



Bilingualism in Children With Developmental Disabilities: What the Research Tells us

Why is this topic important?

Over half of the world's population is bilingual or multilingual. In the United States, 20% of the population speaks more than one language. This number has continued to increase over the past few decades. Parents may wonder whether it's helpful or harmful for a young child to grow up learning more than one language—especially if the child has a language delay or disorder.

What does the research tell us about this topic?

A 2018 study looked at language skills in nearly 400 bilingual and monolingual toddlers. Some children were typically developing while others had autism, a global developmental delay, or a language disorder. The results showed that children with disorders who were bilingual had similar language scores as children with disorders who were monolingual. This tells us that learning more than one language does not negatively impact a child's language abilities—even if a child has a developmental delay or disorder.

What does this mean for my child and me?

If you or another caregiver choose to speak more than one language around your child, you can rest assured that this exposure will not cause your child's skills to fall further behind. Learning a language that is spoken by family members and/or members of a surrounding community can help your child to fully participate in- and connect with their heritage language culture.

Where can I learn more about this topic?

Dai, Y.G., Burke, J.D., Naigles, L., Eigsti, I-M., & Fein, D.A. (2018). Language abilities in monolingual- and bilingual- exposed children with autism or other developmental disorders. *Research in Autism Spectrum Disorders*. doi: 10.1016/j.rasd.2018.08.001