

Raising Bilingual Children (II): How to Make it Happen at a Practical Level

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Parent-Child Activities

The **quality of Spanish exposure** is as important as its **quantity**:

- Provide opportunities for the child to listen and talk in Spanish;
- Ask questions in Spanish about school, friends, likes and dislikes;
- Ask child to tell you a story he just heard in Spanish;
- Read every day to your child in Spanish and encourage his/her questions and comments;
- Make interactive stories in Spanish with puppets or toys (your child decides the story as it goes);
- Recite Spanish poems, nursery rhymes or sing songs;
- Play language games such as “I Spy”, “Simon Says”;
- Play with your child, use role play of whatever she/he likes;
- Tell stories about your childhood in Spanish.

Bringing Your Child’s Spanish to the Next Level

1. Speaking the language is as important as reading and writing it;
2. Take your child beyond “kitchen Spanish”:
 - Discourage code switching;
 - Create the need to learn different vocabulary;
 - Read stories but also books about science and other disciplines;
 - Write a story with your child, so he/she learns punctuation and formal language. Then publish it to share it with others.
 - Take him/her to museums or farmer’s markets and explain what you see in Spanish;
 - Ask friends to come over and teach your child in Spanish about what they know (and you may not know);
 - Watch a sport game in Spanish and teach your child sport-related words.

Teaching/Learning Spanish at Home:

Create a **daily routine** and be **consistent**:

- Make sure to listen to Spanish media (radio/TV) every day;
- Read to your child every day about different subjects;
- Label things around the house for the child to read and see;
- To explain a new concept, use simple words, gestures or images (no English);
- Look up words in the dictionary when you cannot remember a word in Spanish (do not insert English in the conversation);
- Ask your child to read in Spanish (start with 5’-10’);

- Try to find a teacher or care giver who only speaks Spanish:
- Every week record/wrote a short message in Spanish with your child to send to Spanish speaking relatives or friends;
- Volunteer at organizations that need Spanish speakers.

Counteracting the Influence of English at Home

1. Spanish speaking families:

- Do not answer to your child in English, do not speak in English;
- Limit English TV and computer time;
- If your child wants to play computer games, do so in Spanish!
- Look for interesting Spanish-language music videos or other forms of entertainment;
- Create your own entertainment in Spanish: write stories or songs for/with your child, record good jokes or riddles by friends, record yourself or a friend reading a story aloud.

2. Non-Spanish speaking families: Increase the exposure of Spanish at home:

Spanish-language videos, music, computer games, care givers, classes, traveling etc.

Encouraging and Redirecting

- If the child speaks in English to you, redirect him/her graciously to Spanish:
 1. "I am sorry. What did you say? What did you say you wanted? Please say it in our language/Spanish."
 2. "I did not understand. Can you say it in Spanish?"
 3. Use humor instead of critique;

If the child inserts one English word in a Spanish sentence, teach him right away the Spanish word he does not know.

An expert's main advice for parents who speak Spanish:

"Many adults find it very difficult to speak their community language to their children consistently. They frequently fall back into English because this is the language they speak to everybody else. This way the child is placed in a situation like the following:

Mummy speaks English or Greek to me and everybody else speaks English to me. Consequently I can choose to speak English or Greek to Mummy, but because I hear English much more than Greek, English is easier to use. So why should I use Greek?

However, if the parent can get used to only speaking the community language himself when interacting with the child, then the following scenario is the one that presents itself to the child:

Daddy speaks English to most people, but with me he only speaks Italian. I love Daddy and I like him to spend special time with me. I want to do everything Daddy does and I also want to speak like him.

In order for the adult to feel comfortable about using the community language with the child it is best to make a decision to never speak anything but this particular language with the child and to start this as soon as the child is born or from the first time you have contact with a child if she is not your own."

Dr. Susanne Döpke
Monash University, Australia

An expert's main advice for parents who do not speak Spanish:

“The really important factor in children acquiring two (or more) languages, and then maintaining them, is the need they have for those languages: to communicate with parents and family members, to take part in daycare or school activities, to interact with people in their community, etc. If parents can create the need for more than one language, and other factors are favorable, then children will become bilingual.”

François Grosjean
Professor Emeritus
Université de Neuchâtel
Switzerland

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