

Tips for helping your child learn a second language

1. Know how your child learns - we learn differently and knowing how we learn can ease your struggle/time it takes to learn something.

- Multiple Intelligences:

- Linguistic (Visual via Print)
- Logical/Mathematical (Sequence)
- Kinesthetic (Movement)
- Spatial (Visual via Picture/Color)
- Musical (Auditory)
- Nature (Environment around them matters)
- Interpersonal (Social)
- Intrapersonal (Solo)

2. Affective Filter – it's all about attitude and emotion! Students that do not immediately catch something tend to develop feelings and attitudes that they are not good at something before they have gone very far into the subject. Try and focus on what they do know that they didn't know before. When they say they are 'bad' at something, immediately counter that with feedback like 'Then let's practice to get better.' or 'You've only been doing it for You will get better with time.' This is the hardest battle for a teacher as once an attitude is set it is nearly impossible to change it.

3. Respecting Diversity – Culture and people play a huge part in learning a language. Some people love or hate a language based on its culture. Many students have come to study Japanese because of an interest in Japanese manga/comics. Try to include little bits of the new language's culture into your lives – maybe food or music or movies to encourage cultural growth as well as language growth. Try to avoid negative comments – especially for Spanish learners about immigrants, etc. – that put down a culture that a student has an interest in.

4. The Ear comes first – Students between the ages of 8-13 are considered the best candidates for a second language for a number of reasons. This is a window of literacy for their brain and their mouth. Students at these ages (barring learning disability issues) are language sponges – their brains are taking in and processing language like crazy. Now we all process language but this is high absorption time and our first language should be pretty well cemented so we have a basis of comparison. This age is also the period before the muscles of our mouths really cement into their life long state and a window of opportunity to develop native pronunciation. Adults CAN learn a language – they just don't learn it the same and will not really develop the perfect pronunciation. The key to the absorption is hearing lots and lots of the second language, not reading it, but hearing it. In the age of the Internet and TV, this is completely do-able even when native speakers are not around.

Specifics:

1. Set aside a time 10-15mins every day for practice! It is best if this is around the same time and in the same location. (This is true of any class but really important for skill-building areas like language, music and math.)
2. Does your child know how to study? Many students come to sixth grade and have never learned how to study – previous work has either been at their level or below and they have survived on natural talent, or they have learned coping techniques to avoid the feeling of not doing well.

Ways you can help/things you can do:

- flashcards : Spanish word one side, picture on the other (NOT English word). Use color! These are great for Kinesthetic, Spatial learners. Add in saying the word aloud to reach the Musical/Auditory. Work with another to add Interpersonal or by yourself for Intrapersonal. You can just hold up the flashcard and encourage as they go. Make a pile of ones they know and ones they don't and pretty soon the 'Don't Know' Pile will disappear.
 - online practice : conjuguemos.com on a regular basis. This is great for Linguistic learners. Add in saying the answer aloud as you type to reach the Musical/Auditory. Work with another to add Interpersonal or by yourself. Sit down for a session with your child and have them explain to you how they got the answer for the verb conjugation part or just watch and comment on how much they know.
 - online practice : videos/music. While YouTube can contain some pretty crazy and inappropriate stuff, it also is a wealth of resources. Watch a music video by a musician studied in class or a museum site for art. Choose the Spanish language option for your site when available. Also sites that end in .esp are Spanish language sites. Great for Linguistic, Spatial, Musical, Intrapersonal/Interpersonal types. Can be good for Logical/Mathematical depending on the topic.
 - DVDs : nearly all DVDs now come with multiple language tracks. Watch your favorite movie with your child in Spanish with no sub-titles. This is ear training, not reading practice ☺ Have them learn/repeat key phrases or ask them what they understood. Can reach all intelligences.
 - Cable – If you have cable TV, many channels are available in different languages. Then just watch the commercials, 30 seconds of practice! Ask what was said/understood. Can reach all intelligences.
3. Keep the pressure there but low. ☺ Some students are incubators – they don't say a lot but they know a lot about a language. Others are risk-takers that will do anything and never worry about what others think. Classes try to reach both types through various activities but encourage your child to continuously practice. This is a marathon, not a sprint. It takes 3-5 years to develop conversational level of a language and it takes 5-7 years for academic level. If you know Spanish, students don't want to look 'bad' in front of you, so keep it light. If you know no Spanish, I'll bet you can learn a bit along the way.