

Parental Booklet on:
**Bilingual Parent: My
bigger bilingual family**



Real Case Scenario

Georgina and Michael are a Chinese Singaporean couple with two children, Andrew and Ashley. Both Georgina and Michael are able to speak English, Chinese and the Chinese dialects, Cantonese and Hokkien, but the main language of communication between the couple was English. Their first son, Andrew, has a good command of English and Chinese, and has no problems with his languages in school. However, when it comes to their second child, Ashley, it was a different story. She refused to speak Chinese in her Mother Tongue class. During a parent-teacher meeting, Georgina was concerned about her daughter and could not understand why she was unable to understand Chinese in school.

Do you want to know what happens next?

Dear Parents

It's tricky business to raise our bilingual children nowadays. But do not fret, you are not alone. The siblings Andrew and Ashley show the different experiences Singaporean children can have in a bilingual heritage. Each of our child arrives in a family with already established language patterns. Over time, it is our job, as parents, to adapt and evolve our original language choices to adapt and fit in with the changing language circumstances.

It is with this in mind that we have decided to create this parental booklet, "Bilingual Parent: My bigger bilingual family". Our goal is to help parents who are already bringing up their children bilingually to improve the use of bilingual language at home. Unlike the traditional booklets, this parental booklet will discuss the realities of life of two or more children in a bilingual family. Upon reading this, some questions that you may be concerned with is: Does birth order have effect on the children's language use and bilingualism within the home? What are the factors that decide the choice of language of our children? Why is there a difference between language use when the bilingual children are brought up in the same home environment?

We hope to help you fill this void through this booklet. Most importantly, we hope that you, as parents or caregivers of the children, can develop a better understanding of the kind of environment they need for a more efficient language learning. In addition, by understanding the examples found in the booklet, you will have laid a better understanding of communication between you and your children.

Sincerely,
Faye Law Jia Wen.

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Checklist

The purpose of this checklist is to assist parents to evaluate and know where you stand or how much you need to know about bilingual use in a bigger family. The following areas are covered: Environment, Parental Involvement.

Checklist

Environment

What do I notice about my child's environment?

Questions	Yes	No
When I walk into my child's room, are there alphabets or learning charts in different languages?		
When I walk into my child's room, are there reading materials in different languages?		
Does my child have a common language with their grandparents?		
Do you expose your child to music of the second language?		
Is there a set time or place where any one of the language is always used?		
When my children communicate with one another, are they able to communicate in their first and second language?		

Checklist

Parental Involvement

Am I interacting with my child in the following ways?

Questions	Yes	No
Do I spend time to read to my child in the first and second language?		
Do I give encouragements to my child when they speak in the first language?		
Do I give encouragements to my child when they speak in the second language?		
Do I explain to my child the benefits of speaking the first language?		
Do I explain to my child the benefits of speaking the second language?		
Do I find myself switching among the two languages when I speak to my child?		

Checklist

To sum up this section, it is perfectly normal for your bilingual children to use their first language most of the time when they communicate with one another. However, gently steering them towards the second language through the environment they are in and your interactions with them is also important.



The key is that you are the model of your child's language use.

BIRTH ORDER

First-Born

Last-Born



Q: Does birth order have an effect on a child's language use and bilingualism within the home?



Characteristics of child according to their birth order

This section looks at birth order, one important factor that affects the bilingualism in a family.

Birth order refers to the child's position in the family, determined by his or her date of birth.

For example, first-born, middle-born and last-born.

According to Suzanne (2011), the order of a child is linked to a type of personality or character.

For example, an ambitious first-born and a rebellious last-born. The following are some of the traits associated with each birth order of a child in a bilingual family.

