

LOVE AND PARENTHOOD

in an Intercultural Family



Duo for intercultural families (Familia ry)



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To the reader

Familia ry has provided activities and services for intercultural couples and families since 2008. Duo started as a project, but has since secured permanent funding. This booklet, *Love and Parenthood in an Intercultural Family*, was created on the basis of the information and experience accumulated through the first years of the project, and it is intended for all intercultural families that are planning to have a child, expecting a baby or that already have small children.

This booklet contains basic information about a couple's relationship, parenthood, child's identity and bilingualism. It:

- gives information about the different stages of a relationship from falling in love to love;
- describes life between cultures;
- describes how to create a third culture;
- gives information about the effects a child's birth and parenthood have on the parents' life and relationship;
- provides tips on how to support an intercultural child's identity and bilingualism.

The booklet also contains extracts from the stories of parents and grown-up children of intercultural families.

You can contemplate the questions at the end of each section by yourself or with your spouse. It's a good idea to discuss the issues more deeply whenever there is time for it.

You can find more information on subjects concerning intercultural couples and families on Duo's website at en.duoduo.fi

We wish you interesting moments with this booklet
and rewarding discussions!

Helsinki on 1st November 2010

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From falling in love to love

Romantic comedies almost invariably end with the couple who have fallen in love getting together. The implication is that, just like the fairytale prince and princess, the couple in the film live happily ever after.

Real life relationships are not necessarily as straightforward. Romantic relationships have different stages, the first of which is falling in love. Everything begins from two people seeing something interesting in each other and finding, to their joy, that the feeling is mutual. We see a lot of similarities to ourselves in the person we love, and this resemblance that we experience brings a couple who are in love closer. A couple who have just fallen in love see each other in a strongly positive light and can see no faults in each other, only an outright fulfilment of their dreams.

After the first flush has faded, the differences between the lovers begin to emerge. The falling in love stage ends when you start noticing differences as well as similarities in the person you love. This phase is followed by the adjustment stage, during which the lovers find that the loved one doesn't look at life the same way as they do and that some of the differences between them cause friction.

An intercultural couple's life together is affected both by their personalities and cultural backgrounds. Couples awaken to the differences in personalities and cultural backgrounds

during the adjustment stage, and sometimes the very thing that made the loved one so special and wonderful at first becomes annoying. The idea of changing the loved one sneaks into one's mind: "Couldn't you be a little less yourself and more like me?" During the adjustment stage, a couple seeks ways to combine the things that they have in common and reconcile the things that are different about them. A couple may then go through an "international match" in their relationship during which the different cultural customs and values are weighed.

During the adjustment stage, a couple gets used to their life together. Spouses may experience feelings of disappointment and may ask themselves: "Is this the wrong person for me after all? Are we too different?" Moving beyond the complications of the adjustment stage is easiest if the spouses can deal with their differences in such a way that they both feel that they are being understood. This requires flexibility and the ability to find compromises that don't require either partner to give up their basic needs or, in other words, that which is felt to be essential to life and a romantic relationship.

If a couple gets through the pitfalls of the adjustment phase, they move on to the next stage: love. Love shows as commitment to the relationship, and in both spouses feeling that they are being listened to and accepted as who they are. The couple have accepted that the relationship, as well as both parties involved in it, will change over the course of time and that they won't always agree about everything. The spouses also understand that they can't take the relationship for granted and that it takes work to keep the relationship a happy one. Fortunately, it's

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possible to re-experience the first flush and fall in love with the spouse again and again.

A good relationship is one where there is enough room for the feelings and needs of both partners. The fulfilment of needs is in direct proportion to how satisfied– or dissatisfied– the spouses are in their relationship. That’s why it’s important to share your wishes and needs with your spouse; neither partner can be a mind-reader. Open discussion is the key to understanding your partner, and both spouses carry the responsibility for having effective conversations. The skills of talking and listening are worth their weight in gold in a relationship.

