

Learning Two Languages when there is a Language Delay

Learning two languages can be good for:

- A child's overall language development
- Developing a larger vocabulary
- Understanding how words sound and rhyme
- Developing reading and writing skills
- Having access to more than one culture

What is the best way to teach two languages?

- There is no "best" way.
- It usually depends on the language(s) spoken by the parent and the extended family.
- Some parents have no choice about how to teach their child because they only speak one language themselves.
- Children can learn two languages right from birth by exposure to both languages in all daily situations.
- Children can learn the heritage language at home and then English at daycare, preschool, or beginning in kindergarten.
- Children can also learn two languages when each parent speaks a different language to the child.
- Each parent should speak a lot of his/her language and should not mix languages when talking with the child.

Children learn best...

- From people who are fluent in that language, so parents should speak the language that feels most comfortable.
- When they are exposed to the language in all daily situations (e.g., play, books, and music) and from many people in their lives (e.g., mother, father, brothers and sisters, grandparents, aunts, and uncles, etc.).
- When parents don't confuse their child's language learning by mixing words from different languages in one sentence.

Should a child with a language delay be raised with only one language?

- There is no clear research to show that a child with a language delay should be exposed to only one language. This is the case even for children with a severe language delay.
- Families may wish to discuss their options with a Speech-Language Pathologist.

- Any therapy plan should be based on your child's need to communicate for different reasons with different people

Reference: What You Should Know About A Child Acquiring Two Languages, Toronto Preschool Speech and Language Services. The material for this handout was taken from "Some Things to Know about Children Acquiring Two Languages." Watson, C. & Cummins, C., Wig Wag, March 1999.