

Making family bilingualism work in real life

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The lecture is organised by **Duo** for intercultural families.

For more information visit Duo's website at en.duoduo.fi

Jane Merrill, the American author of a book about raising her twins in French, talks about her choice as something very natural: “Bilingual child-rearing is like breast-feeding: it is giving a child a tender gift. It costs you nothing and fits in perfectly with everyday life.”

The Language Approach – who speaks what and to whom?



- One language – one person (OPOL)
- Minority language at home (mL@h)
- Time and Space or a Mixed language approach



Two simple steps to active bilingualism



- Reinforce the minority language!
- Ensure that your children have the need and motivation to use both languages!

Ideas for the speaker of the minority language



- Make a conscious decision to interact (by speaking *and* listening) with your children as much as possible
- Look for one-on-one time with each child to speak your language without the interference of the majority language
- Pay attention when your child is interested in something and ask questions
- Read to your child, even before they understand the stories, and don't stop!

Ideas for the speaker of the minority language



- Find other speakers of your language for support
- Expect your children to talk to you in your language and persist even if they don't
- Help your children (if the situation permits) to create close relationships with grandparents, aunts, uncles and other relatives in your country of origin
- Travel to the minority language country if at all possible

Situations in a bilingual family. What to do if... (1/2)



Your child refuses to speak one of the languages (for example English) and asks in to go out to play in Finnish.

- a) "I don't understand, say it in English, please"
- b) "What is it that you want to do?"
- c) "You mean that you want to go out to play?"
- d) "Okay, go ahead."
- e) "Joo, mene vaan."

We can't force our children to use a certain language. They will use the language if they really need it to communicate with a person who speaks this language.

Situations in a bilingual family. What to do if...^(2/2)



Your child mixes the languages.

- Very common and usually temporary with small children. They want to communicate efficiently and often choose the first word that comes to mind.
 - Ensure that your children have enough exposure to both languages in an unmixed form.
 - Help increase your children's vocabularies by reading to them in both languages.
 - Avoid correcting or interrupting your children. Rephrase what they said in a natural way.
- For older children mixing (code-switching) is often a language strategy used to emphasize something or as a social tool when speaking with other bilinguals.

Keep going



- Tap into your children's interests: connect the things that they like with the minority language
- Use books, magazines, DVDs, music, computer games and smart phone applications
- Encourage biliteracy
- Look for a school or day care in minority language / Saturday school
- Get their friends on board



Last, but not least...



Make family bilingualism a priority, but not a source of stress!