Functional communication is the foundation of a happy romantic relationship, but it isn’t always simple – especially if both spouses speak a language together that isn’t the native language of either. It’s worthwhile for couples to make sure that they have at least one strong shared language and to learn each other’s mother tongue, at least a little. In addition to verbal communication, interaction skills are composed of non-verbal communication, and these skills can be learned and are well worth learning. The golden rules of interaction are:

- Organise your words so that it’s possible for your spouse to understand you and so that misunderstandings are avoided. Speak with respect for your spouse.
- When you’re listening, try to put yourself in your spouse’s position and understand his or her experiences, even if you have a conflicting opinion on the matter.

When we met I was surprised by how similar we were. We laughed at the same things, valued the same things and saw our future – and what we wanted from it – in very similar ways. I also noticed differences between us, but they didn't seem important, because we had such a wonderful time together. At some point things changed, and I couldn't really understand what caused these changes. Maybe it was simply the long, dark Finnish winter, or maybe I missed my old friends back in my home country. She found it difficult to understand me and she told me later that she felt guilty that we were living in Finland because of her. Now we've reached the stage where we have accepted each other's differences. We can't always agree with each other, nor should we. Maybe we could be useful in international politics, because that's how good we've become as negotiators! (The man of an intercultural family)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION



- What was I attracted to and fell in love with in my spouse?
- What made him/her so special?
- What is a good romantic relationship like?
- What do I expect from a romantic relationship?
- What do I expect from my spouse?
- What do I need from a romantic relationship?
- What kind of a romantic relationship makes me happy?
- What kinds of things bring us together?
- What is my spouse worried about at the moment?
- What kinds of things make my spouse happy?

Between cultures

Culture contains all the information that is passed on from one generation to the next, for example, in the form of language, habits and customs. People consider the values that are characteristic of their own cultures important and define through these ideas what is “normal” and “abnormal”, wanted and not wanted. Our ways of expressing ourselves and our feelings – happiness and sorrow, satisfaction and irritation – are also influenced by our cultural background. In other words, everyone of us is, to some extent, the product of the culture we grew up in. Culture also affects the way we perceive the world and interpret our experiences. People can interpret the same situation in many different ways and, although the interpretations are different, they are all correct in their own way.

Differences in cultures bring their own challenges to an intercultural romantic relationship, but dissimilarities in personalities and world views don't always cause problems. Many people would even find a relationship with someone who was exactly the same boring and too predictable.

Opposites may complement each other and make a relationship more balanced and harmonious. For example, a thoughtful and quiet spouse may find it helpful when their partner takes responsibility for tending to social relationships, and a spouse who is used to speaking before thinking may learn a lot from one who thinks things over first. Similarly, a person from a culture that emphasises individuality may appreciate

their spouse's broader idea of what constitutes a family, and a person from a communal culture the possibility for more independent decision-making.

People have their assumptions and preconceived ideas about cultures and sometimes these are misleading. Outsiders, as well as spouses themselves, have preconceived ideas about cultures. Assumptions about cultures may be positive or negative, and stereotypes are common.

*Because we come from different countries, many of our friends thought we must be very different from each other. In the beginning, for example, we both had to answer questions about our religions, although neither of us is a member of any religious community. Often friends also asked about our cultural differences, though the most visible differences in everyday life are caused by the fact that I like to keep the house tidy and my spouse has a more relaxed attitude towards neatness! What surprised me was that I communicate more often with both my own and my spouse's family. I had imagined that my partner would be more family-centred, because it's a characteristic that is strongly associated with his culture. But our temperaments are only too similar – we both have fiery personalities. Luckily we also calm down quickly!
(The woman of an intercultural family)*

Couples should examine their preconceived ideas and expectations, as well as the differences that stem from their personalities and cultural backgrounds, and discuss them openly. Open discussion reduces the risk of misunderstandings and incorrect assumptions and helps couples to understand each other.

