

Some facts about bilingualism that may surprise you



It is estimated that 1..... than half the world's population is bilingual, and, 2..... an increasingly globalised world, there are obvious benefits to speaking more than one language. However, for many years, parents were discouraged from teaching their children to speak more than one language from birth. Learning two or more languages simultaneously was believed 3..... cause confusion and slow down academic development. While it is certainly true that children who are learning to speak more than one language 4..... their mother tongue will often mix the languages up or speak a little later, these are temporary problems, and 5..... reason to avoid teaching a child both their parents' languages. In fact, there are plenty 6..... reasons to encourage your child to become bilingual from birth. As well as the obvious benefits of being able to communicate with more people, and the possibility of earning more money, children who speak more than one language have been shown to score more highly 7..... achievement tests at school. This is true for mathematics as well as tests of verbal skills. And in later life it has 8..... found that bilinguals, 9..... average, will tend to develop Alzheimer's disease five years later than monolingual speakers. Speaking three or more languages offers even more protection. It seems that the increased number of connections within the brain allows bilinguals to cope better with brain damage.

But is it too late if you haven't 10..... learned a second language in childhood? It used to be thought that the adult brain was very fixed, but recent research has shown that we continue to develop new connections in the brain throughout our lives, meaning that it's perfectly possible to learn another language to a high standard. Older learners are 11..... likely to have native-like pronunciation, but they are better at learning vocabulary as they are able to use 12..... more skills and strategies than children. And learning a language is like using a muscle – the 13..... you use it the stronger it gets, meaning that you will find your third language easier than your second, and so on.