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Spanish classes, ESL, tutoring, translation, travel to Hispanic nations

Life | THE MAMI PAGE

Teach your kids to be bilingual

*The whys and hows
of raising your kids
to speak español.*

IT COULDN'T BE a better time to teach kids Spanish—a study found that just 17 percent of third-generation Mexican Americans have retained their fluency. Here's how to reverse that, starting *ahora!*

Why do it? “There are cultural, social, intellectual and cognitive advantages to being bilingual,” says Ana Celia Zentella, Ph.D., professor of ethnic studies at the University of California, San Diego. Indeed, research has found that being bilingual helps build brain matter the same way exercising builds muscle. Maria Sanchez taught her niños Spanish to reconnect them with their past. “I wanted them to be able to speak with their grandparents,” she says. And experts say that there is no danger your kids won't learn English; they're exposed to it every time they walk outside.

When should we start? “In utero!” laughs Ruth Kunstadter, a New Jersey-based Spanish teacher. It's easier for younger children to pick up languages, but don't be discouraged if your kids are older—they'll be more receptive to learning tools.

How can we do it? Exposure, exposure, exposure. It's not enough to just have your parents speak to them when they visit, Zentella says. Declare entire days as “Spanish only.” Make it fun: Have the kids join a program that teaches Spanish through singing, or take them to bilingual reading hours at the library. See



Spanish movies and set up playgroups with other kids who are learning. Enroll older kids in classes, or consider immersion school. Language programs can help, too: Kunstadter's Chispa Productions (chispaproductions.com) offers DVDs that teach Spanish as a culture rather than a foreign language. And visit multilingualchildren.org to connect with other bilingual families.

—Kenya M. Rankin