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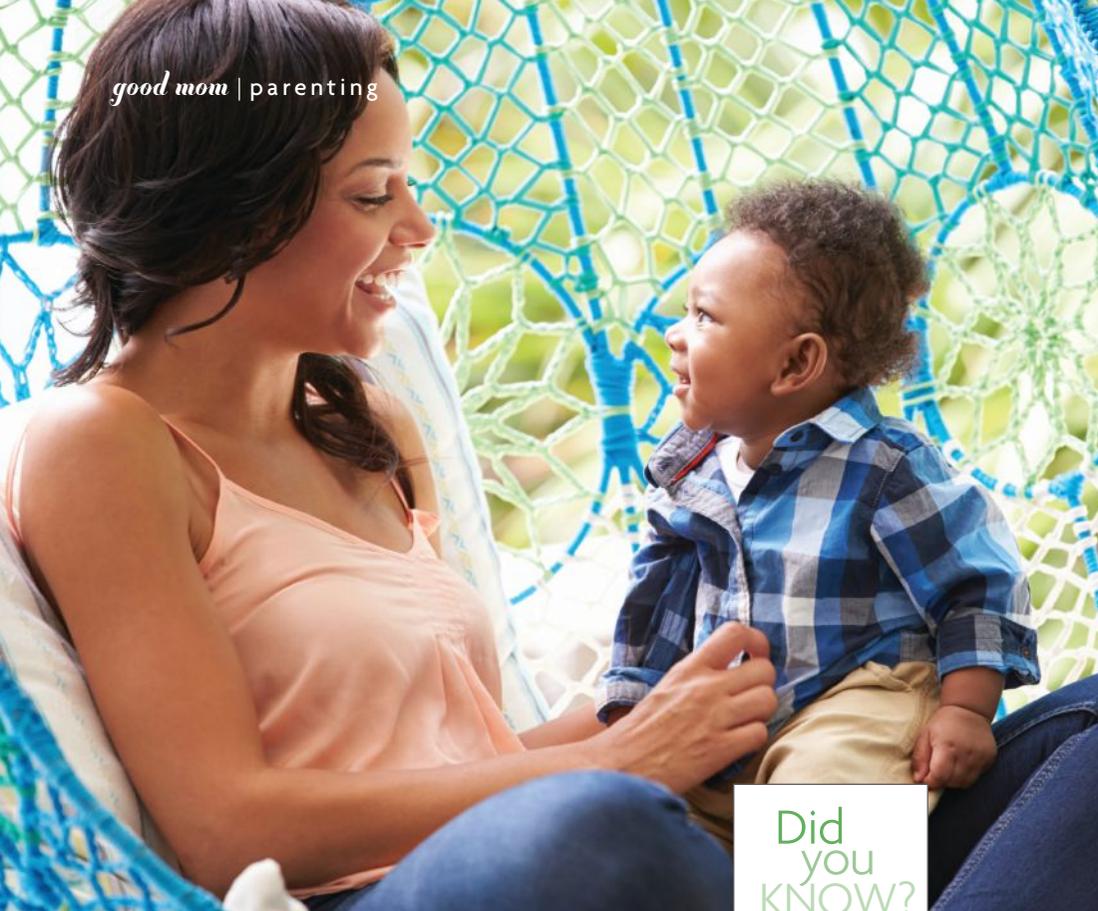
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### Word to the wise

Parents often shy away from teaching their children more than one language for fear that it might hold them back developmentally. But research has consistently shown that multilinguals develop at exactly the same pace as monolinguals, hitting the same milestones at the same time. “They have a more limited vocabulary compared to monolinguals, yes,” Adrian Garcia-Sierra, PhD, concedes. “But don’t forget, they also have words for the other language.” Tally up your child’s vocabulary across languages, and you’ll see he’s right on track.

Did you KNOW?

Roughly **20%** of the U.S. population speaks a language other than English at home, according to François Grosjean, a leading expert in bilingualism.

## Little linguist

When your bambino has yet to utter his first word, adding a second language is probably the farthest thing from your mind. But to fully reap the benefits of bilingualism, there’s no better time to start. **BY TIFFANY R. JANSEN**

**B**ecause I speak English and my husband speaks Dutch, raising a bilingual child was a no-brainer. But when we shared our decision with others, the response was a mixture of admiration and concern. What a great opportunity for our daughter, but wouldn’t two languages be confusing for her?

Actually, there’s no scientific evidence to support the idea that multiple languages confuse a child. “Children’s brains are hyper-focused on learning language, and they crave language input,” says Amy Herren, a speech-language pathologist at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center in Ohio.

In fact, studies show infants are most receptive to speech sounds from any language up to about 8 months of age. After that, their brains home in on sounds found in their native languages. So, the sooner you can introduce a second language, the better.

### Language lock-in

For those of us with bilingual families, the choice of language has practically been made for us. But what if you don’t have a built-in second language?

“Pick one you want to learn, one that you’re excited about,” advises Jackie Friedman Mighdoll, founder and director of Sponge, a language school for children in Seattle.

If you’ve always dreamed of going to Germany, try German. French is a solid choice if you’re a Francophile at heart. Did your ancestors come from Poland? Give

Polish a go. Or attempt Sanskrit if you’re a yoga fanatic.

