



USC University of  
Southern California

USC UNIVERSITY CENTER  
FOR EXCELLENCE IN  
DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

**Assessment of Bilingual Children with Autism  
and Other Developmental  
Disabilities: *Update and Recommendations  
for Parents and Professionals***

**The Help Group Summit  
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# Presenters

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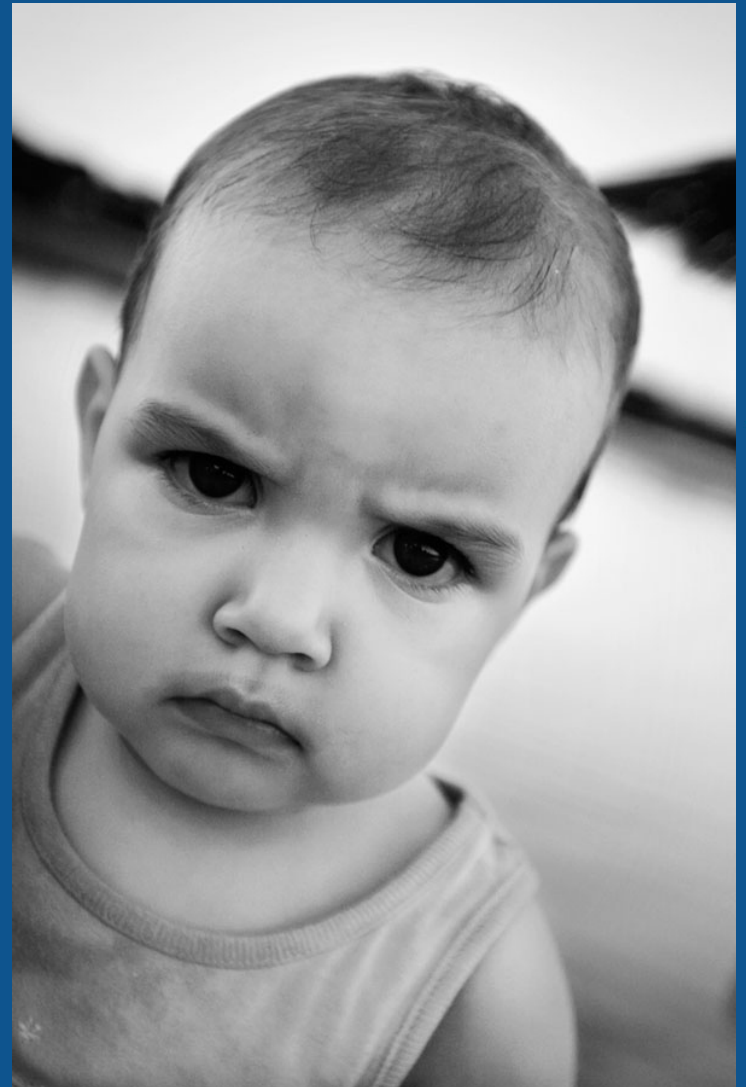
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## Participants will

- Gain knowledge about research findings related to bilingual language development in young children with autism and other developmental disabilities;
- Learn about the factors to consider when assessing a bilingual child;
- Learn how to support families in maintaining the home language for children with and without developmental disabilities.