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What does culture mean to me?

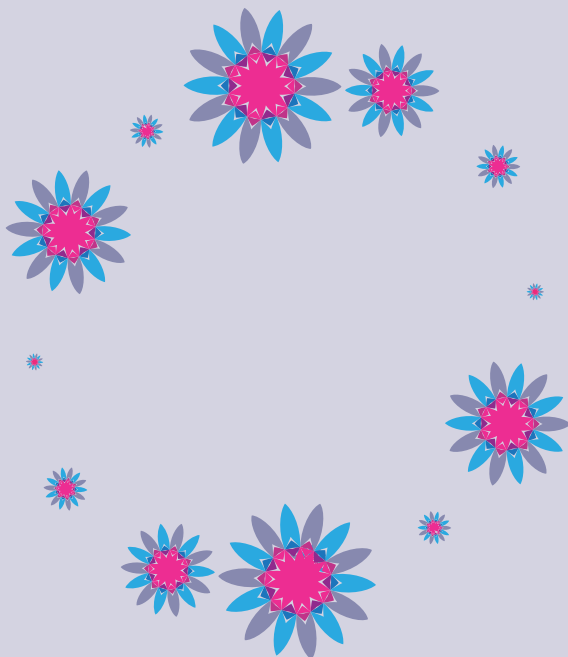
What is my cultural background?

What kinds of things do I value in my own culture?

What kinds of things do I value in my spouse's culture?

How does my cultural background affect my personality?

What kinds of events have had an influence on the kind of person I've become?



Third culture combines old ways from both cultures and creates new ways

When a couple's cultures meet and interact a new one is created: a third culture. The couple pick elements from both cultures and from these build their own way of doing things, i.e. a third culture. Its building materials consist of, for example, values; food and customs; attitudes to gender roles, relatives and friends; home décor; holidays and celebrations. At its best, this third culture combines the best of two cultures and what is important for the couple in a way that satisfies both spouses.

In addition to combining old ways, a third culture creates new customs and gives families the freedom to act in the way that best suits them. Families may, for example, celebrate the feasts of both spouses' home countries, combine different celebratory traditions in one party, or create a completely new way to celebrate special days.

A functional third culture is easiest to create and maintain when you understand and value both your own and your spouse's cultures. The saying that you can't love someone else unless you love yourself also applies to cultures. In an intercultural relationship, the appreciation of cultures starts from knowledge about them. That's why it's important that both

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spouses consider their own backgrounds and experiences, as well as the influence these have on what they are like and what they regard as important. The creators of a functional third culture have a strong, positive identity that isn't threatened by difference. They are sensitive to each other's needs, and neither of them has to give up the cornerstones of their lives.

Creating and maintaining a third culture requires active participation from both spouses. They must be able to talk about even difficult things openly and with respect for each other. The third culture must also undergo transformations as the family evolves from one phase of life to another, and this requires flexibility and the ability to make compromises.

Creating a third culture is the shared task of spouses. "We sit in the same boat, row in the same direction and create something new together," says a man living in an intercultural relationship.

Attitude to time varies from one culture to another. In Finland, we're used to being efficient and thinking that time is money. My husband comes from a culture where the outlook on time is different, and being late isn't always automatically seen as wasting another person's time or as disrespectful behaviour. I've always had a kind of rebellious attitude towards Finnish efficiency and the concept of time, and that's why I've found my spouse's ability to take a more relaxed view and appreciate time in itself an enviable characteristic. My spouse doesn't get worked up about bus timetables, breakfast times at the day-care centre, being late for a children's party or a meeting being cancelled. Life without constant scheduling and planning is much less stressful. Sometimes this

relaxed attitude can go a bit over the top and then the efficiency in me rears its head. Because of the differences in our cultures, we've had to create our own practices and make compromises on how we deal with and use time in different situations. (The woman of an intercultural family)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What are the customs from my childhood family that I want to keep and cultivate in my own family?

