



Clearinghouse on Supervised Visitation

The Institute for Family Violence Studies

Florida State University

March EPRESS

QUESTIONS FROM DIRECTORS

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We have been teaching parents skills related to the protective factors, but we need help addressing parental resistance. What do we do when parents don't want to learn new skills?

There are many reasons that a parent might be resistant to your program's efforts. Parents might be angry, embarrassed, or frustrated at being required to use the supervised visitation program. They might be experiencing sadness, anxiety, and uncertainty about the future. Because of the emotional burden that can result from being separated from a child and having to navigate the child welfare or family court system, program staff should expect some push back or resistance from parents. It's normal. But how do you deal with it in a way that allows the program to benefit the parent-child relationship?

First, remember that no one wants to be singled out. No one wants to feel inadequate. No one wants to feel like a "bad" person or parent. So remember that we want to emphasize the positive aspects of supervision: the fact that the parent and the child are protected; the fact that other parents are in the same situation; the fact that staff are there to help the family. Staff should try to "normalize" the process, saying things like:

- "we are so happy to see you"
- "we are so glad you're here" and
- "welcome!"

Using the Protective Factor tools created by the Clearinghouse should open up opportunities for communication between the parent and the staff. Be sure that parents are told early on (e.g., in Intake) that the program will be giving parents handouts and materials throughout the process. Then it's not a surprise when staff give a parent a set of handouts on, say, reinforcing positive child behavior. Don't make a family feel like the materials are punishment for something that happened during the visit. Instead, try the following:

1. Give all parents a special **folder** for materials to be handed out over several weeks. For parents with small children, offer the child an opportunity to color a picture on the folder during the first visit. You can refer to the folder as a "family fun" folder, or some other creative title.
2. Whenever you hand the parent a new resource, be sure to say something like: "this week we are giving all parenting information about X" (for example, communication, or school issues). Let parents know that everyone is receiving the handout. That normalizes the process.
3. Spend a minute describing, in an upbeat and positive way, what the handout says. Don't just leave it for the parent to read. Emphasize the value of the material.
4. Acknowledge universal sentiments, such as
 - a. "Parenting can be tough"
 - b. "Sometimes being a parent can be hard"
 - c. "Lots of parents struggle with _____"
 - d. "Parents often ask me about _____"
5. Suggest ways to use the material.
 - a. "You can tape this to your refrigerator."
 - b. "Put this in the car for your next trip."
 - c. "Here's an affirmation card you can put in your wallet."
 - d. "Don't forget to add this to your family fun folder! Even if you don't need it now, it might be helpful in the future."
6. Emphasize strengths as often as possible. Parents may see the handouts as recognition of weaknesses or challenges. Be sure to take a minute to affirm parents' appropriate behavior and responses each and every visit. Examples include:
 - a. "I really liked the way you _____"

- i. let Stevie choose his toy
 - ii. asked Christy why she was upset
 - iii. offered Jose another turn after he made a mistake in the game
 - iv. explained to Julie that if she left the toys on the floor, other children might trip on them.
- b. "It was so helpful when you _____
- i. agreed to change your visit to accommodate the other parent's schedule
 - ii. filled out the form fully so I can add it to my file
 - iii. brought an extra bowl of fruit to share with your children

We will talk more about these guidelines at the next phone conference. Until then, keep providing real help to parents to strengthen their relationships with their children. *Remember: No effort on behalf of children is ever wasted. (Garrison Keillor)*

The benefits of bilingualism

By Samantha Matras

Introduction

Researches have continually and consistently found that bilingualism is an experience that positively shapes our brains for a lifetime. Education that aims to increase bilingualism, which is the ability to speak two languages fluently, has a controversial history in the United States and is often associated with cons rather than pros. Many parents may be hesitant to encourage bilingualism in their homes out of fear of potentially confusing children or impeding the acquisition of English.



However, studies show that the only differences found between individuals who speak multiple languages compared to individuals who speak only one are advantageous ones. Social service providers can inform parents about the benefits of being bilingual, encouraging them to teach their own non-English native languages to their children.

Objectives

This E-press aims to inform social service providers about developmental and cognitive benefits of bilingualism.

