

Multilingualism: A Guide for Schools

What is multilingualism?

Multilingualism means using two or more languages in everyday life. Children may learn languages from birth or pick up other languages later.

Will more than 1 language confuse children?

No. Research shows that multilingualism does not confuse children or delay language development

It is normal for children to:

- Mix languages (code-switching)
- Use different languages in different settings
- Have a “silent period” when learning a new language (a time when they are listening and taking in language before speaking much).

These are all typical parts of multilingual development.

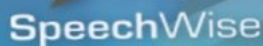
Can Multilingualism cause speech and language delay?

No. Multilingualism does not cause speech or language difficulties.

Multilingual children usually reach language milestones at a similar rate to monolingual children (children with just 1 language). While vocabulary may be spread across two languages, overall understanding is typically equal.

If a child has a speech or language difficulty, this will usually be present across both languages.





Benefits of multilingualism

Multilingual children may develop:

- Strong attention control and listening skills
- Great cognitive flexibility and problem-solving abilities
- Increased awareness of different cultures and perspectives
- Stronger connections with family, culture, and identity



How to support multilingual children in school

Support works best through everyday interaction:

- **Encourage families to use their home language confidently when at home**
This supports communication, learning, and connection (see parent handout for more advice)
- **Give children lots of time to respond**
Especially when they are at the early stages of learning a new language.
- **Accept all communication**
Words, gestures, pointing, and mixed language are all valid.
- **Include them in appropriate language group interventions** e.g. Talkboost, vocabulary or narrative groups etc.

When to seek advice

Seek support if the child:

- has difficulty understanding simple instructions
- has limited communication in either language
- is not making expected progress over time

Key message: families do not need to choose one language. Using your home language supports a child’s communication, identity, and learning - including their development of English.

For any support please contact us at SpeechWise Therapy. We are passionate about supporting children's communication so they can thrive at home, at school, and beyond.