable of leaning more than one language at their level of potential. It is not necessary to limit their instruction to English. In fact, this may be detrimental in that it may limit their ability to communicate with family members.⁴

How can we support our bilingual families?

- Encourage parents to speak and read with their children in the language with which they are most comfortable.
- Provide language- and literacy-promoting anticipatory guidance. This encompasses anything that increases talking and learning about the world, such as:
 - ◊ Talking about traditions
 - ◊ Telling family stories
 - ◊ Singing traditional songs
 - ◊ Reciting or making up poems
 - ◊ Reciting sayings and riddles
 - ◊ Playing with language
 - ◊ Encouraging writing development (scribbling)
 - ◊ Doing activities together, like cooking, going to the library, going to museums, etc.
- Model *dialogic reading*, asking the child questions about the pictures and the story content, which makes sharing books interactive and fun.
- Help parents access GED and ESL (English as a Second Language) classes.

1) Genessee, F. Dual Language Development In Preschool Children, National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) (2008) <http://www.psych.mcgill.ca/perpg/fac/genessee/Dual%20Language%20Development%20in%20Preschool%20Children%202008.pdf> Last accessed 7/1/12.

2) Genessee, F. Early Dual Language Learning, Zero to Three, September 2008. P 17-23 http://main.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/29-1_Genessee.pdf Accessed 7/1/2012

3) Dreifus, Claudia. (May 31, 2011). The Bilingual Advantage. The New York Times. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/31/science/31conversation.html?src=ISMR_AP_LO_MST_FB

4) Paradis, J., Genessee, F. & Crago, M. (2011). Dual language development & disorders: A handbook on bilingualism & second language learning (2nd ed.). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes. Quoted in Facts and Tips, Young Dual language learners birth through five. <http://www.collaboratingpartners.com/documents/topic4.1ft--languagedevelopment.pdf> Accessed 6/30/12