

MYTH VERSUS FACT

There are many misconceptions around English Language Learners (ELL). This can make it hard to know when you should see a speech-language pathologist (SLP). Here are a few of the most common myths:

Learning more than one language will cause problems in one or all languages.

Learning more than one language does not cause language delays. Children all over the world learn to speak more than one language with possible benefits (ASHA, n.d.1).

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) cannot assess a child's home language unless they speak it.

SLPs can and do assess all of the languages a child speaks. This is necessary to determine if a child has a language disorder. If SLPs do not speak the home language they may use parent interviews and reports, or interpreters to allow them to gather informed consent, learn the characteristics of the home language, and determine if the assessment materials are culturally appropriate (Tuller, 2015; ASHA, n.d.2; Shipley & McAfee, 2008).

Using words from more than one language or mixing grammar rules in a single sentence are signs of a language disorder.

Mixing words and grammar rules between two languages is common when learning a second language and is called code switching. It follows social and grammatical rules. It is not done randomly. Code switching in itself does not indicate a language disorder (ASHA, n.d.4).

Bilinguals are developmentally slower than monolinguals.

Children learning one language (monolingual) and those learning two (bilingual) reach developmental milestones at the same time. For example, speaking their first words at age 1, and making their first word combination at age 2 (ASHA, n.d.3).



Children with a language impairment should not learn more than one language at a time.

If you do not learn a second language at a young age, you will never be fluent.

Speaking English at home will always help a child learn English faster and improve their vocabulary and grammar.

It is not necessary to continue to focus on building an English language learner's home language since it will not be used in school.

Children with language impairments are able to successfully learn multiple languages at the same time. Studies have compared bilingual and monolingual children with similar language difficulties or disorders. Results do not show any extra delay or difficulty for bilinguals (Guiberson, 2013).

There is no age cut off for learning a second language. Both adults and children are able to successfully learn a second language (Hoff, 2014).

Speaking poor-quality English will not help. They need to be exposed to a rich English environment with speakers who have strong English speaking skills. Get them to read in English. Enjoy high quality English media. Promote participation in English extracurriculars and making native English speaking friends (Paradis, 2011).

Building the home language enhances the development of both the home and second language. Additionally, maintenance of the home language is important for strong family relationships (Alberta Education, 2009).



WHEN TO CONTACT A SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST?

Children from all around the world successfully learn more than one language. Bilingualism will not cause or worsen speech or language problems. However, if your child is having trouble with both languages, he or she may need help from a speech-language pathologist (ASHA, n.d.3).

INFORMATION GATHERED FROM:

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- Paradis, J. (2011). Individual differences in child English second language acquisition: Comparing child-internal and child-external factors. Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism. 1.213-237.10.1075/lab.1.3.01pa.
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- Tuller, L. (2015). Clinical use of parent questionnaires in multilingual contexts. In S. Armon-Lotem, N. Meir, & J. de Jong (Eds.), Assessing multilingual children: Disentangling bilingualism from language impairment (pp. 332–360). Bristol, United Kingdom: Multilingual Matters.

Getting Help

If you suspect a problem, consult a Registered Speech-Language Pathologist (R.SLP). To find a practitioner:

- Contact HEALTH LINK - Health Advice 24/7 at 8-1-1 or visit: www.MyHealth.Alberta.ca
- Enquire at a Public Health Centre or your child's school.
- Find a private practice SLP:
 - Search the Yellow Pages
 - Contact the Alberta Speech-Language Association of Private Practitioners (ASAPP) website at www.asapp.ca.