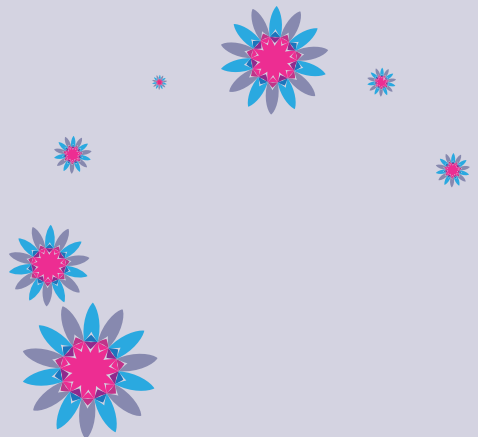
What are the customs from my childhood family that I've happily given up or would like to give up?

How do we combine different customs and habits in our everyday life?

What kinds of new customs have we created, or I would like us to create?

What kinds of customs do you have concerning, for example, holidays, feast days or meal times?

What is a good and happy home like in your opinion?



When two becomes three

When a child is born it turns the parents' life upside down and changes their everyday routine. The couple no longer exist only for each other, and at first the little baby takes every bit of attention. Combining the romance of a relationship with parenthood and cherishing both in a way that keeps the whole family satisfied is one of the most demanding challenges that a couple will meet in their relationship. The best gift parents can give their child is to love each other, because parents' mutual love supports and promotes the baby's development.

Parenthood is a unique experience which offers countless opportunities to experience joy and happiness. A baby also brings along tiredness and conflicting emotions. Lack of sleep and time alone with the spouse are common experiences for every parent with a young child. Both individual endurance and the durability of the relationship are put to the test in every family with a baby.

We didn't really believe it, but having a baby did change our relationship. We used to spend a lot of time together, just the two of us, but now everything seems to revolve around the baby. Our little daughter is the best thing that ever happened to us. We enjoy playing with her and seeing how she grows and develops immensely. Every day brings along something new. All the same, when we collapse on the sofa at night and fall asleep in front of the television, I miss time that is dedicated only to

us adults. I love everyday life with the baby, but at the moment our relationship is dull and robotlike. Fortunately, we both accept that this is inevitable at this stage and it won't last forever. We try to organise time for each other, too, although it's not easy, because my parents don't live in Finland and my husband's parents live in another town. (The mother of an intercultural family)

Parenthood consists of feelings, responsibility, decisions, information and learning new things. The road to parenthood is personal, and mothers and fathers experience parenthood in different ways and often also at a different pace. A child's birth sets parents thinking about their own background. "Where do I come from? What were my family and my parents like? What kinds of traditions and values did my family have, and which of them do I want to pass on to my child?"

People's ideas of good parenting are based on their own experiences. When expecting a child, the future parents look back at their own relationship with their parents and, through this, build their own parenthood. Their idea of parenthood is significantly influenced by their own childhood families, because it's the only model anyone knows inside out. The spouses' models of parenthood are activated after their child is born, and often parents don't awaken to the differences of opinion, arising from their backgrounds, until then. Typical subjects of dispute include, for example, the way manners are taught, discipline, and the importance of world view or religion in bringing up the child.

The reconciliation of cultures and models of parenthood

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require parents to be able to discuss matters openly and reach agreement on things. There is no one correct way to act – every family can define a suitable way to be a parent for themselves. A family’s own way to act is easiest to discover when the parents discuss together what in their opinion are the most important points in parenthood and bringing up children. Parents also have to have an ability to find new solutions and make compromises, because spouses don’t always agree on matters of parenting and upbringing.