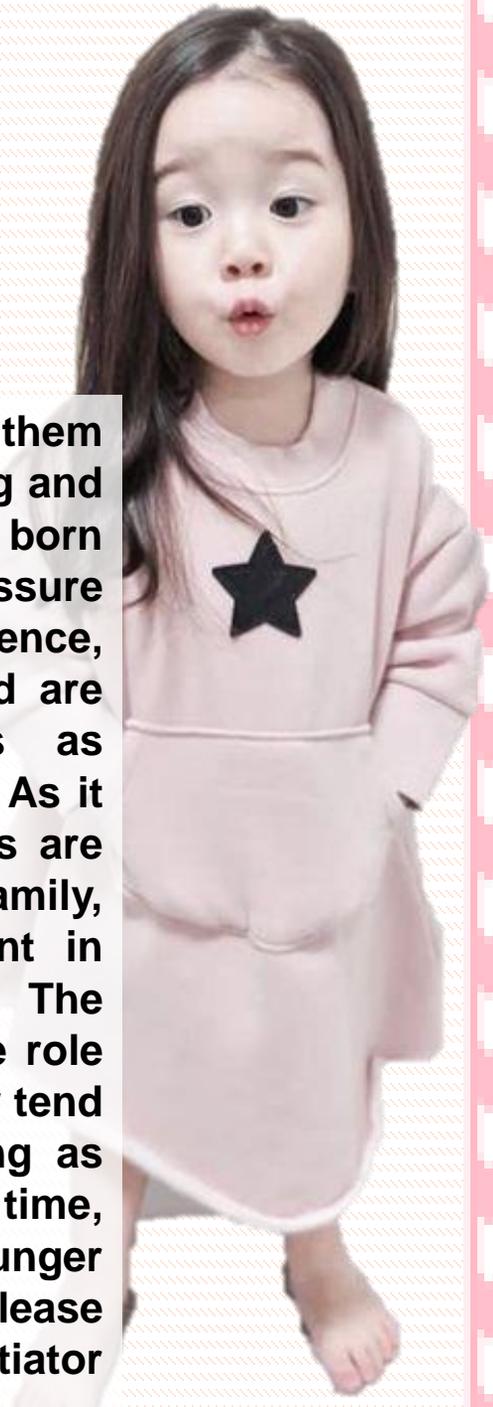
First-Born Child

Many psychologists believe that the oldest child in the family has an earlier advantage than their siblings. This is because they benefit from being in an environment with two interested parents talking directly to him or her. First-born or only child are typically described to be ambitious, anxious, cautious, responsible, motivated and sensitive (Suzanne, 2011). They also tend to perform better in school and attain a higher level of education as compared to the other siblings. This is because they are motivated to do what their parents expect of them. Thus, parents are more likely to have higher expectations from their first-borns. However, as a result of their high goals, they tend to have higher anxiety levels than their other siblings.



Second / Middle- Born Child

Suzanne (2011) describes them to be caring, curious, easy-going and sociable. The second or middle born benefit as they have less pressure from pleasing their parents. Hence, they are more adventurous and are less concerned about rules as compared to their older sibling. As it is not the first time the parents are dealing with a child joining the family, the parents are more confident in parenting the second child. The second or middle child play the role of a teacher and student, as they tend to look up to their older sibling as their role-model but at the same time, might have to take care of a younger sibling. As a result, they try to please everyone and becomes the negotiator in the family.



Last-Born Child



Understanding the established traits linked to the birth order is important as it helps parents understand that they should deal with each child differently and how they should deal with each child.

Last-born child

The last-born plays the role of being the baby in the family and tend to be cheerful, irresponsible, playful and rebellious. As they have the status of being the youngest in the family, most of the parental attention are given to them. Hence, they might sometimes unintentionally become spoiled by their parents. Also, they are more likely to lose tantrums when things do not happen their way and use emotional blackmail to get what they want. However, they also play the role of a joker in the family.

“

She takes a longer time to reply because her elder brother talks for her.

