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Bilingual-bicultural (Bi-bi): Learning American Sign Language

Read this page to learn what bilingual-bicultural is, and if it's right for your child.

What bilingual-bicultural (bi-bi) is

- The word bilingual (by-LING-gwal) means being able to speak 2 languages. The word bicultural (by-CUL-tur-al) means being part of 2 cultures, or 2 communities.
- In bi-bi (by-by), children use 2 languages and learn about 2 cultures:
 - Children learn American Sign Language (ASL) as a **first language**. They learn ASL as their main way of communicating with other people.
 - They learn English as a **second language**. They use English mainly for reading and writing. They may also learn spoken English.
 - Children learn about and become part of **Deaf culture** and the Deaf community.
 - They are also still part of their **family's culture** and their family's community.
- Bilingual-biculturalism (bi-bi) is based on the idea that deaf children need a language they can see.
 - Spoken English is very hard to learn because they can't hear.
 - Since they learn by seeing, **American Sign Language (ASL)** is best for them.
 - Once they've learned one language, they can pick up other languages more easily.



What is ASL?

ASL is a language that you see instead of hear.

You use hand movements, facial expressions and body posture to communicate.

It's different from English, and has its own system of meanings.

ASL is one of the most widely used languages in the U.S.

What is Deaf culture?

Deaf culture is made up of people who share the same language and values. They may also share some of the same experiences. Deaf culture has its own history, stories and art.

The Deaf community is made up of different kinds of people. Its members are mostly deaf or hard of hearing. They come from different backgrounds, and are of different races. They've lost their hearing at different ages for different reasons.

People in the Deaf community refer to themselves as "Deaf" with a capital "D." "Deaf" with a small "d" means deafness as a medical problem.

What other parents say

Read our [Parent Talk](http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/meet/parents/communicating.jsp) (<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/meet/parents/communicating.jsp>) page to see what parents said about the communication method they chose.

Learn more about bi-bi

- The [Eric Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education](http://ericec.org/digests/e553.html) (<http://ericec.org/digests/e553.html>) explains bi-bi and lists questions to ask if you want this option.
- [Deaf Linx](http://www.deafnix.com/options_bibi.html) (http://www.deafnix.com/options_bibi.html) tells you what bi-bi is, and its good and bad points.
- The [About.com](http://deafness.about.com/cs/bibi/) (<http://deafness.about.com/cs/bibi/>) network has links to good articles on bilingual-biculturalism.

Learn more about sign language

- [Handspeak.com](http://www.handspeak.com/) (<http://www.handspeak.com/>) explains what sign language is and has a sign language dictionary.
- The [American Sign Language Browser](http://commtechlab.msu.edu/sites/aslweb/browser.htm) (<http://commtechlab.msu.edu/sites/aslweb/browser.htm>) has mini videos of many different signs.
- The [Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center](http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/InfoToGo/index.html#communication) (<http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/InfoToGo/index.html#communication>) lists books and websites about sign language you may want to check out.

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You can find this page online at:

<http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/communicating/choices/bibi.jsp>