My husband and I had lived together for three years and we thought we knew each other well. It’s a cliché but true that a baby changes everything completely. I compared my husband to my own super-dad and his father model was based on his dad. After several crises, we began to understand, little by little, that our family has its own roles and we don’t have to follow the style of our own families. So we formed a third culture. I would urge parents to examine their own backgrounds and think about their expectations. To talk aloud about what they think makes a good mum and a good dad. To talk about what parenthood could be like in their own family. (The mother of an intercultural family)

As in a functional romantic relationship, the requirement for satisfaction in functional parenthood is that the hopes, needs and expectations of both parents are met. Hopes, needs and expectations are personal, but they are often regarded as self-evident and common to all: because this is important to me, it must be important to you too. Parents may come across surprises, even unpleasant ones, unless they have discussed and

agreed on parenthood and their child's upbringing beforehand. It's not a good idea to keep your thoughts to yourself, or wait for your spouse to understand you without you having to say anything. It should also be remembered that even the best of plans don't always come true and changes can be made to them if the situation requires it.

Couples should discuss things beforehand but also be prepared for the fact that the opinions of either spouse can change once the child is really there. Even though many plans and agreements have not materialised and we've had to rethink them, they haven't caused huge crises in our family. (The mother of an intercultural family)

Parenthood and romantic relationships function best when both spouses commit themselves to them through words and actions, and are willing to be flexible and make compromises. The happy everyday life of a family with a baby includes moments with the little one, but parents' time alone together is also important. It doesn't have to be a three course meal or a weekend at a spa – a short daily moment with the spouse over a cup of coffee, or a walk together while the baby sleeps in the pram may be quite enough.

After the baby is born, there is a father and mother in the family, but also a man and a woman. Expressing love regularly to the spouse through words, concrete actions and the sharing of responsibility helps to maintain both functional parenthood and a happy relationship.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

What was my childhood family like?

What kinds of parents were my parents?

What kinds of traditions and values did my family have, and which of them do I want to pass on to my child?

What kind of a parent do I want to be?

What kind of a parent do I want my spouse to be?

What is important to me in parenthood?

What kind of support in parenthood would I like to have from my spouse?

How can we spend time together without the baby?

What can we do to look after our relationship?



An intercultural child is more than the sum of his or her parts

A child's identity and individuality begin to develop at an early age, and already at the age of a few months, a baby recognises him or herself in the mirror. A child's basic understanding of who he or she is develops during infancy. This understanding is influenced by the child's experiences, personality and the cultural backgrounds of both his or her parents.

The journey to being 'me' has many stages. The ego or identity is constructed during infancy, school age and puberty and continues as an adult. Parents can support their child's journey and the development of a solid and positive identity in many different ways. A positive identity means that a child is proud of themselves and their background.

A child growing up in an intercultural family builds his or her identity with the building blocks provided by both his or her parents' cultural backgrounds, but every child also has a great deal of something that is just him or her. Heredity, genes, outward appearance or parents' wishes for their child don't determine an intercultural child's identity; instead, the child is more than the sum of all that he or she is made of.

When I talk about myself I usually say that I come partly from my mother's and partly from my father's culture. In reality, of course, it's not

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50%-50%. If my mother's and father's cultures are at opposite ends of a line, then I've been at different points on the line at different stages of my life. Where I am on that line also varies according to situation. (The adult child of an intercultural family)

A child's identity develops through comparisons. A child compares him or herself to his or her parents and other people close to them; for example, siblings, grandparents and friends. Through these comparisons, the child learns about similarities and differences and about his or her own identity. The development of identity is also affected by the way other people view the child and what kind of feedback he or she gets from others.

The stage of searching for identity also includes experimenting. A child tries out different options and aspects of his or her intercultural identity – depending on the situation and age. A child may, for example, sometimes identify with his or her father's culture and sometimes with the mother's, or emphasise one side of his or her cultural identity and downplay the other.