”

The impact of birth order on the linguistic competence of a child

This statement is made by a Singaporean friend of mine who have two bilingual children. Several researchers have studied the impact of birth order on the linguistic competency of a child. What they have discovered is that parents invest different amount of time and effort to help each child in the language. Very often, parents tend to spend more time with their first child to learn their language. The subsequent-born child arrive in an environment where the language patterns of the family is already established. Thus, the subsequent-born child will have to fit in the language pattern of the family and follow a similar pattern in its language use (Suzanne, 2011). Earlier on, we looked at the characteristics of a child linked to birth order. Now, we will look at how language use and vocabulary is linked to the birth order of a child.

In the next few pages, we will look at the findings by some studies...

First-Born Child

Impact of birth order: First-born have better semantic and vocabulary skills

In order to determine if there was a relationship between birth order and language competency among bilingual children, Faz (2015) studied 49 English-Spanish bilingual children and found that there was a significant difference between birth order and English semantic scores. This result suggest that first-born children have a more advanced semantic and vocabulary skills than the subsequent-borns. Besides, Suzanne (2011) states that parents are more likely to be motivated to spend more alone time with their first child on their language input, thus first-born usually have a wider vocabulary.

Second & Later - Born Child

Impact of birth order: Second & Later borns have better pronoun skills

Oshima-Takane, Goodz & Derevensky introduced that second-born and later-born children use more advanced pronoun skills than the other children in the family (as cited in Lowry, 2012, p. 2). This is because second-borns tend to overhear conversations between their parents and older siblings, and thus are exposed to more pronouns than his or her siblings. According to Lowry (2012), second-borns and later-borns are exposed to a different linguistic background from the first-born, where they hear conversations that are more complex. Thus, this they have a better ability in terms of the use of pronouns compared to their older sibling.

Second & Later - Born Child

Impact of birth order: Second & Later borns have better conversation skills

Hoff-Ginsberg states that second-born or later-born child have better conversation skills (as cited in Lowry, 2012, p. 2). She suggest this might be due to the different language experiences and environment where the second or later-born children have to put in more effort to understand and be included in conversations between parents and their older siblings. This provides motivation for them to learn conversational skills to be included in the family's conversations. Suzanne (2011) also supported this theory by claiming that the second or later-born children have better conversational skills and are quicker to understand people's conversation as compared to first-borns.

HOW

We can help ...

In summary, we understand that birth order creates a different learning environment in terms of language learning for the children. It seems that the first-born child has a slight advantage over the subsequent-borns as parents subconsciously reinforce birth order, spending more time and effort on language skills with the first-born child and give more allowance to the subsequent-child. Hence, understanding the type of conversations you place with your children is important as you can play a part in developing the language strengths of each of your child as they develop.