Brain benefits

Executive functioning: One skill bilingual individuals must master is speaking just one language, the most appropriate language for a particular environment. For example, someone who speaks English at home but Spanish in the classroom would not necessarily want to say “hello” to his class and “Hola” to his family. Multilingual individuals overcome challenges involving attention and selection skills that individuals who speak just one language do not. People have brain “stocks” of arbitrary sounds and attached meanings that help them make sense of language and conversations. Someone who speaks only one language searches for meaning within one “stock” when she or he hears a word. By contrast, a person who speaks two languages must search two “stocks” for meanings. For example, when someone who speaks both Spanish and Italian hears the sound “b-u-rr-o”, she or he extracts meaning from multiple stocks and interprets the sound to mean either “donkey” in Spanish or “butter” in the context of Italian. Thus, that person must distinguish which interpretation is correct for the

situation. This process of constantly using, interpreting, and choosing the most appropriate languages to speak given a set of circumstances involves **executive functioning**.

Executive functioning is a cognitive process that enables individuals to plan, focus, remember, and successfully multi-task. It is vital to filtering and managing the plethora of stimuli and distractions that enter people's sensory systems everyday enabling them to set and achieve goals.

studies show multilinguals have enhanced executive functioning skills relative to people who speak just one language. likely because they practice using their executive functioning systems more than their monolingual counterparts.

It is important to know that children are not born with executive functioning skills, but are born with the capacity to develop them. Social service providers can help parents understand that learning multiple languages is one way to help children reach and even surpass their cognitive-development milestones.

Empathy: Bilingual children must be especially attentive to social cues to determine which language to use with different people in different situations. These tasks lead to enhanced social and emotional skills that help children develop the capacity to empathize. Studies demonstrate that bilingual children as young as three years old have achieved advanced results on tests that involve "perspective-taking" and "theory of mind" which measure a child's ability to understand others' behaviors.



Reading: An extensive, randomized study compared public school students who received instruction in just English to public those who were assigned to dual-language classrooms with instruction in one foreign language alongside English. Researchers found that the students who were enrolled in dual-language classrooms outperformed their counterparts in English reading-skills by a whole year's worth of learning.

Another study compared foreign-language dominant students to English native students. The foreign-language dominant students were not yet fully bilingual and were still learning English, yet they scored similarly on standardized reading tests to the English native students. Despite having weak English vocabularies relative to the English native students, the foreign-language dominant students were just as good at decoding text as their counterparts were. This study also found that overall, the foreign-language dominant students scored higher on executive functioning tests, which may help explain their ability to decode text well.

Thus, if foreign-language dominant parents are hesitant to encourage their children to speak their native language, fearing it may negatively affect their children's English comprehension, social service providers can inform those parents that bilingualism positively affects English comprehension.

Reduced cognitive decline: the benefits of bilingualism are long-lasting and positively impacts cognitive abilities in more than one way. Research suggests that speaking multiple languages can help protect against cognitive decline as people age. One study found that among elderly patients with signs of Alzheimer's disease, bilingual individuals showed their first symptoms of the disease on average 5 years later than individuals who knew only one language. The argument for learning multiple languages in relation to cognitive diseases is like the argument for doing "brain-challenging" games such as Sudoku and crosswords puzzles: exercising the brain fights deterioration, and bilingualism is a constant brain exercise.

Conclusion

The benefits of learning multiple languages, especially at a young age, are numerous and well-validated. Beyond the more obvious benefits of speaking multiple languages, such as career advantages, bilingualism has also been shown to positively impact cognitive development which translates to advanced reading skills, increased emotional intelligence capacity, and protection against brain deterioration. If parents seem anxious about their



children learning multiple languages at once, social service providers can talk to parents about the benefits of bilingualism. Talking to parents about bilingualism may help lessen parents' apprehension towards bilingualism or even inspire parents to actively encourage and support their children's acquisition of more than one language.

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HOW TO ENCOURAGE GOOD BEHAVIOR

(AGES: 4-9)

Children crave attention. To help avoid bad behavior, emphasize good behavior! Reinforcing good behavior involves actions or techniques used to encourage desired behaviors.



- Praise your children when they do something well. Be specific. For example, "I liked how you shared your toys with other kids."
- Let your children know that you are pleased! Smile. Hug them.
- Reward them for their behavior. Rewards can range from a visit to the park or an extra story at bedtime.
- Explain WHY your child's behavior was so positive. "I really needed you to pick up your toys so I don't fall over them."