In infancy, my intercultural identity was so self-evident to me that it never occurred to me to question it. Shortly after starting school I reached a stage when I hated being different from my friends in any way. I even wrote my name in a more Finnish way for a while so that I wouldn't stand out. The well-meant wondering and questions of my friends' parents and other adults made me downplay my intercultural background. Maybe I felt I didn't know enough about my other home country to

satisfy their curiosity. This stage passed quickly, however, and later I discovered how handy it was to be able to change cultural identity in different situations; for example, when something in one of the cultures felt stupid or embarrassing. (The adult child of an intercultural family)

A child easily senses his or her parents' disagreements, and conflicts between the parents confuse the child. This is why parents must be able to agree on the issues concerning parenthood and children's upbringing. These issues should be talked about already when planning a child and, at the latest, when expecting one. It's not a good idea to postpone talking about it, because it's important to prepare oneself for parenthood in advance.

The parents' cultures should be evident in a child's life in a natural and positive way, and the child should not have to choose between the cultures on the request of either the mother or father. The most important thing is that parents offer their child positive experiences from their own cultures. These experiences will help the child to understand his or her roots and give them cause for pride.

The parents in an intercultural family should also support their child in their attempts at dealing with being different. Parents provide the best model with their own attitudes and behaviour. They must be able to discuss their prejudices honestly, and differences must be appreciated and respected. Parents should act in a fair and just way, because children copy the model their parents give them in both good and bad.

Parents can support their child by accepting and normalising

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the child's experiences and experiments. This can be done if parents are present and ready to listen to their child's thoughts and feelings. With help and support, the child will grow into a strong, independent person who is prepared to make his or her own decisions and choose their own way.

The third culture created by an intercultural family breaks traditions and creates new ones. This is also what the children of intercultural families do: as adults, they act in their own ways – exactly like every generation before them.

I'd like to add that being intercultural is great gift, and the special characteristics of bringing up an intercultural child shouldn't be thought of as an extra challenge. Being intercultural is a benefit for a child. In my experience, intercultural children grow up to be open-minded adults who view others as people – not as representatives of nationalities! (The adult child of an intercultural family)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

How will your cultural background be evident in your child's life?

What about your spouse's culture?

What are the values and customs of your own culture that you would like to pass on to your child?

What are they in your spouse's culture?

How can you take your spouse's culture into account in your child's everyday life?



Think back to your own childhood: what kind of a relationship did you have with your parents?

What kinds of things did you do together and what are your best memories from your childhood?

What kind of a parent do you want to be for your child?

What kinds of values do you want to pass on to your child? Is religion, for example, important to you in your child's upbringing?

Bilingualism is a richness

Language is an important part of a person's identity. It puts thoughts and feelings into words and helps people to build an image of the surrounding environment and their place in it. Language also represents roots and continuity, because language and culture go hand in hand. In an intercultural family, a child lives in a world of two languages, as well as two cultures. At best, parents' native languages are present in a child's life in a natural way, and parents give their child the gift of bilingualism.

Language is the key to knowledge about a culture and to understanding your own roots. Bilingualism is a richness which a child inherits from his or her parents. It opens a window to both parents' cultures and supports a child's identity. Through the parents' languages, a child connects with their cultures and learns to understand his or her parents, and the ways of thinking and acting prevalent in the cultures.

Bilingualism creates the best possible conditions for a child's warm, close relationship to both parents and promotes the child's balanced and comprehensive development. A bilingual child can speak the native languages of both his or her parents and can thus communicate fully with both parents. Neither parent has to speak a foreign language with their child, and interaction with the child is not weakened by insufficient language skills. Even if you speak a foreign language excellently, the inescapable fact is that a person's mother tongue is the

language of emotions and, as such, that language has an important role in bringing up a child. Bilingualism also gives a child the possibility to create a close relationship to both his or her grandparents and other relatives and friends.