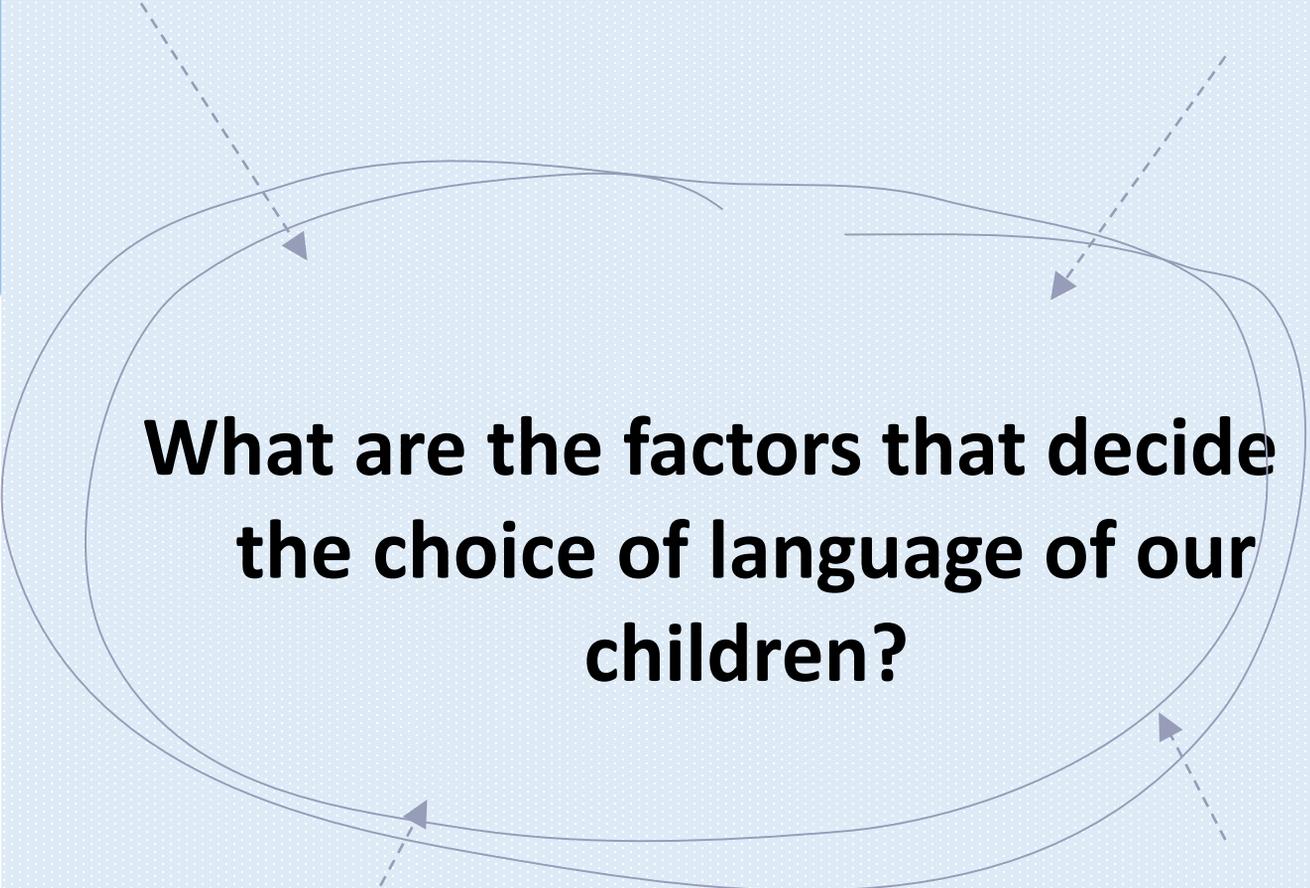
Choice of Language



**Let's pretend to be
Powerpuff Girls. I want
to be Blossom**

I want to be Bubbles!

It is fascinating to see how our children have grown this far and have their own conversation together. There is something special about observing their interactions, the way they communicate and play with one another, and the language they choose to communicate in. But often, we may wonder, “why and which language will our bilingual children use?”. We as parents cannot control the language they choose to speak and sometimes, we are concerned if our children is using more of one language and less of the other.



**What are the factors that decide
the choice of language of our
children?**

There are many different factors which determines their preferred language. They are:

Parents as influence of language choice

During the early years of the childhood, parents are the biggest influence in terms of their language use as they are able to control the exposure the children get with the languages they speak (Suzanne, 2011). However, this depends on the parent's amount of language input on the child. According to a study by Houwer (2007), to raise a bilingual child to speak two languages successfully, parents must expose their child to an ample amount of language input. This suggests that parents should plan ahead in time to determine the language patterns to be used to suit the family's needs. Thus, depending on the family's language strategy, our bilingual siblings are more likely to speak the family language altogether. For example, if parents decide to use Chinese as the language spoken at home, the children are most likely to use that family language, at least in their early years.

