



KIDCARE CANADA

nurturing the best possible start

Video Specific Discussion Q & A



Born to Communicate - Chapter Four

Babies can Manage More than One Language

Categories of questions:



Short answer questions (help participants to warm up and connect to their previous learning)

- *Is it common for families to have more than one language in their background?*

ANSWER: Yes, around the world and for centuries, humans have travelled and migrated and intermarried. Consequently they founded families with multiple languages. In the recent past, there was a misunderstanding that children would be confused if the same person spoke more than one language to them. Today we know that children have a capacity to separate languages they are exposed to. Nobody needs to worry if their children are exposed to multiple languages. In fact, there are benefits!

- *Can babies tell the difference between languages?*

ANSWER: Yes – even at birth. The research shows they react differently to a languages they heard in the womb when compared to an unfamiliar one.

- *Do different languages have different patterns that can be recognized even by those who don't speak them?*

ANSWER: Yes! Most of us have had the experience of being able to recognize a language that we don't understand.

- *Can young children learn more than one language?*

ANSWER: yes! Young children have the capacity to learn many languages and it is easier at this point in their lives than it will ever be again – especially when they are in a relationship with someone who is speaking it to them.

- *Is it easier to learn a second language when you are young?*

ANSWER: Yes -- see above!

APPLICATION

Personal experience questions (help participants apply what they have learned – make it personally relevant and meaningful)

- *Do you personally wish you knew more languages than you know?*

ANSWER: People will respond differently – many people will wish they knew more because it provides insight into a culture and it allows communication with people. E.g. when travelling

- *Describe your relationship with a multi-lingual child. Do they “know” to speak a particular language to particular people?*

ANSWER: People may describe children they know who know multiple languages as being able to know which language to use when interacting.

- *If you speak more than one language, have you had conversations where you switch back and forth? Can you describe this experience?*

ANSWER: People may describe some amusing experiences here.

- *Have you seen families where the parents speak to their baby only in their first language and not in the language of their chosen community? How did this work out for the child?*

ANSWER: People may have a range of things to describe here, usually with the outcome that the child eventually has no problem with the language of their chosen community once they get a bit older and interact with community members.

REFLECTION

Open-ended questions (help participants reflect and move towards deeper learning)

- *Do you know families where children cannot speak to the grandparents without an interpreter? What do you think about this, and why?*

ANSWER: Participants might respond that they do know families – or might even have this situation in their own family. The research suggests that it is good to encourage the grandparents to continue to speak directly to the grandchildren in the heritage language. There is great value for the whole family when generations interact together and all the languages are valued ... and the grandparents might learn some of the dominant language from the grandchildren!

- *Do you know families where very young children cannot speak the languages of their neighbours? What do you think about this, and why?*

ANSWER: In many Canadian communities a variety of languages can be heard. It is not unusual for children to hear other languages spoken by their neighbours. It can be enriching for young children to hear these languages and often, they are the ones who figure out how to overcome language barriers. As always, there is great value in learning to communicate with others.

- *In some families the only way for their baby to learn the heritage language is to focus on it before they learn the dominant language. What do you think of this?*

ANSWER: It is quite wonderful when children learn their heritage language and most children learn the dominant language quite easily when they are exposed to it, for instance in pre-school or playing with neighbourhood children. Having said this, knowing that very young children can easily learn more than one language, they can also be exposed to the dominant language in their culture. In other words, parents and grandparents don't need to worry. The children will pick up the languages they need to use.

- *A very young multi-lingual child might split the number of known words over two or more languages, while a very young child who speaks only one language might know the same number of words – but all in one language. How might this impact later language acquisition?*

ANSWER: Parents don't need to worry. Children are born ready to adapt to the family they are born into. The goal is for children to feel safe in their families and able to communicate. There are many opportunities through books that are read to children and later, through more formal schooling, for children to enrich their vocabularies, and often, children who know more than one language can use words from one language as clues to understanding another.

- *Communication with babies is important whether in one language or many. How can you encourage this?*

ANSWER: The value of speaking to babies cannot be overstated. This is the basis for language learning and later, literacy. Parents and caregivers can talk to babies any time the baby is receptive. They can explain what they are doing, what they did, or what they are going to do. They can refer to body parts when they are washing or

dressing their baby, name flowers and trees that the child can see when looking at a book or looking through a window or outside. Singing to babies has many advantages for the baby and the parent! Similarly, nursery rhymes help babies pick up the sounds and rhythms of a language.

All questions are examples only and have been designed to be modifiable. They are currently framed for professionals who support families.

If your audience is comprised of parents, we recommend you change the wording to make it more personal.

e.g.

- *Have you seen families where the parents speak to their baby only in their first language and not in the language of their chosen community? How did this work out for the child?*

Could become

- *If your first language isn't English, do you (plan to) speak to your baby in your first language, English or both? What are your reasons?*

And

- *Communication with babies is important whether in one language or many. How can you encourage this?*

Could become

- *Communicating with your baby is important whether in one language or many. How will/do you encourage this?*

And of course you may want to design questions of your own!

Suggested approach

Before showing the video

Decide on a couple of questions from the “Previous Learning” category above to put to your participants.

- Ask a first question and engage participants in a discussion. You may want to use questions like, “Have others had similar experiences?” to encourage all participants to speak.
- Depending on your time availability (3 hour session), ask a second question.

Ask participants to notice if these questions are also addressed in the video.

After showing the video

- Ask for first reactions to the video – words that come to mind? Interesting comments they recall, or something that was new to them
- Remember to refer back to your question(s) prior to watching the video and ask participants how those questions were addressed in the video

Application questions

- Then move onto the “application” questions to further discussion and provide participants with the opportunity to relate what they saw in the video to their own experiences
- Ask how participants might change their actions with infants because of the video – or suggestions they might make to new parents because of the video

Reflection questions

- Move on to “reflection” questions to encourage deeper thinking about the topic

Closure

- Depending on the time available and the group you are working with, either summarize key discussion points or ask participants to summarize some of the key discussion points and share what they will continue to do because of the content of the video or what changes they will make because of what they have learned from the video.

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DISCLAIMER

The content of KidCareCanada videos is informed by current research and shared by experts in the field. It should not be used for diagnosing or treating, and is NOT a substitute for professional care.