Language is such a huge part of a person's identity that I'm sure it's very important to learn both parents' mother tongue. As a child, I felt guilty for not being able to speak the language of one of my parents well enough. I worried that my relatives would think that I didn't want to be in contact with them, when actually I didn't know how. (The adult child of an intercultural family)

The decision to bring up a child to be bilingual is often easy to make, but bilingualism requires persistence and patience from parents. Parents are a child's most important teachers and hold a key position in transmitting and enriching a language. For a child to develop rich and versatile language skills, he or she needs a reason to use both his or her languages and plenty of stimuli in both of them.

It's best to start getting to know a language as early as possible with words, games, songs, fairy tales and nursery rhymes. Speaking to a child even before he or she is born may be important to the child's development, and a baby forms an idea of a language long before he or she learns to talk. A child becomes familiar with a language by first discerning the emphasis and rhythm of the language. Next, the child begins to understand speech sounds and words and takes the first step on the path of speech by babbling and gurgling.

It's a good idea for parents to learn about children's language development and bilingualism preferably already during pregnancy but, at the latest, after the baby is born. The information can be used as a basis for discussion about your own child's bilingualism and what it means to the family. At the same time, parents can chart the child's linguistic environment in order to utilise its strengths. Linguistic environment refers to all the places and situations where a child has an opportunity to be in touch with his or her parents' languages.

I wish my parents had been more aware of the fact that growing up to be bilingual doesn't happen by itself and that bilingualism has to be actively, persistently and consistently supported. (The adult child of an intercultural family)

The best and simplest way to achieve bilingualism for your child is for both parents to speak only their own native language to their child. In many intercultural families, parents also use a third language when speaking to each other which is not the mother tongue of either of them. It does not confuse the child if the parents consistently only speak their own native language to them.

Speaking your own language to your child makes him or her secure, because they know which language to speak with each parent. Inconsistent use of language and mixing languages confuses a child and slows down his or her language development.

Language development consists of different stages and

periods. A child may, for example, start speaking one language sooner than the other, or mix up words from the two languages. This is a natural and passing stage, as long as parents persist in speaking their own language when talking to their child.

If one of the parents speaks Finnish, bilingual children living in Finland often develop skills in Finnish earlier than in their other language, because they hear Finnish both at home and outside it. The first language to be spoken by a child is also affected by which of the parents spends more time with the child. Parents would be wise to pay special attention to the language that their child hears less often in everyday life. This is the only way to guarantee that both languages develop equally.

In our family, we talked about bilingualism well in advance, but it turned out that in practice it wasn't as simple as we'd thought. We probably made the mistake of taking it for granted and not thinking about our family's situation and linguistic environment enough. My spouse felt under pressure to learn Finnish quickly with the result that he also began to speak Finnish at home to our child instead of Spanish. There was a time when my spouse felt the situation was almost hopeless, because our child went to a Finnish-speaking day-care centre and all her friends and relatives spoke only Finnish to her. My spouse felt he was alone in this situation. Studying, working and the everyday rush of a family with a small child took all our strength and didn't leave enough for us to support our child's bilingualism. Luckily it's never too late to start. After we realised the situation we were in, we've started being more consistent in our use of language, and our child now also goes to a Spanish-speaking club where she meets other children who speak Spanish. I also support

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my spouse by finding as much material in Spanish for him as I can, such as books. In just a few weeks, there have been great improvements in our three-and-a-half year old child's language development. (The mother of an intercultural family)

Well before we had our first child, my wife and I decided that I would speak French and my wife would speak Finnish to our children. Even so, now that our children are six and eight, they speak fluent Finnish but their French is not so good. The reason for this is the Finnish environment we live in: Finnish people, Finnish day-care centre, Finnish school, etc. We try to balance the situation out by visiting our relatives in France and inviting them here as often as possible. In fact, this has been really important to the children, because this way they have had to speak French. Then they also feel that being able to speak French is necessary for them. (The father of an intercultural family)

Children need to be encouraged to and guided in using language correctly, but they should never be scolded or punished for their mistakes. Bilingualism should be fun for a child and not tedious or frightening. Bilingualism should be made a natural part of family life and children should be given several reasons to be able to speak both languages. For example, friends, children's programmes and films in a different language, as well as regular visits to a parent's home country, help to motivate a child.