There are many different factors which determines their preferred language. They are:

School language as influence of language choice

As a bilingual child grow, they start to have their own preferred language. When they start school, they gain exposure to more than one language. The child starts to develop their own language preference as they have more contacts in school, especially with teachers and friends. A typical language pattern exists for a bilingual child where during their early years of life, they will use their family's language pattern but as school starts, they find new friends and the peer group language become their preferred language of use (Suzanne, 2011).

There are many different factors which determines their preferred language. They are:

Siblings as influence of language choice

First-born's influence on subsequent-born siblings

The language that the bilingual siblings choose to use in their own conversation is called the preferred sibling language. According to Obied (2009), siblings play an important role in shaping the language choice of the family and this will increase as the siblings reach adolescence while parents' influence will reduce. Bonfiglio (2017) states that between the older child will decide on the language of communication between the bilingual sibling as he or she has a wider range of vocabulary. Thus, when parents establish a target language with the older child, it can help to influence the language spoken between their bilingual children.



There are many different factors which determines their preferred language. They are:

Siblings as influence of language choice

Mixing both languages

The preferred sibling language can consist of one language or a mix of two languages. Mixing refers to a phenomenon in communication where the usage of two languages becomes as if they were one language. Parents are usually worried when they watch their child mix languages as they think of it as problems of their child becoming bilingual. However, mixing at an early age is normal because it is a transitional stage for a bilingual child to acquire two languages. Many of our bilingual children like to mix two languages because they use it as a linguistic game that they both can play or as a private language known to themselves. (Suzanne, 2011)

HOW

We can help ...

In this section, we have looked at the factors than can determine the language of choice of a bilingual child. Typically, the parent's language is the preferred language. However, other factors such as the influence of older sibling and the time spent in school with friends will influence the preferred language of a bilingual child. Thus, this tells us the importance an environment of our bilingual child plays in playing a role in influencing their language choice.

Different Language Use

English

Malay





As parents, we realize that although our children live in the same home, they grow up to have different language competency.

Each of our child has their own language experience and each of them are being dealt with in the family with its bilingualism in their own way.

Some of them excel in languages and some do not.

Within a bilingual family, one child might be good at picking up languages while the other strives to communicate in one language.

Q: Why is there a difference between language use when the bilingual children are brought up in the same home environment?

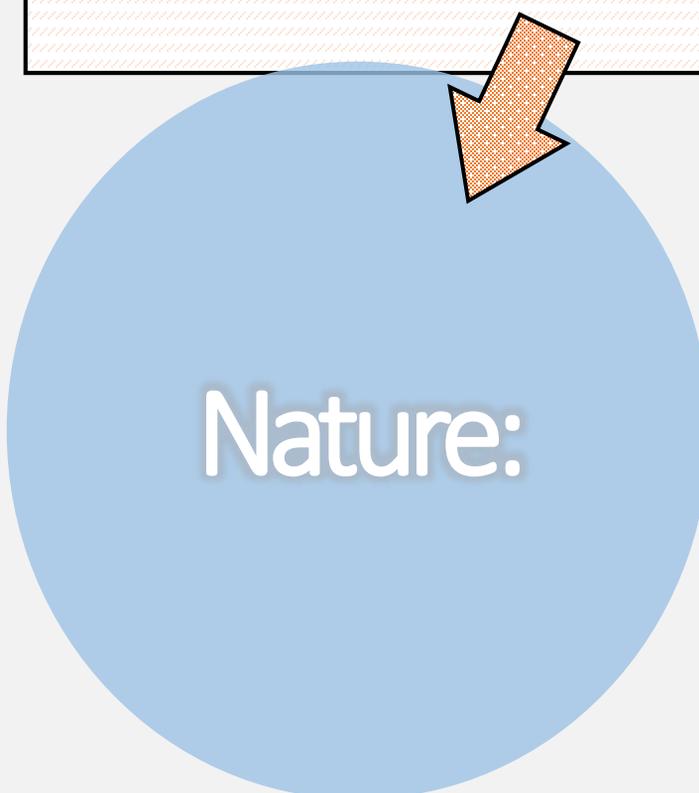
#1. Nature & Nurture Debate:

Over the years, psychologists and linguists have studied the link between a child's personality, the way they are brought up by their parents and their home environment. Definitely, a child's personality is able to affect the way he or she behaves. For example, some babies enjoy being in contact with others while some like to keep a far distance from others. These areas are being studied as they play a role in language acquisition.

