Orthophonie
VoxLingue
Speech and Language

Printable sheet

What to say back when your child mixes languages: examples to keep handy

Mixing languages in one sentence is normal for a bilingual child: they're using every word they know. No need to correct them. Answer them, and they'll hear the word in your language.

Three steps, every time

1. Answer what they mean.
2. Say the word in your language, as part of your answer.
3. Carry on with the conversation, without asking them to repeat.

Examples

THEY SAY	YOU ANSWER
"I want the red camion."	"You want the red truck? Here it is."
"Look, a gros dog!"	"Oh yes, a big dog! It's running fast."
"More lait."	"More milk? Here you go."
"I don't want my bottes."	"You don't want your boots? Let's put them on together."
"It's froid."	"Yes, it's cold! Let's get your hat."

In our home language:

In our home language:

When you can: the whole sentence

Advice from **Kimberly Martins, speech-language pathologist and founder of VoxLingue**: all bilingual speakers code-switch, and if it happens sometimes, that's OK. Ideally, when speaking to your child, avoid mixing within the sentence, so they get the entire model of the language.

"Go get your shoes, we're leaving." rather than "Go get your souliers, we're leaving."

They answer in another language?

That's OK. Keep going in your language, and say what they said in your language if they didn't know how to say it. Speak the language you're most comfortable in, and keep all your languages.

The sign to check

It isn't the mixing. It's **few words or little understanding in all of their languages**, little progress over several months despite exposure, or losing words.

In Québec, contact the CLSC or ask the doctor (Agir tôt, free, before school entry). At the same time, you can see a speech-language pathologist privately. In Ontario: Preschool Speech and Language, no referral needed.

Sources: Kimberly Martins (2026); INSPQ (2023, in French), recasting without correcting; OOAQ (2026, in French); CHU Sainte-Justine (2026, in French); Paquette and Byers-Heinlein (2025); Québec.ca, Agir tôt program. **General information: this sheet does not replace an assessment.**