

**Two languages are better than one**

### **Being bilingual is an asset, not a problem.**

Children who are learning to speak a second language may display a range of behaviours. Some may remain silent and refuse to participate, others will adapt more quickly. Children who are learning English as a Second Language are also often mistakenly assessed as having 'language problems' if their English language does not emerge quickly. *All children growing up in Australia and attending Australian schools will learn English at their own pace.*

### **Bilingualism is not a learning difficulty, but a learning process.**

Many parents experience anxiety about their children being excluded or disadvantaged if they cannot speak English before they start kindergarten. In some cases parents and children are discouraged from speaking their home language and told to speak English only. Parents and educators are often unaware that many primary schools offer English language support classes for children from Non English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB). *Educators can alleviate parental anxiety by explaining how their programs can successfully and simultaneously teach English and support maintenance of the home language.*

### **Home languages will get lost forever.**

Unless children are continuously encouraged to speak in their home language whilst they are learning English, as they get older they are likely to lose proficiency in their home language or they become reluctant to speak it at all. *It is important that educators support children and their families to feel good about their bilingualism.*

### **Languages learning is a social activity and**

### **happens in different cultural environments.**

Our responses to difference can have a lasting affect on all children, but especially children from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, who are learning English as a Second Language. If the messages children and families receive about their language and culture are negative or not communicated effectively, they may learn to be ashamed of and resistant to maintaining their home languages.

*Children develop a strong sense of identity and well-being when their learning environment responds positively to difference and diversity, and actively promotes their bilingualism.*



ETHNIC CHILD CARE, FAMILY AND  
COMMUNITY SERVICES CO-OPERATIVE LTD



Children's  
Services  
Central

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Belonging, Being and Becoming; The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) Government of Australia 2009

**Bilingualism  
and Languages  
Learning**

**"Children's use of their home languages underpins their sense of identity and their conceptual development". (EYLF 2009)**



This brochure can be downloaded from [www.eccfcsc.org](http://www.eccfcsc.org) and is also available in other community languages.



## Some sound advice for people working with young bilingual children

### *How do we define a bilingual person?*

A bilingual person can be defined as someone who can use two languages with reasonable proficiency. There are varying degrees of bilingualism.

### *Children can become bilingual in two ways.*

**Simultaneous bilingualism**-when a child learns two languages at the same time.

**Successive bilingualism**-when a child already speaks one language, then learns to speak another.

For young children it is very important that the first language is supported and encouraged to develop, in order that it can support the learning of the second language. Learning a new language can take time and the child may be silent for a period. This 'silent period' can vary from one child to another.

### *There is no question about the important benefits of being able to learn and maintain more than one language. The benefits of bilingualism include;*

#### **Intellectual:**

- Understanding about how language works.

- The ability to learn additional languages
- Increased intellectual capacity in other academic areas.

#### **Social:**

- Understanding of linguistic diversity.
- All children learn that there is more than one way to speak, read and write.
- Children grow up in a harmonious and diverse society, where difference is the norm.
- Children are able to communicate and maintain their relationships with family members who may not speak English.

#### **Cultural:**

- Pride and confidence in cultural and linguistic heritage and identity.
- Important family and cultural values and are maintained and shared with future generations.

#### **Economic:**

- Employment, education and social opportunities in later life.

### **How can we support bilingual children?**

- Reflect on your own feelings about languages, culture, identity and education.
- Develop a positive and supportive approach to bilingualism in your program and with all families.
- Find out about every child's language and culture.
- Convey respect and interest in pronouncing names properly (if you don't know how then ask).
- Make a list of and learn useful survival words.
- Collect bilingual resources and integrate their use into the program on a daily basis.
- Represent and use children's languages and literacies in a range of written, oral and digital forms.
- Employ bilingual staff to speak in the home languages of the children.
- Encourage staff who speak other languages to use them (with each other, children and families).
- Model, display and use different languages consistently throughout the day.
- Encourage and support bilingual children to play and learn together in their languages.
- Provide information to parents about the importance of maintaining the home language, and how children can successfully become bilingual.

