

May I Have a Word?

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Tips for Parents Raising Bilingual Children: When the Home Language Differs From the Community Language

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BE INTENTIONAL

- Realize that everyday activities such as mealtimes, getting dressed, bath time, and playtime are all opportunities for talking, teaching, and providing quality language exposure. Be intentional about ongoing verbal interactions about things, routines and events in your child's life.
- Arrange for varied opportunities for your child to have diverse contexts for engaging in the minority language such as book sharing and reading experiences, singing, educational videos, children's shows, play groups, family visits and trips. It is important for your child to have access to other speakers of the minority language as much as possible.
- When your child uses incorrect words or grammar, simply model the correct vocabulary and/or sentence structure in response to the child's utterance.
- When appropriate, expand your child's utterances by first affirming what he/she said and then by adding to what was said if the vocabulary or grammar usage was lacking.
- Even if your child is tending to speak more in the majority language, continue speaking to him/her in the minority language. When appropriate, recast the utterance, or present it in a different or changed structure while maintaining its meaning. For example, if your child utters a phrase or sentence partly or entirely in the majority language, recast the utterance in the minority language, modeling correct usage where any vocabulary or grammatical gaps were noted.
- Instill in your child a sense of pride and "need" for the minority language by keeping it relevant and constant in his/her everyday life. Children will inevitably discard a language they do not feel they need.
- Consider teaching your child to read and write in the minority language. The more competencies your child

develops in the minority language, the more internally relevant and important that language will become.

BE CONSISTENT

- If you are the primary source of language input for your child in the minority language, consistently speak to your child in that language whether at home or out in the community.
- Though code mixing, or alternating between two languages while speaking, is completely normal and appropriate for bilinguals, in order to clearly draw a line between the two languages in your child's linguistic environment, limit code mixing as much as possible at least at the beginning stages.

BE PERSISTENT

- Don't lose heart or give up even if your child's language proficiency or skills seem to fluctuate over time in his/her two languages. Some fluctuation is normal as children learn to navigate between both languages.
- Don't allow for interruptions or long periods of little or no exposure to the minority language.
- When it seems hard and laborious, remember the long-term benefits and rewards you are bestowing upon your child by raising him/her to be bilingual.
- Relatives, friends, and community members may misunderstand or even disagree with your decision to raise your child bilingually for various reasons. If you can, kindly educate them about your decision, but if not, politely stand your ground based on what's best for your child. Your dedication, consistency and persistence *will* pay off in the end!

"The bilingualism of children should be a source of joy, both for parents and children, even if there are occasional moments of difficulties."

François Grosjean