Your enthusiasm will serve to keep your babe engaged, as well as motivate you in the long run. And if your child decides to pick up a different language later on, he’ll be one step ahead of the game. “Once your child has learned a second language, learning a third language is going to be that much easier,” Mighdoll explains.

### Immerse yourself

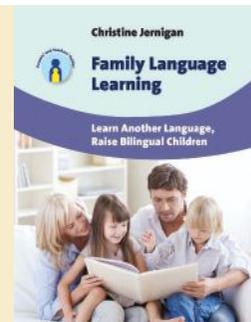
Experts agree that the best way to learn a language is increased exposure.

One-on-one interaction using parentese (“Hiiiiii, bay-bee”) has the strongest effect on language development, according to Nairan Ramirez-Esparza, PhD, assistant professor of psychology at the University of Connecticut.

My husband and I practice OPOL (one parent, one language), in which he communicates with our daughter in Dutch, and I speak to her in English. >>

### STUDENT TEACHER

Don’t speak a second language? Make learning one a family affair. Channel View Publications recently published *Family Language Learning: Learn Another Language, Raise Bilingual Children*. This first-ever guide aimed at monolingual parents offers tips on how to choose a language, stay motivated, respond to naysayers and incorporate the new language into your lifestyle.



## Advantages that translate

Studies have unearthed countless advantages to speaking more than one language:

- Sharper problem-solving skills
- Greater ability to tune out distraction
- More job opportunities
- Improved memory
- Ability to resolve conflicts more efficiently
- Protection against dementia
- Higher earning potential
- Heightened social awareness
- Advanced multitasking and task-switching abilities
- Increased creativity

But it doesn't have to be a parent who is doing the talking. Annie Anderson, a mother of two in the Boston area, hired a Spanish-speaking nanny to care for her 8-month-old son. If you have friends or family members who speak your chosen language, ask them to speak it with your child.

Don't overlook opportunities in your community, either. Some libraries hold storytime in other languages, and expat and heritage groups often organize events in their native tongue. Online networking sites, like Meetup.com, are great resources for play groups and other get-togethers in your area where participants will be speaking the target language.

For older children, international cartoons like "Masha i Medved" (Russian), "Caillou" (French) and "Pocoyo" (Spanish) can be found on Netflix or YouTube. Listening to music can also boost language learning.

### Make it class-y

Language schools like Mighdoll's Sponge are cropping up all over the United States, offering classes for children from infancy to elementary school.

Immersion schools are another popular option. Anderson's daughter, Helena, attends Pine Village Spanish Immersion School four days a week, and we were able to find a Dutch preschool program near our home in Westchester County, New York.

## good to know ...

**Code-switching (alternating between languages when trying to communicate) is perfectly normal in multilingual children. It's a sign that the child is learning to inhibit one language while using another.**



A quick Google search can reveal other language immersion opportunities in your area. In fact, a friend of mine found a French immersion ballet class for her 2-year-old son that way.

Just because your child hasn't started speaking doesn't mean he won't get anything out of it. Mighdoll has witnessed a baby, who wasn't able to talk, respond appropriately to a question in Mandarin using sign language.

### Child's play

Games are a fun way to help your baby develop motor skills, rhythm, spatial and body awareness ... and learn a language!

Chant pat-a-cake in Spanish, play peekaboo in Mandarin, or jump into a rousing game of *il est ou ton nez?* (where is your nose?). Singing songs together in the target language is another fun way to learn.

For toddlers, Hungry Hungry Hippos, Candyland, memory card games and puzzles can also be effective when played together in the new language. "My partner has these Spanish flash cards for verbs, and she and my daughter will sit on the couch and do them together," says Anderson.

Apps can also encourage language learning through play, though Herren advises using them as a last resort. Children need to learn the social aspects of a language, like appropriate use of emotion and proper facial expressions, and that can't be taught through an app.

### Bilingual benefits

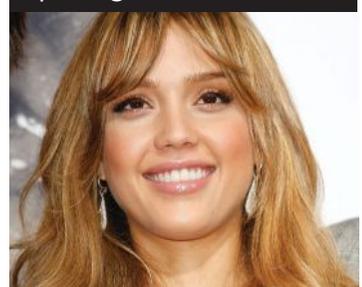
Whatever language and method you choose, the benefits of being bilingual are clear. Studies have unearthed countless advantages to speaking more than one language, including sharper problem-solving skills,



improved memory, advanced multitasking abilities, lower risk of dementia, more job opportunities, higher earning potential, heightened social awareness and increased creativity. But the payoff requires a lot of invested time and energy.

"Sometimes parents think a few months of language exposure will create huge benefits for their children, and that's just not true," says Adrian Garcia-Sierra, PhD, assistant professor of education at the University of Connecticut. Learning a language is an ongoing and ever-evolving process requiring dedication and consistency—but the impact it will have on your child's life makes it well worth the effort. **P&N**

### Spotlight



**Teaching your tot two (or more) languages? You're in good company. These celebrities are the proud parents of bilingual babies.**

- **Jessica Alba** is learning Spanish along with daughters Honor and Haven.
- **Angelina Jolie** and **Brad Pitt** live in France and have a French-speaking nanny for their six kids.
- **Heidi Klum** passed her native German along to her children.
- **Tiger Woods** taught Sam and Charlie English, while they learned Swedish from mom Elin Nordegren.