

These are 12 myths & misconceptions...

1. Bilingual children start to speak later than monolinguals.

myth

3. Young children soak up languages like sponges.

myth

2. Bilinguals start out school behind monolinguals and they never catch up.

myth

6. If bilinguals score lower on standardized tests, it shows they have lower aptitude than the average monolingual child.

4. Bilinguals are just like two monolinguals in one person.

myth

5. You have to be gifted in languages in order to learn two languages at once.

myth

myth

7. Latino immigrants in the U.S. resist learning English and want everyone to learn to speak Spanish.

myth

8. Some languages are more primitive than others and are therefore easier to learn. The reason so many people can speak English is that English has less grammar than other languages.

myth

9. Speaking a second language is its own reward.

myth

11. If a bilingual child experiences any language problems in one or both languages, dropping one of the languages will fix the situation.

myth

10. Parents who do not speak a language perfectly will pass their errors and their accent on to their children.

myth

12. There's only one right way to raise a bilingual child.

myth

and this is what we know about them...

5. Early language learning is not like a talent and does not require a special gift; it's part of being human, like walking or seeing with two eyes.

6. Standardized tests examine just a part of a bilingual's language aptitude (i.e. just one language) and compare it to a monolingual's entire language aptitude.

Average scores for bilinguals do not take into account different patterns of language dominance. There are, as of this writing, no standardized tests that are appropriate for use with bilingual children.

3. Children seem to have an easier time learning languages than adults, but we should not underestimate the effort it takes and should not expect them to learn perfectly from the beginning.

1. There is no scientific evidence supporting this. Bilinguals and monolinguals share the same wide window for normal development.

4. There are special capabilities that bilinguals have that monolinguals do not. Bilinguals very often have one (dominant) language that is comparable to that of a monolingual and another, weaker one, which they use less often. In any conversation, bilinguals choose whether to operate in a monolingual mode or a bilingual mode.

2. In fact, bilingual children tend to have faster growth curves than monolingual children.

8. There is no such thing as a primitive language or a language without "grammar." All languages are infinitely complex and yet learnable.

10. This might be true only if the child never heard any other speakers, which is unlikely to happen with parents who are nonnative speakers of either a majority or a minority language.

9. This may be true, but we cannot expect children to see it that way. We must make it meaningful for them to know the language by providing contact with interesting people doing fascinating things in the second language.

7. Very few Latino immigrants do not speak English; there are not enough programs that teach English to accommodate the demand for them. Programs that use Spanish as well as English do so in part because it helps children learn English faster and better.

12. Parents are the experts in this field. The only wrong way to raise a bilingual child is not to do it. If you haven't already, now is the time to start.

11. There is no evidence that this is so. Children who have problems with two languages generally also have them with one.