



## **Bilingualism: Myths and Facts**

There are many children who understand what it means to live in two worlds: the French world and the English world. Here in Nova Scotia there are several families where English and French are spoken in the home and as a result many parents ask themselves which language to use at home with their child.

Following are commonly asked questions and recent research based responses. Please note that all families are unique in their choices and needs.

**MYTH:** Learning two languages is more difficult than learning one.

**FACT:** Children are capable of learning two languages simultaneously without particular cognitive difficulty. The brain does not add language information but processes it in a much more complex way and can easily handle two languages at once.

**MYTH:** Children who are learning two languages start talking later than those who only learn one.

**FACT:** Children who learn two languages should begin talking at the same time as those who are learning just one: first words between 12-14 months, combining words ('juice daddy') between 18 and 21 months. If your child isn't combining words at 21 months it may be prudent to refer for a speech and language assessment (see below for details on how to refer).

**MYTH:** Mixing both languages (i.e. 'franglais') is a sign that the child has not mastered either language and should be corrected as soon as possible.

**FACT:** Mixing two languages (using words from English in French sentences or vice versa) is natural and expected for bilingual speakers, child or adult. It is not considered a sign that the child is confused with their language development and it should not be corrected.

**MYTH:** Acadian French isn't 'good' French and is harming the language development of my child.

**FACT:** Acadian French isn't 'wrong' but is simply an older version of standard French, many words and phrases originating in the 1600s to the 1800s. Even grammatical differences (like 'j'allions' and j'avions') are older ways of conjugating verbs. Acadian French has grammatical and vocabulary rules like all other languages and dialects, and as a result it is simply different.

**MYTH:** Learning two languages is more (or too) difficult for children with a communication delay.

**FACT:** As the brain does not process language by adding information, learning two languages isn't more difficult than learning one. Therefore, learning two languages isn't too difficult for a

child with a communication delay. In fact, being bilingual can help support communication skills of children who are struggling by providing them with resources from a whole other language.

**MYTH:** If we remove (or concentrate on) only one language, this will help my child's language difficulties.

**FACT:** Bilingualism neither delays nor harms a child's language development. If the child has difficulty in one language, they will struggle in the other. Removing one language will not make learning the remaining language easier for the child.

Removing one language could:

1. Limit the child to only one language for their communication, whereas before the child had access to two languages.
2. Reduce the child's capacity and quality of communication with their family, community and friends.
3. Lead to a reduction in self-esteem and family attachment.
4. Impact the child's self-identity with regards to their family (who may be bilingual while they are not), their community and their culture.
5. Diminish education and job opportunities.
6. Reduce the number of language and vocabulary models.

#### **How to make a referral for speech and language services:**

*Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech Centres (NSHSC)* accepts referrals for children between birth and school entry (grade primary). A doctor's referral is not necessary; we accept referrals from parents and other professionals who work with the preschool population.

#### **Please contact the NSHSC Centre nearest you**

To locate the nearest NSHSC Centre use our 'Find us' link on our website: [www.nshsc.ns.ca](http://www.nshsc.ns.ca)

***To speak with someone in French please call (902) 464-5001.***



*Every person deserves a voice.  
Every voice deserves to be heard.*

*Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech Centres (NSHSC) was established in 1963 and is a Provincial Program of the Nova Scotia Department of Health. NSHSC is the healthcare agency responsible for providing hearing services to Nova Scotians of all ages and speech-language services to preschool children and adults.*