Bilingualism – Key Information for Early Years Practitioners

- More children in the world grow up bilingual (2 or more languages) than monolingual (1 language), so it's perfectly natural!

  ADVANTAGES:
  - ➤ Stimulates brain development
  - ➤ Develops confidence in learning
  - ➤ Gives pride in their culture
  - ➤ Helps feel secure in identities / deeper self-confidence
  - ➤ Able to pick up new languages more easily
  - ➤ More proficient readers

- It may take 2-3 years for children to achieve conversational competence in English and at least 5 years to achieve educational competence. It does also depend on factors such as child's age, length of time in UK, level of proficiency in the first language, support available etc.

- Bilingualism does not cause speech and language difficulties. Bilingual children are no more likely to have Speech and Language difficulties than monolingual children.

  - ➤ If a bilingual child has difficulties learning **all languages** - they are likely to require Speech & Language Therapy support
  - ➤ If a bilingual child has difficulties learning **only English** – they only require support from their setting.

- To learn language, children need a strong foundation and a good model of language to learn from. A child who develops good use of the mother tongue is more likely to develop good English. So…

  - ➤ Parents should use the language they know best.
  - ➤ If parents speak the same language… use their own language at home, and English outside of home.
  - ➤ If parents speak different languages…each should use their own language with the child.
  - ➤ Even if a child has not heard much English before they start school, they should have no difficulty in picking English up, as long as they have a strong foundation in their first language.

- It is normal for children who are learning more than one language to...

  - CODE SWITCH – this means they mix words from different languages in on sentence.
  - STAMMER
  - Use EMPTY/NON-SPECIFIC VOCABULARY (e.g. um, er, this, thing, that) in the second language as they need lots of time to process and learn the vocabulary.
  - Go through a SILENT PERIOD – this may last several months. They are not being passive, but learning about all the languages they are hearing.
  - WATCH and COPY what others do
  - COPY and IMITATE what others say.

- Advice to give parents:-

  - Talk to your child in your own language
  - If you are using two languages at home, keep them separate – use them at different times or have one person speak one language.
  - Enjoy your language - use it in public and help your child develop a cultural identity
  - Find opportunities when your child can meet other adults and children who speak the same language.
  - Encourage and praise your child's attempts to communicate whichever language they use.
  - Have fun with songs, rhymes and stories in your own language
  - Don't give up! If your child talks back to you in English, acknowledge their response and repeat back what they've said in your own language. If they've responded, it means they've understood!

- Helping bilingual children in groups:-

  - Find out what the child's home language is.
  - Use language line or an interpreter where necessary
  - Work alongside the parent to help the child settle – use lots of gesture, open body language and visual props.
  - Give the child lots of time to respond
  - Find out some key words in the child's first language you could use. You could encourage other children and parents to take an interest in other languages by learning a few words or a song.
  - Encourage parents to speak their first language as they introduce their child to the new setting e.g. where toilets are, the routine, names of toys etc.
  - Encourage parents to talk about pictures in books in their first language or to interpret as you read a story.
  - All the strategies you would use with children who have speech and language difficulties will also be helpful for bilingual children, e.g. commenting on what they are doing, repeating what they've said, not asking test questions, model back the correct sounds and structures.