Rewards for your children

Possibilities for Preschoolers	Possibilities for Elementary school children
Listening to an extra bedtime story.	Taking time off from chores. I know you worked hard to put your toys away. I will help you set the table tonight for dinner.
Playing games. For example, the parent can mimic an animal and have the child guess which animal the parent is pretending to be.	Choosing a special breakfast. "You were so good at making your bed this morning. Would you like to have this cereal, or toast and fruit this morning?"
	Sleeping in a different place in the house. "Let's make a tent with a sheet in the living room and bring our pillows there."
Drawing a picture together. Use crayons or markers to draw a picture - take turns deciding what to draw. For example, draw a garden. You draw a tree, and then your child draws flowers. You draw the sky, and your child draws birds.	Planning an afternoon's activities. "I have tomorrow afternoon off from work. What would you like to do? We could go to the library, or walk in the park, or eat peanut butter sandwiches on a blanket in the grass."
A movie night - watch a TV movie together, or rent a \$1 movie from Publix.	20 minutes extra time on the television or computer. "I am so proud of the way you helped with the dishes. Go ahead and spend an extra twenty minutes on your computer game."

An example of positively reinforcing a reward would look like this.

- After a young child throws a tantrum and calms down:
"I am glad you calmed down. I know it's hard to feel so many emotions. Let's have a glass of juice and a hug."
- When your child completes their homework:
"Wow, I am proud of you for completing your homework! How about you decide what we will have for breakfast for tomorrow?"

Teaching your child mindfulness

Mindfulness teaches our kids to tune into their feelings and thoughts. Fostering this skill early can help them better handle stress in the years to come.

- **Share feelings:** Practice expressing gratitude at dinner by having each person share one thing he or she is thankful for.



- **Be active:** Ask children to jump up and down and then place their hands on their hearts. What do their heartbeats feel like? How fast are they breathing?
- **Talk about everyday objects that your child takes for granted:** What does their favorite toy feel like? Try activities such as sand drawing or finger-painting.
- Ask your child to eat a piece of fruit slowly. Before eating the fruit, ask your child to explore its shape, color, smell and texture. **Encourage him or her to notice the taste and sensations while chewing.**
- Go for a mindful stroll. On the walk, designate short periods of time to zone into your senses. **Spend one quiet minute listening to sounds, noticing sights, smells or feelings.**
- **Breathing exercise:** Next time your child is holding their favorite teddy on their belly, ask them to notice the teddy rising and falling as they breathe. See if they can “slow teddy down” by breathing slower.

March Craft

Leprechaun Popcorn Hat Craft

Here's an easy craft to do at home in honor of those cute little leprechauns!

Materials:

- 2 Pieces of Green Construction Paper
- 1 Piece of Yellow Construction Paper
- 1 Piece of Black Construction Paper
- Tape/Glue
- Scissors
- 1 small paper plate (size of a dessert plate)

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Directions:

1. Use a small plate to trace a circle around 1 piece of green construction paper. This will be your hat base.
2. Cut the 2nd piece of green construction paper in half lengthwise.
3. Cut out a strip of the black construction paper that's the same length as your hat. Glue/Tape to the bottom of your green strip. The black will be the belt around your hat.
4. Cut a small square out of the yellow construction paper. Place in the center of your long black strip (this is the hat's buckle)
5. Now you're ready to build the hat! Bring the long ends of the green construction paper together (forming a ring) and tape the edges closed. This will be the top hat part.
6. Using scraps of paper, cut a few small rectangles. Attach to the inside of your hat. Then glue/tape to the circular base of the hat. This will keep the hat together (and the popcorn inside.)



Now the hat is done! You can use a small plate underneath to keep your hat steady while you fill with delicious popcorn. FUN for the kids and a delicious way to enjoy the holiday!

Talking to your Baby

- Speak to your baby in higher pitch, exaggerate consonants & stretch vowels, and vary your volume.
- Describe everything you're doing as you're doing it. For example: "Mommy's making lunch and pouring it in the bowl. The bowl is blue and shiny."
- Respond to your baby's utterances and pause when you talk to give your baby a turn. Example: If your baby coos, then you coo in response. Ask your baby a question, then pause and wait for a response
- Describe everything your baby is doing as your baby does it. For example: As your baby plays with a ball you say "You're rolling the ball. You like that ball."