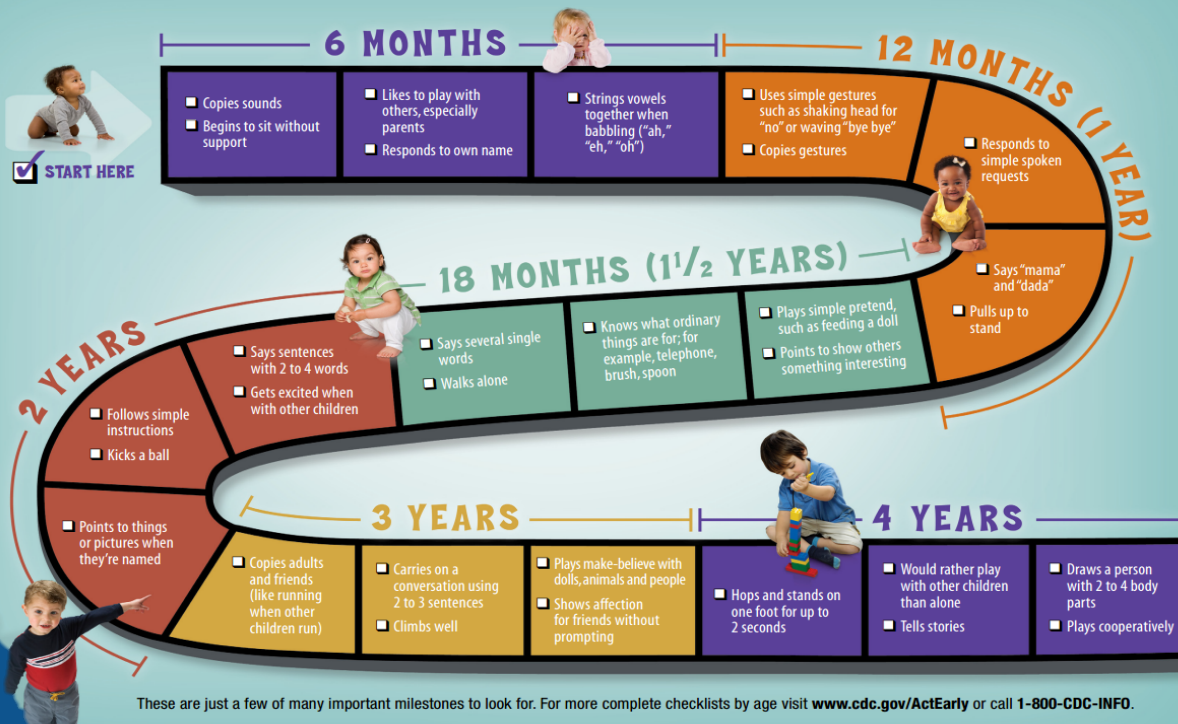
# Myths and Facts About Bilingualism



# Myth 1: Bilingual Children's Language Will be Delayed

## Your Child's Early Development is a Journey

Check off the milestones your child has reached and share your child's progress with the doctor at every visit.



- Classic study showed that language milestones are the same for bilingual and monolingual children
  - 25 Spanish-English bilinguals and 35 from monolingual homes
  - Language milestones were tracked from ages age 8 to 30 months
  - Combining vocabulary in both languages, bilinguals had same vocabulary as monolinguals

Pearson, Fernandez, & Oller (1993). Lexical development in bilingual infants and toddlers: Comparison to monolingual norms. *Language Learning*, 43, 93-120.



# Take Away Message

If a bilingual child is not reaching typical milestones—seek help! It's not because he or she is being exposed to 2 languages.



# Myth 2: Children are Confused by Exposure to Two Languages



- Some children may show cross-linguistic influence: rules from the more dominant language may get applied incorrectly in the less dominant language
  - This is a typical part of bilingual language development
- Children are good at figuring out when/with whom they should use which language
- Code-switching/code mixing is not a sign of confusion

## Children feel confused when their parents change their language use

- Parent stops speaking in the home language to the child after concern about language delay is raised
- Family members stop conversation when child comes in the room to avoid exposing him to the “wrong” language



# Myth 3: Children with Developmental Delays or Autism Spectrum Disorders Will Have More Delays if Exposed to Two Languages



# Facts: Bilingual Language Development in Children with DD/ASD

- Studies have compared children with disabilities from monolingual and bilingual homes to determine if there is a difference in language acquisition
- Important to test children in their dominant language or in both languages if bilingual

# Children with Down Syndrome

- Study of children with Down Syndrome being raised in bilingual (English-French) vs monolingual homes in Canada
- Ages 2 ½ to 8 years
- No difference in language abilities for the two groups—bilingual children had equally developed skills as monolingual children

Kay-Raining Bird et al. (2005). The language abilities of bilingual children with Down syndrome. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology*, 14, 187-199.

# Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders

- Study of children with ASD from bilingual (n = 45) and monolingual (n = 30) environments
- Ages 3 to 6 ½ years
- No differences in language skills between the two groups

Hambly, C. & Fombonne, E. (2012). The impact of bilingual environments on language development in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 42, 1342-1352.

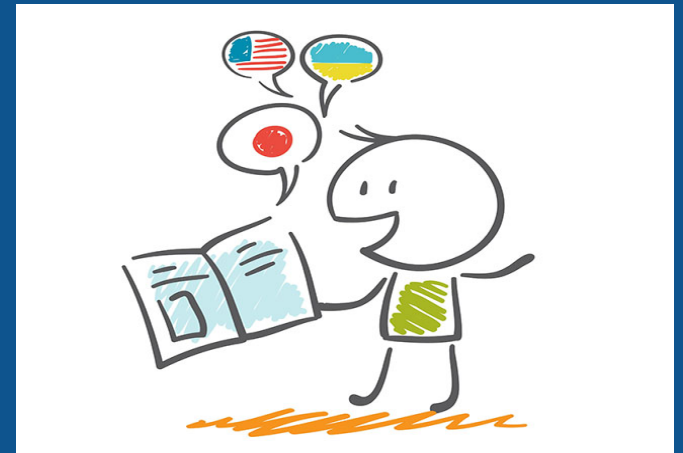
# Children with Specific Language Impairment (SLI)

- Studies of bilingual and monolingual children with SLI
- No differences in grammatical morphology (such as use of verb tenses) between the two groups
- Children with SLI were able to become bilingual when a second language was added

Based on research by Paradis and colleagues (French-English bilingual children) and by Gutierrez-Clellen and colleagues (Spanish-English bilingual children)



# Celebrate Bilingualism



# Benefits of Bilingualism

- If children are exposed to two languages from an early age and become proficient in both, advantages are found, such as:
  - Metalinguistic awareness, which is linked to reading/writing skill
  - Executive control functions (because they have learned selective attention and inhibition)
  - Later onset of dementia in older adulthood

Based on research by Bialystok at York University in Toronto

# Benefits of Bilingualism

## Personal benefits:

- Access to more people, literature, travel, employment opportunity, connecting with different cultures



# Assessment of Bilingual Young Children



# Collaboration with Interpreters

- Before and after the session: prepare & debrief
  - Learn greetings; pronunciation of names
  - Prepare for intentional silences
  - Prepare for discussion of difficult topics
  - Debrief re interpreter impressions
- During the session: connect with family
  - Describe interpreter role
  - Speak directly to family member
  - Use short, concise sentences

# Determining Language to Use

- Caregiver questionnaire/interviews
- Observe in different settings
- Language samples in all exposed languages

# Test Selection and Administration

## DO:

- When possible select tests:
  - Translated appropriately (International Test Commission guidelines)
  - Normed on children from similar language background
  - Including representative standardization sample
  - Examples for Spanish-speaking young children:
- Consider use of a nonverbal or language reduced assessment if no appropriate verbal test available (e.g. Leiter - 3)

# Test Selection and Administration

## Do (continued)

- Incorporate Authentic Assessment principles
- Ask parents to observe the child during testing and to tell you how typical the performance was of their usual behavior/functioning
- Select naturalistic alternatives to supplement standardized testing



# Test Selection and Administration

## DON'T:

- Don't informally translate “on the fly”
- Don't use an interpreter for a standardized cognitive, language, or other structured test
- Don't assume a test was translated appropriately or normed on non-English speaking children

