Most immigrants will experience their children learning English faster than they do. They may also experience children replying in English while they speak their mother tongue to them. Why?
Because children want to fit in with their peers - desperately - and because they hear English so much more.
This very brief guide should answer the most important questions about raising children bilingually. The more detailed information sheet "Raising children with more than one language: Friends say we should!" along with a section of important Questions & Answers can be found on our website:
www.saskgermancouncil.org

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About the Saskatchewan German Council

Established in 1984 as a volunteer based, non-profit organization, the Council has been dedicated to promoting culture, language, customs, traditions and interests of Saskatchewan people of German-speaking background for the benefit of all Saskatchewan people.

SGC plays an active role in building provincial multiculturalism and the Canadian mosaic. The Council is a member of SaskCulture, under whose umbrella it receives funding from Saskatchewan Lotteries.

To learn more or to connect with the Saskatchewan German Council visit:

www.saskgermancouncil.org
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Raising Children Bilingually: A Very Brief Guide

What is bilingualism?

Bilingualism is the ability to use two languages for communication.

Active bilingualism means that a person can communicate in two languages, e.g. speaking Tagalog at home and English at work or school.

Passive bilingualism means that a person can understand two languages. They will understand their grandmother speaking Tagalog (or German, or Cree, etc.) to them, but will respond in English.

What is multilingualism?

The word "multilingualism" is used when a person can communicate in more than two languages.

How common is bilingualism in Canada?

- 18% of Canadian residents are bilingual in the two official languages (English and French).
- Another 23% of Canadian residents are bilingual in an official language and a non-official one: either an aboriginal language or an immigrant language.
- About 41% of Canadians speak more than one language!

What are the advantages of bilingualism?

- Better job opportunities
- Ties to family and country of origin
- Being able to navigate more than one culture
- Cognitive advantages: better attention span, faster processing, and better at switching between tasks - all of this means that bilingual children tend to do better in school.
- Bilingualism slows down cognitive decline in older people.

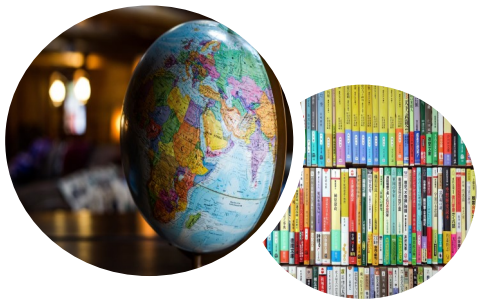
(Read more: http://dana.org/Cerebrum/2012/The_Cognitive_Benefits_of_Being_Bilingual/)

What are the disadvantages of bilingualism?

- It takes time and effort to maintain a second language.

What is the most important reason to speak 2 or 3 languages?

- It helps maintain your own sense of cultural identity. It also helps navigate different cultures with different rules!

I want to pass my mother tongue on to my children. How do I do this?

- The more your children hear your language, the more they will learn. This includes you talking or reading with them (or talking when they are around), letting them watch movies, listen to the radio, CDs or podcasts in your mother tongue. All of this will help the children develop passive bilingualism: the ability to understand your mother tongue.
- Develop a "family language policy": decide which language is spoken when. There are two common strategies:
  1. heritage language at home (no English at home)
  2. one parent, one language
- Which model you choose depends on your family. Once you've decided, you also need to communicate this to your children and remind them.
- Sign your children up in a Heritage Language School! This will help them develop a peer group with whom to speak their heritage language. (Also, consider volunteering! Most language schools are desperate for help.) Here is a list of Heritage Language Schools in Saskatchewan: http://www.heritagelanguages.sk.ca/home/ (click on “Language schools”)
- Instill pride in the cultural and linguistic heritage in your children. As they get older, they may feel ashamed at being “different” from their classmates and may want to distance themselves from their heritage to “blend in”. Help them develop positive attitudes towards their heritage by maintaining your traditions, and participating in cultural events, visiting your country of origin. By showing them how much you value your heritage, you teach them to value it as well.