Today’s piece was prepared by Emma Cantor, MD, based on a NY Times article,

[Raising A Truly Bilingual Child](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/10/well/family/raising-a-truly-bilingual-child.html)

In today’s day and age, raising a bilingual child is often considered trendy, and this article highlights some of the realities and struggles associated with this feat. They discuss the difficulty of raising a bilingual child using only a bilingual nanny or a small amount of a second language mixed with a predominant primary language. The article advises not only mixing in multiple languages, but also mixing in multiple cultures to get the full multicultural and bilingual experience. In general, this article tends to discuss these issues more in the context of schooling and bilingual nannies, but prior studies have shown that bilingualism can be a cognitive advantage that less wealthy children have over the more economically advantaged (2). Thus, we should encourage families from multicultural (and sometimes less economically privileged) backgrounds to continue speaking both their native language as well as English.

One misstatement in the article however is that “a child who is learning two languages will have a smaller vocabulary in each than a child who is only learning one.” This could potentially lead to bilingual children being left out of programs, such as Birth to Three, because their limited vocabularies may be considered within normal limits. In fact, this is not supported by the literature, and any child, bilingual or monolingual, that has less than the expected number of words total (primary plus secondary language) should be referred for further evaluation (birth to three as well as hearing). Some literature suggests that bilingual or trilingual children might actually have an advantage in word learning (3,4)

The article also points out that, “they may mix the languages, but that doesn’t indicate confusion.” This is true, and bilingual children may actually out perform monolingual children on selective attention and multitasking (1).

**RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES ON BILINGUAL & OTHER SPEECH/LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT:**

[El Centro de la Raza](http://www.elcentrodelaraza.org/) *Helps Spanish speaking parents raising a bilingual child help to connect their child with cultural activities outside of the home*

[Typical Speech/Language Development](http://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/) *This ASHA resource helps families look at where their child is in terms of speech and language development and how that matches up with what is expected of a child that age.  If there are any deviations from this, despite multiple languages spoken in the home, it is worth looking into further.*

[Free Speech/Language development classes](http://earlylifespeech.org/Services/Classes) *This resource from Early Life Speech & Language provides parents with group classes to help promote speech and language development.*

And that’s today’s Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics: IN THE NEWS!

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