



BabyTalks: Brilliantly Bilingual

Below are recommended stopping points (denoted with the symbol □) and suggested questions to use in your group's discussion. Please feel free to follow your group's lead and discuss topics and questions that are of greatest value to the group! If you're working with a larger group, you may find it useful to discuss these questions in smaller groups and then reunite to summarize.

Learning objectives

Young children begin to learn language at birth, and continue learning language throughout their lives. In this presentation, we discuss how children are born primed and ready to learn language – even two or more. We discuss the fundamentals of children's early language development, how learning multiple languages influences that process, as well as cognitive benefits bilingual children may gain. We also include strategies and resources on how to support dual language learners.

At the end of this presentation, you should be able to:

- Understand the brain's role in supporting dual language learning
- Explain how everyday experiences build bilingual children's language skills
- Support language development through playful interactions
- Describe the cognitive, social emotional, and cultural advantages of learning more than one language.

Presentation Overview

What Does It Mean to Be Bilingual, or a Dual Language Learner?

What is bilingualism? (Slide 4)

Types of bilingualism (Slide 5)

Why is bilingualism important to you? (Slide 6)

□ **Recommended stopping point: After Slide 6**

- Simultaneous bilingual children learn their two languages at the same time, while sequential bilingual children learn one first and the other later on. Are there any simultaneous or sequential bilingual children in your programs? How might supporting a sequential bilingual child be different than supporting a simultaneous bilingual child? What might this look like at different ages – for instance, infancy, toddlerhood, and the preschool years?
- ***Why is bilingualism important to you?*** Why is bilingualism important to your community? How are language and culture related? What does your language – or languages – mean to you? Why is it so important for you and your community to maintain your home language?

Rapid brain growth (Slide 8)

Experience and pruning strengthen brain connections (Slides 9-10)

Sensitive periods and native/home language learning abilities (Slides 11-13)

□ **Recommended stopping point: After Slide 13**

- At birth, children's brains are already 25% the size of its adult size, and by age 5, it reaches a whopping 92% of its adult size. But this does not mean the brain is 92% done developing at that age! What other skills children need to learn and refine from their preschool years onward?
- The process of pruning connections is a necessary and important part of brain development. What does pruning tell us about the importance of early experiences? How might this knowledge be applied in the classroom or at home?

□ **From Research to Practice (Slide 14):** The process of brain development is the process of building our brains through the experiences that we have every day. Our brains are so busy forming new connections early in life; the type of experiences that shape those connections matters. The more often a child has an experience, positive *or* negative, the more likely that experience is to shape the connections forming in their brains.

Think about the kinds of experiences the children that you work with have on a daily basis.

What kinds of language experiences are children in your classroom getting in each of their languages? What is an example of a positive language experience that children might experience frequently?

Consistent, High-Quality Experiences Build Language Skills

Children learn from others (Slides 16-19)

Experiences shape language ability (Slides 20-21)

□ **Recommended stopping point: After Slide 21**

- In slides 16 to 18, you learned about a study about the relationship between face-to-face interactions and children's early language learning. The children in this study were not bilingual, but the results from the study show that face-to-face interactions are crucial to language learning in general. Monolingual, English-speaking babies were better at distinguishing between Chinese sounds if they spent face-to-face time with a live Chinese speaker, but not when they watched a video or listened to a recording of the same Chinese speaker. What features of a live interaction might spur learning?
- Research has shown that hearing more language as an infant relates to larger vocabularies in the toddler years. What are some daily opportunities for teachers, home visitors, or parents can take advantage of to talk with children and provide them with more language practice?



- **From Research to Practice (Slide 22):** Learning happens in the context of relationships. Children’s relationships with teachers, parents, and other caregivers shape their language and social emotional development.
 - How do the children you work with demonstrate that they learn from others?
 - How do you incorporate relationship-based learning strategies, like back and forth interactions and responsiveness, into your everyday work?

The Bilingual Brain (Slides 23-25)

Cognitive flexibility game: Stroop Task (Slides 26-39)

Cognitive flexibility game: Sun-Moon (Slides 40-42)

□ **Recommended stopping point: After Slide 42**

- How did it feel to complete the Stroop task and Sun-Moon game? What kinds of games or activities could you use in your work to give children practice with cognitive flexibility?

Learning More Than One Language

Dual language learning in the classroom (Slide 44)

Sensitive periods for language learning (Slides 45-47)

Supporting Dual Language Learners in the Classroom (Slide 48)

From Research to Practice (Slide 49)

□ **Recommended stopping point: After Slide 49**

- In your work with children, have you heard code-switching? How did you respond? Discuss ways you can support and encourage dual language learners’ expressive language in the classroom.
- Research suggests that bilingual children do **not** experience a delay in their language development. Are you surprised by this finding? Why or why not? How would you explain this finding to your colleagues, or the families you work with?
- Discuss the suggestions for supporting dual language learners in the classroom on slide 52. How might you incorporate some of these ideas into your work? What other strategies have members of your group tried in their work to support dual language learners?