Two languages are better than one

Does my child have a language 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 may be 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.*

Will my child be disadvantaged?

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. Many primary schools offer English language support classes for children from CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) background. *Insist that your child continue to maintain your home language as well as being supported to learn English.*

My child already speaks the home language.

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 the home language or may become reluctant to speak it at all. *It is important to support children to feel good about their bilingualism.*

Languages learning is a social activity and happens in different cultural environments.

The way in which other children and adults respond to difference can have a lasting affect on all children, but especially to children who are learning English as a Second Language. If your children are made to feel uncomfortable about speaking their home language outside of the home, they may learn to be ashamed of and resistant to using and maintaining it. This can also effect the way they feel about themselves, their family and their cultural identity in the future.

Children develop a strong sense of identity and well-being when their home and learning environments actively promote their bilingualism.

When children are learning more than one language

"Children thrive when families and educators work together in partnership to support young children's learning". (EYLF 2009)

This brochure and can be downloaded from www.eccfcsc.org and is also available in other community languages.

Some sound advice for bilingual families with young 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, learning to respect difference.

- 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 you support your children to become bilingual ?

- Consider how your own feelings about your first language, culture, and identity will be passed on to your own children and future generations.

- Be consistent and persistent with using your language, but try not to 'correct' children if they make mistakes.

- Decide where and who will speak each language.

- Do not mix languages.

- Encourage your Early Childhood Education Service to employ a bilingual educator.

- Make it a habit to watch movies, read books or listen to CD's in your home language.

- Join play or recreational community groups that share your language.

- Tell stories, sing songs and play games in the home language.

- Borrow bilingual books, videos or music from the library.

- Provide some useful survival words for your child's teacher.

- Spend time in your Early Childhood Education Care service reading books, telling stories or making signs in your home language.