Nature :

According to Chomsky, a child's ability to acquire a language is a natural process and all children follow the same pattern (as cited in Suzanne, 2011, p. 123). For example, their speech will start with babblings and move to familiar nouns before being able to be fully grammatical within six years.

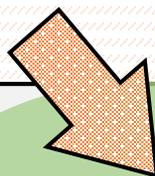
Plomin states that siblings share about 30% of their parents genes and among that, only 15% is accountable for personality traits (as cited in Suzanne, 2011, p. 122). This suggests that there is a 85% difference between siblings. This is why one sibling is better in languages while the other is not. Even though they use the same language strategy and speak the same languages, one child is better in language than the other. Although it is a bonus as it allows the child to become a more fluent bilingual, the child still needs practice and motivation to speak languages.



Nature:

Nurture :

As mentioned earlier on, even though it is the parent's language that affects the language choice of a bilingual child, it is the wider community and the child's friends that brings their language to life. Nevertheless, parents play an important role in offering practice and sustaining bilingualism for the child but it is their friends and peers that affects the child's language use more than the parents. Thus, parents need to be aware of the social world of their child and their language use outside of home. .



Nurture

Q: Why is there a difference between language use when the bilingual children are brought up in the same home environment?

#2. Language histories of each child:

As we have mentioned, children living in the same home environment do not grow up with the same language competency and skills. Thus, language histories are the backbone of how our child becomes bilingual. It can consist of all the tiny experiences that make up their life, such as their favourite book or film that inspire them to learn. As a child grows, they get exposed to the outside world and experience different things. This theory explains why some children excel in languages while some do not. Each child reacts differently to different languages and thus, have different motivations to learn or speak each language. One child might feel attached to a particular language or refuse to use that language. Hence, it is important that parents understand what language strategies work for which child and what does not.



Q: Why is there a difference between language use when the bilingual children are brought up in the same home environment?

#3. Rivalry between siblings:

Inter-sibling rivalry is a natural process that will occur in a family with more than one children. Siblings can quarrel over many things. Siblings can use language as a tool to compete for their parent's attention. Common siblings' tricks include one sibling not allowing another sibling to talk in one language, laughing at another sibling's language mistake and overcorrecting minor language errors. Typically, the first-born child has an upper hand as compared to the other siblings and would use oversophisticated language to confused the other siblings. However, the younger siblings can also be good at spotting mistakes in languages. Overall, this is a safe method for our bilingual children to learn from their language mistakes but if the rivalry becomes too malicious, it can lead to a child dropping or under-using one language. For example, if the older child continuously mock and make fun of the younger child's ability to spell, the younger child might lose confidence in that language and give up speaking that language permanently or use that language less often (Suzanne, 2011).



GENERAL ADVICE FOR YOU

Parents often ask for advice of how they should raise their bilingual children. The following are some of the rules of thumb that parents can apply to your child's learning language situation.

1. Be consistent but also adapt the learning strategy based on your child's learning ability

As we have mentioned earlier on, a child is able to develop language normally and master their languages regardless of the way he or she is being exposed to them, as long as the patterns of exposure is consistent. For example, if a family decides to use Chinese and Hokkien as the language spoken at home but English outside, they should be consistent with it. The child will be able to differentiate the situations and speak the appropriate language accordingly. However, parents should also plan and determine the language patterns to be used to suit the family's needs

Read On...

