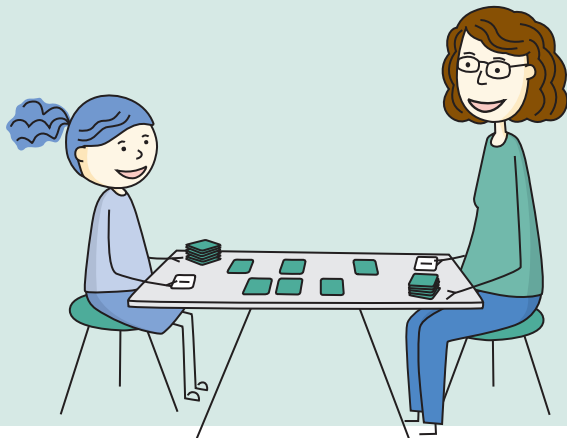


## What is important during therapy?

- › A language impairment will not disappear of its own accord. A child will not just “grow out of it”. Children who are affected need qualified, individual therapy with a speech and language therapist at the earliest possible stage. Language support activities (‘Sprachförderung’) are not enough.
- › In Germany, you need a prescription from an ear, nose and throat specialist, a family doctor or a paediatrician in order to receive therapy.

## Choosing a speech and language therapist

- › There is a definite advantage if the speech and language therapist speaks the child's home language. However, this is often not possible, but that should not stand in the way of therapy being successful.
- › Even therapists who do not speak a child's home language can offer your child urgently needed support with language acquisition. Home language(s) can also be integrated into the therapy with parents' help, or using materials such as computer programmes.



## No. 3 – Achieving bilingualism ... for children with language impairments

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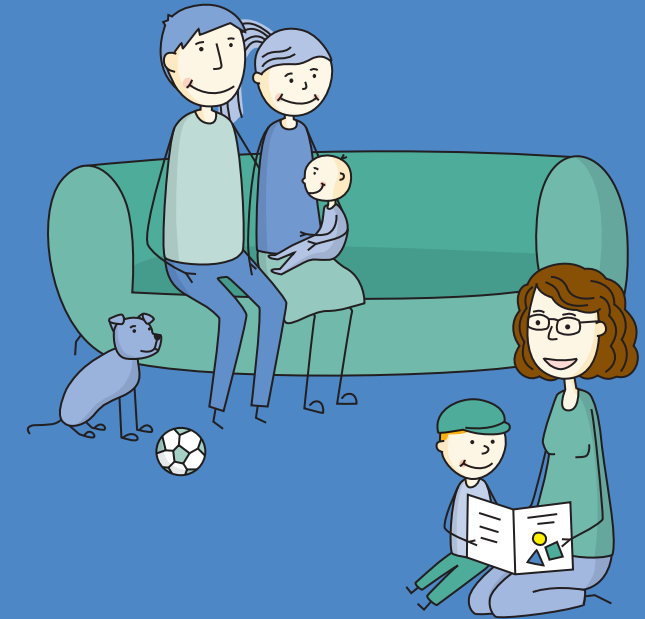


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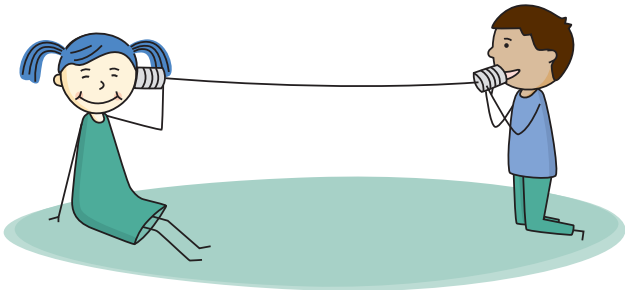
## Achieving bilingualism ... for children with language impairments

3

SCIENCE FOR LIFE  
Facts – Research – Information  
for Parents and Teachers

## What is a language impairment?

- › When a child's language acquisition does not develop in an age-appropriate way, this is known as a language impairment\*. Anomalies become apparent, even though the child can hear well, is of normal intelligence and does not have any other neurological or socio-emotional deficits. Language impairments can take on many different forms.
- › Some children have difficulties with articulation, others have limited vocabularies or problems with grammar. Several of these features can occur together. Children often find it difficult to understand language properly.
- › Symptoms can vary throughout childhood. The same child may show weaknesses in vocabulary at the age of 4, in grammar at the age of 5 and have difficulties learning to write at the age of 6.



## Can bilingualism cause language impairments?

- › No, bilingualism cannot lead to language impairments. Language impairments are mostly congenital, i.e. inborn. Bilingual children are not affected by language impairments any more frequently than monolingual children are.

## How do language impairments affect bilingual children?

- › Language impairments always affect all of a child's languages. However, the languages may be affected in different ways. Therefore the symptoms of an impairment may vary in the different languages.

## Are language impairments more severe in bilingual children than in monolinguals?

- › No, research has shown that language impairments in bilingual children are not more severe than in monolingual children. But impairments are often detected only in the most severely affected children. When children are more mildly affected, their problems are often mistakenly attributed to bilingualism.

## Can children with language impairments learn more than one language?

- › Yes, bilingual children with language impairments learn all their languages to the same level as they would learn a single language. Language acquisition is not impeded by bilingualism.
- › This means that parents should definitely not "take away" a language in order to make language learning easier for their child. Doing this would deprive the child of skills that he/she has already learned and of future possibilities for self-expression. There is also no evidence to suggest that this approach would improve the child's command of the remaining language(s).

\* This term refers to a specific language impairment (SLI), which approx. 7% of all children are affected by.

## What is important when diagnosing language impairments?

- › To diagnose a language impairment, information on language acquisition should be considered. This usually involves therapists asking parents:
  - How long has your child been learning German?
  - What is the child's level of language development in your home language(s)?
  - How intensive is the contact with both languages?
- › These learning conditions help to determine whether a language impairment is present or not. Because clear diagnosis is not always easy, bilingual children are sometimes classified as having language impairments even though their language abilities are developing normally for a child of the same learning background. More frequently, however, a language impairment can remain undetected because all bilingual children can make similar mistakes to those made by monolingual children with language impairments.
- › There are currently only a few testing procedures available, for a limited range of languages, with which the level of home language skills can be assessed. This means that it is often not possible to assess both of a child's languages.

