



# 11 THINGS I'VE LEARNT IN YEARS OF MULTILINGUAL MOTHERHOOD & IN 10 YEARS OF RESEARCH IN BILINGUAL ACQUISITION

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Dear parents and parents-to-be,

This is a short summary of 11 points to consider when raising your child with two or more languages in predominantly monolingual-oriented societies.

In some places, such as the Basque Country or South Tyrol in Europe, or Puerto Rico in the USA - being bilingual is the norm. In these bilingual communities, schools and society support bilingualism, and bilingual children thrive. But what happens when you live in a monolingual-oriented society and your child hears one or more languages only at home? In such situations, achieving active bilingualism or multilingualism can be more challenging. Along with it, some frustration or overwhelming feelings can arise, and you might encounter difficulties and sometimes feel like you have failed.

I hope that these 11 insights I've gained from 11 years of multilingual motherhood and 10 years of research experience in multilingual acquisition, learning, and education can shed light on this incredible journey you are undertaking.

Turn to the next page and enjoy reading! It will only take 7 minutes of your precious time.

Dr. Alessia Raineri PhD from Multilingual Land

Destination	Travel Period	Essentials
HAPPY MULTILINGUAL KID	From BIRTH to TEENS	LOVE

## 1. Consistency

Children need consistent exposure to each language to become active speakers. Small children can learn a language quickly if practicing every day but they can also forget it quickly if that daily exposure is suddenly missing. If each parent uses languages inconsistently, it can hinder bilingual or multilingual development.

Reminder: Parents need to agree on a strategy and stick to it as much as possible. If problems arise, the family language plan needs to be revisited and adjusted together.

## 2. Flexibility

Being too rigid about your linguistic strategies can be detrimental for a child's harmonic multilingual development. Communication doesn't have to create stress for the family. Forcing children to use a language they are not comfortable with can lead to resistance. Listening to them and to their preferences, can open a new way to communicate. Encouraging them gently is more effective. Flexibility can help children feel more comfortable and natural in their language use.

Reminder: Flexibility is not inconsistency, but just a way to adapt to the child's needs while keeping the family harmony.

## 3. Balance

Focusing too much on one language at the expense of another can lead to imbalances. Each language needs adequate attention and practice. A healthy linguistic balance is what you should aim for.

Reminder: Balancing exposure, you are giving the opportunity to every language to fully develop.

## 4. Need

Children and adults have distinct approaches to learning. For children, language is a tool for communication. Children learn language because they need it or because they find it enjoyable. When their peers use a particular language, that language becomes appealing to them. When they need it because it is the only means available to express themselves, they will make efforts to learn it.

Reminder: Create a need for your language.

## 5. Fun

Children love listening to tales and rhymes, they love singing and dancing, they love engaging in sportive games, talking over a board games or seating down painting and creating. If the language is associated with fun activities, they will enjoy learning it.

Reminder: Engage in fun activities with your language.

## 6. Support

If the community or school environment does not support multilingualism, it can be challenging for children to practice and feel confident in their languages. Improving communication with the school and community, or finding a more supportive school, can be very beneficial. Additionally, enrolling in language classes or joining playgroups in the target language can also help.

Reminder: You cannot control the environment, but you can choose what is best for your child.

## 7. Culture

Children need a variety of resources to learn a language, such as books, movies, music, and interaction with native speakers. Relying solely on parental instruction might not be sufficient. Children need to see that there is an amazing linguistic and cultural world to discover behind their communication with their parents.

Reminder: Culture and language are closely intertwined.

## 8. Avoid Comparing

Multilingual children might take longer to develop proficiency in each language compared to monolingual children. Comparing them to monolingual peers can be discouraging.

Reminder: Every multilingual child has his own linguistic history and path.

## 9. Prevention

Keeping tracks of your child multilingual development is important. If you note a language delay or a speech difficulty, do not wait to talk to an expert specialised in bilingual or multilingual development. Early interventions can lead to important improvement in language development. Be aware that traditional Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) are trained to work with monolingual children, and that there are still many false myths about bilingualism among health practitioners and educators.

Reminder: Do not wait too long to ask for help.

## 10. Avoid Overcorrection

Constantly correcting anybody's language mistakes can demotivate. Encouraging communication and gently guiding children to correct usage is healthier and more effective. Appropriate language use can be attained through certain discourse strategies. Multiple studies show that tailored strategies appropriated to the child age and characteristics can bring a passive bilingual to an active one in a short period of time.

Reminder: Whatever we are learning, we all make mistakes along the way.

## 11. Positive

Last but not least, when raising a bilingual or multilingual child, you need to think in small steps, while be focussed on your long term goals. This attitude will help you to avoid stress and overwhelming feelings. Raising a child is complex, thus raising a multilingual child can be overwhelming at times.

Reminder: Concentrate on what you have achieved.

## Top 3 Multilingual Land's Frequent Asked Questions

### Can I have a customised Family Language Plan?

Yes!

A customised Family Language Plan (FLP) can empower your multilingual family in many ways, answering to your specific needs and goals, helping you with the right tools and resources. In order to analyse your family and child's situation in great detail, we offer two to three Consultations (VALUE PROGRAM): one or two for the full analysis and one for the advice and FLP implementation. Resources and contacts are provided.

THE **VALUE PROGRAM** (2-3 CONSULTATIONS + FLP) IS FOR YOU IF:

- You are new parents or parents-to-be of a bilingual or multilingual child.
- Your child is growing up with two or more languages, but you are struggling with transmitting your home (or minority) language(s).
- You need to choose the right school for your bi- or multilingual child.
- Your child is having problems with the school (or majority) language.
- Your child has an atypical development and you need some guidance.
- Your toddler has a language delay and you want to have some directions and help.
- Your bi- or multilingual child has dyslexia and you want some directions.
- Your children are now teens and you want to discuss about their multilingual development.

Join me at [alessia@multilingualland.com](mailto:alessia@multilingualland.com)

### Can I activate my child's passive bilingualism?

Yes!

We offer a set of Coaching sessions that will give you the tools and confidence to communicate with your child in a more effective way.

THE **COACHING** SESSIONS ARE FOR YOU IF:

- Your child is not answering to you in your language but in the school (majority) language.
- You gave up talking in your (minority) language with your child some time ago but now you are regretting it.
- Your child or teen used to be an active bilingual or multilingual and now he doesn't want to talk in the minority language anymore.

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## How can I know if my multilingual child has a developmental language disorder?

Make a multilingual development screening.

With our extensive research in early multilingualism and developmental language disorders (and dyslexia), we can shed light on your child multilingual development and address you to the right specialists for therapy if needed. Our screening follows a research-based method with parental questionnaires in a set of European languages that the screener understands. For speech therapy we will address you to the right speech language pathologist (SLP) who covers the languages of your child.

THE **MULTILINGUAL DEVELOPMENT SCREENING** IS FOR YOU IF:

- Your child is in-between 2 and 3 years old (or slightly older) and you noticed that your child has some language delay, despite a typical physical and psychological development.
- Your toddler's educator or paediatrician has warned you about some language difficulties.
- Your child's educator or paediatrician has said to you something not really convincing, like that "bilinguals are normally late talkers" or that "you should stop speaking one language to them".

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ALL LANGUAGES HAVE SUPERPOWERS

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