Bringing up a child to be bilingual requires work and orderliness, but the benefits of bilingualism guarantee that the work is well worth the effort. These benefits can't be sufficiently

emphasised. A bilingual child has the possibility to express him or herself in two different languages and communicate with all his or her family members and relatives. Bilingualism supports a child's identity and close relationship to both parents. It creates fertile ground for understanding different cultures, and bilingual children grow up to be natural interpreters of cultures and promoters of cultural interaction. A child's bilingualism is an important resource.



Practical tips for supporting a child's bilingualism

- Read your child books in your own language. Look at pictures and put everyday situations into words. Repeat words often and talk a lot!
- Listen to music in both languages and sing together.
- Play various games and play together. Play and games are easy to adapt into any language.
- Find out whether there are clubs or other activities available in your locality in the language which your child hears less often.
- Get to know other families like your own and strive to make it possible for your child to have friends who speak different languages. Bilingualism appears natural to a child when there are other bilingual children around too, and adults who speak different languages, and the child can use his or her languages in different situations.
- Communicate with relatives and friends who are far away through the Internet (for example Google and Skype) and over the phone. This way your child's understanding of kinship and friendship starts to develop at an early age and his or her language becomes more varied through new contacts.
- Think about your language environment: what kinds of possibilities does it offer for supporting your child's language development?
- Visit your relatives and invite them and other friends with

- families to visit you. Organise traditional celebrations.
- Watch children's programmes with your child; for example, via satellite channels in the language which your child hears less often.
 - Tell your relatives, friends and even the staff of your child's day-care centre about your wishes to support your child's bilingualism. This allows them to take the situation into account and, for example, to learn to say hello to the child in a foreign language. Small things are important to a child.
 - Find out about the different stages of children's language development from books and by discussing it with other (bilingual) families.
 - Be proud of your own languages and cultures. This way your child will also learn to appreciate them.
 - Bilingualism is not rare in the world, and all parents have the possibility to bring their children up as bilingual: don't miss this opportunity!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

Think about your own concepts of bilingualism. What are the possibilities or challenges you recognise in bilingualism from your family's point of view?

Familiarise yourself with the list of practical ways to support bilingualism. Think about the things that can be easily done and those that may require more effort. Can you think of other ways to support your child's bilingualism?

Read books or articles about the different stages of children's language development. Think about how you could prepare for the challenges of the different development stages beforehand. Discuss your child's bilingualism with your spouse. What does your child's bilingualism mean to you as parents? What does it mean from the point of view of your child?

In conclusion

The purpose of the booklet *Love and Parenthood in an Intercultural Family* is to awaken parents to think about and discuss these important matters so that they will be better able to understand both each other and their own starting points. This booklet does not offer a ready recipe for a family model, because every family creates its own way of doing things. Yet there are some basic ingredients that help families to do this, such as positive actions and words, patience, understanding, forgiveness, commitment and love.

Parenthood is a life-long journey during which parents will encounter countless moments of joy and happiness, as well as challenges. Every challenge can be overcome when parents can act together and talk about things openly. Good parenting consists of spending time together, loving, commitment, trust, safety and sharing responsibility in everyday life.

You can find more information on subjects concerning intercultural families on Duo's website at en.duoduo.fi. The web pages also include information about establishments offering various services and counselling, recommended reading, research information and statistics.





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By email info@familia ry.fi

The booklet is available in English, Finnish,
Spanish, French, Russian and Thai.



The term intercultural family is used to describe families comprised of partners who have born in different countries. For more information about intercultural issues, please visit our website en.duoduo.fi (in English) and duoduo.fi (in Finnish).