

Supporting Bilingual Speakers Who Use AAC: A Guide for Care Partners

Language is part of who we are.

Bilingual individuals often use more than one language every day, and AAC should support that. Using both languages is normal and does not slow learning or recovery. Mixing words between languages, and switching languages between settings (code-switching), is common and expected.

Why Language Choice Matters for Bilingual AAC Users

- Using your home language supports communication confidence, identity, and connection with loved ones.
- Daily life often means switching languages between settings — home, school, work, and medical visits.
- Code-switching helps people communicate naturally.
- AAC should match real-life communication needs.



(King & Soto, 2022; McNamara, 2018)

Myths & Facts About Bilingual AAC

Myth: "Two languages will confuse my loved one."

Fact: People can learn and use more than one language, even with a communication delay or disorder. The brain does not get confused by two languages. Using more than one language is normal and safe, and language mixing is expected. *(Peña et al., 2023)*

Myth: "We must choose only English."

Fact: Keeping the home language supports stronger relationships and better carryover across settings. Bilingual AAC users benefit from culturally and linguistically affirming access to both languages strengthens communication opportunities. *(McNamara, 2018; Baker et al., 2018)*

Myth: "AAC users can't be bilingual."

Fact: Bilingual AAC supports strong communication outcomes and does not limit development. A 2024 scoping review found that bilingual AAC led to positive communication outcomes, including improved expressive output with low-tech bilingual communication boards and successful use of bilingual AAC apps. *(Mitchell & Baker, 2024)*

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Myths & Facts About Bilingual AAC (*continued*)

Myth: "Bilingualism hinders cognitive, language, and social development."

Fact: Bilingualism does not hinder development. Research on both typically developing bilingual individuals and those with speech-language disorders does not support negative views of bilingualism. (*Peña et al., 2023*)

Myth: "Care partners must be bilingual."

Fact: Care partners don't need to speak both languages perfectly or fluently. Consistent modeling, language exposure, communication opportunities, and encouragement from family and other communication partners can support bilingual language development and AAC use. (*Hoff & Core, 2013; Monroe & Soto, 2025*)

What Is Dual Language Mode (DLM)?

DLM is a feature on Lingraphica devices that lets you switch between two languages on a single screen. With DLM, you can:

- Show English or Spanish under each picture
- Translate text while customizing cards
- Support natural code-switching
- Match real-life communication needs at home, school, medical visits, and in the community

When DLM Helps

- One language at home; another at school or appointments
- A caregiver who speaks one language; a provider who speaks another
- Mixing languages in the same conversation
- Preserving the home language after a stroke or neurological change

(*King & Soto, 2022*)

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Using DLM Across Settings

Home

- Use both languages during meals, getting ready, chores, or family time.
- Add photos and familiar words in both languages.

School

- Help teachers understand how your loved one switches languages.
- Build pages for school routines in English and Spanish.

Medical Appointments

- Add symptoms, pain-scale words, body parts, and questions in both languages.
- Prepare a page for emergencies.

Community

- Use the preferred language when ordering food, shopping, or meeting friends.
- Organize folders by location so the right words and phrases are quick to find.

Caregiver Strategies You Can Use Today

Model: Tap the device while you speak, using the language you're speaking in the moment.

Honor both languages: Add important words in English and Spanish.

Prep ahead: Build pages for appointments, school, and outings with meaningful vocabulary.

Encourage code-switching: Follow your loved one's lead. Switching is normal.

Personalize: Add photos, videos, names of important people, and daily routines.

Coach others: Show family, teachers, and providers how to pause, listen, and respond.

(King & Soto, 2022; Hung et al., 2023; Clarke & Soto, 2025; Soto & Vega, 2024; McNamara, 2018)



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Quick Start Checklist (DLM)

1. Open the **Settings Menu**, then tap **General Settings → Language & Voice**.
2. Choose your default language.
3. Toggle on **Dual Language Mode**.
4. A **Translate** button will appear on the button bar in Talk.
5. Tap **Translate** to switch all cards and folders on the page to the second language. Tap it again to switch back.
6. In the card editor, type in English or Spanish, then tap **Translate to [language]**.
7. Consider creating a **Favorites** folder for key bilingual phrases.

Simple Conversation Starters (English • Español)

How are you?	¿Cómo estás?
I need help with...	Necesito ayuda con...
I feel pain here.	Siento dolor aquí.
Let's call the doctor.	Vamos a llamar al médico.
I want to practice Spanish.	Quiero practicar español.



Common Barriers

Cards won't translate. Connect to Wi-Fi, or enter the text manually.

Too many cards. Remove the extras and start with Favorites.

I don't speak Spanish. Model simple taps and celebrate every attempt.

Hard to use AAC across settings. Start with the people and places that matter most to you.

Resources for Support

- [Download free communication boards \(English & Spanish\).](#)
- [Start a free device trial to see if an AAC device is a good match.](#)
- [Join In AAC: The free online community for Lingraphica AAC device users and care partners.](#)

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