# Interpreting Results

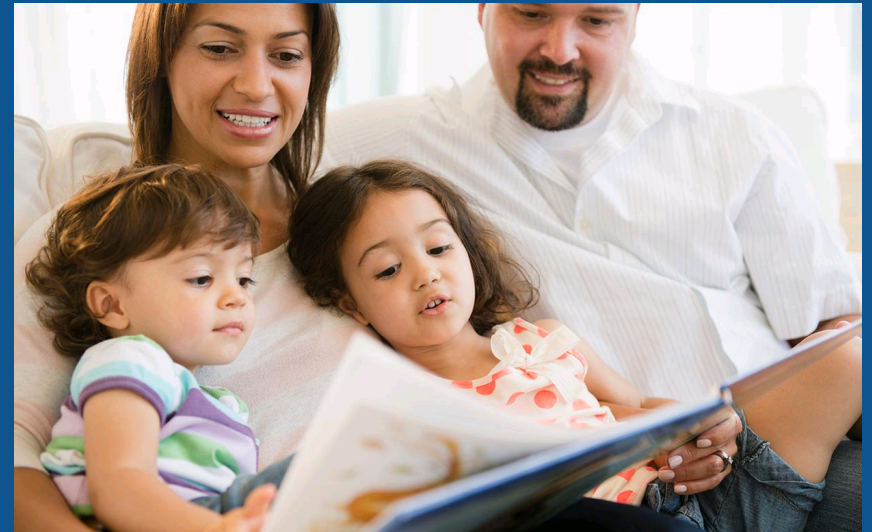
## DO:

- Interpret test results with caution, considering norms and standardization sample
- Compare results from different assessments
- Combine both languages

## DON'T:

- Don't assume a test is “nonverbal” based on title
- Don't assume norms are applicable because test instructions translated
- Don't assume language delays are due to being raised bilingually; bilingual children on average have same language milestones as monolingual

# Humans Need Humans



# The live human presence is critical to language learning

- Attention and arousal = **motivation**
- Live humans combine speech with eye gaze
- Joint attention
- Reciprocal interactions



# Adults are Language Models

- Parents and caregivers provide a more rich language model when speaking their home language
- People using their home language speak with more heightened affect/emotion which stimulates children's learning



# Home Language Contains Culture



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- Language is the medium for children to learn about the values, beliefs, and norms of their family culture
- Parent-child attachment is linked to language and communication
- Language connects children to extended family members
- Loss of home language especially likely when the home language is a minority language in the culture



# Supporting the Home Language in Children with Delays & Disabilities

- Encourage parents to speak to their children in the language in which they are most comfortable—even if the child has delays
- Work with providers/therapists on ways to support communication in the home



## Recommendations for Parents

- Option 1: Use the language that you are most comfortable in at home. Your child can learn the second language when he or she starts school.
- Option 2: Use two languages from the start. If there are people living in the home who speak different languages, your child can be exposed to more than one language and will learn to distinguish them.

# Recommendations for Parents

- Give your child many opportunities to hear and practice using both languages in everyday situations.
- Tell stories and sign songs; share books
- Talk about your traditions and cultures
- Make sure interactions in home language are varied and fun, and not just giving instructions



- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association website: [www.asha.org](http://www.asha.org)
  - The Advantages of Being Bilingual
  - Teaching Your Child Two Languages
  - Becoming Bilingual/El Nino Bilingue
- Paradis, J., Genesee, F. & Crago, M. B. (2010). *Dual Language Development and Disorders: A Handbook on Bilingualism and Second Language Learning*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition.

- Head Start materials: The Importance of Home Language series

<https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/culture-language/article/importance-home-language-series>

Bilingualism: Frequently Asked Questions

[www.literacytrust.org.uk](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk)

- Center for Applied Linguistics
- Wharton, Robert H., Levine, Karen, Miller, E., Breslau, Joshua, & Greenspan, Stanley (2000). Children with special needs in bilingual families: A developmental approach to language recommendations. *ICDL Clinical Practice Guidelines*. The Unicorn Children's Foundation: ICDL Press, Pp 141-151.

# Comments? Questions?

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