



Multilingualism has potential!

It is estimated that more than one third of all pupils in Germany speak several languages. Children who grow up with one or more **heritage language(s)** often have a better understanding of how languages are constructed. This makes it **easier** for them to **learn foreign languages**. They have improved **communication and social skills**, they are more **creative** and they have more **problem-solving strategies**. By having developed language skills in their heritage language(s), they can better identify with their own **cultural background** and they can communicate with their family and friends outside of Germany.

This flyer provides parents and families general information and tips about how to raise their children multilingually. You can find more information on our website that provides further helpful links.

Recommended reading:

An Introduction to Bilingual Development
A. De Houwer (2009)



About us

The Centre for Multilingualism at the University of Konstanz was founded in 2014 and conducts research on multilingualism. The Centre is a branch of the international network “Bilingualism Matters”.

Our goals:

- Conduct research on multilingualism in an interdisciplinary way and integrate it into university teaching.
- Train and support early stage researchers.
- Develop further education opportunities and advice to educational organisations.
- Advise families on questions about how to raise their children multilingually.

How we can help you

- We can answer your questions about multilingualism by e-mail, phone or in-person.
- We can give a presentation at your school or community group to explain the benefits and challenges of multilingualism.
- You can access further information and resources on our website.
- We can invite you to participate in cutting-edge research at the University of Konstanz

Contact

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Multilingualism in childhood

Tips for parents

Multilingualism right from the beginning

In a typical multilingual family in Germany, German is the **language of the environment** and the **family language** or **heritage language** is the language spoken by one or both parents.

It is important to use within the family right from the beginning the language(s) **you know best**. Most of the times, this is your mother tongue(s). This will enable you to express your thoughts and emotions best and share them with your children.

If several languages are spoken within the family, you can choose a system that suits you well: e.g. one person – one language. The most important thing is for everyone to **feel comfortable** in each situation **with the language choice**.

German is usually the **dominant language** of the children because German is usually spoken in daycare, school, and with friends. Therefore, some families experience phases in which **the child may not want to speak their heritage language**. This can create tension. Continue using your heritage language with your child in order to **keep it active in the home** without putting too much pressure to your child.

Supporting the German language

- Expose your child to German from the beginning in a natural environment through **friends, playgroups or selected media**.
- **Do not force yourself** to speak with your child in German if you have limited German language skills.
- Children can learn German quite quickly in the kindergarten. Therefore, **kindergarten** is very important for your child's development of German. Start searching early for a place in a kindergarten.

Supporting the heritage language

- Offer a **variety of books, children's songs, and selected media** in the heritage language.
- Involve as **many speakers** of the heritage language as possible outside the family, such as friends, people in clubs or in the local community.
- Ask kindergarten teachers if they can **integrate the heritage language** in the class activities. For example, you can offer to bring books or music. The **class teacher** is also a good contact person.

Can multilingualism lead to problems in language development?

There is **no evidence** that multilingualism in early childhood can lead to delays or disruptions in language acquisition. Unfortunately, many people have this fear because ...

- Multilingual children may use fewer words in German than monolingual children. However, multilingual children know many additional words in their heritage language. Their **entire vocabulary is the same or even larger** than the vocabulary of monolingual children.
- Most multilingual children mix their languages when they speak. However, this does not mean that they are confused. Mixing languages is called code-switching. **Code-switching** is often a strategy that allows children and adults to compensate for language gaps and to signal their multilingual identity.