GENERAL ADVICE FOR YOU

2. Say what you feel is natural

Parents are more likely to be consistent in their language strategy if they use a pattern of language exposure that they are comfortable with. If the mother is more comfortable speaking in Malay and the other in English, they should stick to it as a child feels more natural to hear one language from each parent. Maintaining a language pattern should be enjoyable to encourage bilingualism in your child (Cobas & Chan, 2001).

3. Encourage your child to be interested in learning both languages

Motivating your child to be interested to learn both languages is the key to successfully raising your child bilingually. As we have mentioned earlier on, children learn differently. By offering encouragement and praise to them, it can affect their speed of learning. Besides, parents can engage their children in language-learning activities to improve their child's self-esteem and as a way to practice languages. The following activity is one such way you can have fun practicing languages with your children.

Origami Activity

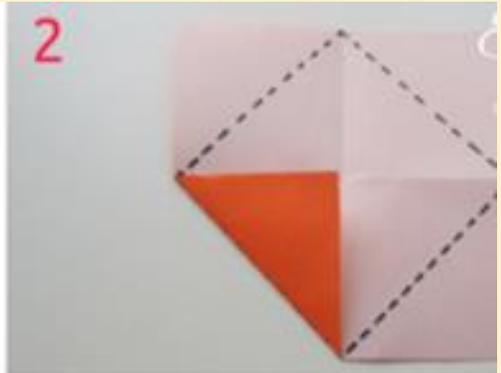
*Bilingual Activity for
parents*



This game can be played among the bilingual siblings, with one or both parents instructing the use of the activity. As children love creative activities, this will definitely entertain them. Besides the various origamis mentioned, you can create other categories of origami of your own.

Colour Origami

What you need:
Colour papers
Age: 3 – 5 years



Outcome



You can choose colours that you would want your children to learn in both their L1 and L2 vocabulary. You can create your own origami following the instructions above. As you fold, you mention the colours of each coloured paper to teach your children vocabulary in both languages. Once you have finished folding, write the names of all the colours in both languages inside the paper.

Burger Origami

What you need:
Colour papers
Age: 6 – 8 years



Outcome



As the children's age increase, the parents can consider increasing the level of difficulty of the origami according to their vocabulary skills. To fold the origami burger, it involves squashing the colour papers and flattening them. The cheese do not have to be squashed. Like the colour game, when folding, teach your children the vocabulary in both languages. Once you have finished, write the names of all the colours in both languages inside the paper.

Resource for Parents

While the information in the booklet is aimed to help parents understand ..., there will most likely be occasions when you may need help from others. The following are resources where you can get more information.

ORIGAMI

Organisation	Information	Contact
Everyday Origami		Everyday Origami (@everydayorigami) on Facebook

BOOKS

Organisation	Information	Contact
Bilingual Siblings - Language Use in Families by Suzanne Barron Hauwaert	Book that provides additional information about raising bilingual children	Book copies available in National Library Board (11 copies)

Resource for Parents

ORGANIZATIONS

Organisation	Information	Contact
Raising Bilingual Kids and Little Global Citizens	Chat with other parents of bilingual children worldwide	Join the Facebook Group "Raising Bilingual Kids and Little Global Citizens"
Smartparents	Make general enquiries on questions about raising children (local)	Email hello@smartparents.sg .
Ministry of Education	General FAQs about education	Hotline: +65 6872 2220
Childcare Information Services	Portal for parents overseen by MOE and MSF and provides information on centre-based infant and child care	Information line at: 6258-5812

Real Case Scenario

RECALL...

When Ashley's teacher asked them how much Ashley spoke at home, Georgina and Michael realized that they all only spoke English at home, without noticing.

With time alone speaking just Chinese with Georgina, and some tuition class in Chinese, Ashley's Chinese improved. Ashley is now able to participate in classes normally.

As we have seen in Ashley's case, each child has their own reactions and experience to their linguistic heritage. We hope that with this parental booklet, you have gained a better understanding of your child.

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