

Education

5 Tips To Help Your Child Become Bilingual

By **Cassandre Deramat and Laetitia Zicchinella**

Bilingual children seem to be the topic *du jour*. You cannot open a magazine or watch a news program without seeing or reading about it, and it seems like international schools are blossoming all around most neighborhoods in the New York area.

Raising a child bilingually, however, is not a simple choice to make. It takes a lot of work and support from the family or caregiver. So be sure to review these 5 tips before your child embarks on becoming bilingual:

1. Know your child's strengths.

It is important to know from the get-go that all children are not alike. So one method might work remarkably well with one child and be more challenging to another. It is not uncommon to see in the same family one sibling being completely bilingual and the other not. Even though some children are better at learning a language than others, this should not stop you from trying; it is possible for anyone with enough dedication to learn a foreign language.

2. The earlier the better.

The earlier a child is exposed to a new language, the easier it will be for him to feel at ease with it. As you may have noticed, as you get older, it gets more and more difficult to learn a new language. It is the same for children. It is easier for a 7-year-old to pick up a foreign language than for a 16-year-old. Furthermore, even if a 16-year-old becomes bilingual, he/she will, for the most part, keep an accent, unlike the 7-year-old.

3. Be patient.

On the other hand, you cannot expect your child to become bilingual just by going to an international pre-school for two years. A child at such a young age has to learn so many new concepts other than language that he will need many more years to fully grasp a second language.



4. Do it for the right reason.

If you decide that you want your child to speak a foreign language even if you don't, it is possible, but do it for the right reason. Don't do it to impress others; do it for your child's future. It is a difficult choice to make, so you should be prepared for the challenges and discipline that will be involved.

5. Expose your child to the foreign language as much as possible.

If you decide to put your child in an international school, which is the best way for him or her to become bilingual, be sure to also expose him to the foreign language in a non-school environment. He will be more willing to embrace a foreign language for the long term if he needs to use it on a daily basis. It is also a good idea to hire a nanny who is a native speaker, to travel to a country where that language is spoken, make play dates with children who speak the foreign language. All of those elements will give your child the greatest chance of becoming bilingual.

CASSANDRE DERAMAT and **LAETITIA ZICCHINELLA** are executive directors of *In Transition, Inc.*, a training and consulting firm for foreign expatriates based in New York City. They can be reached at www.intransitioninc.com.