

Parents

Bilingual Babes

The best time to teach your child a second language is the same time she's learning her first one. So *vamonos!* (Let's go!)

By Ilisa Cohen

»Start now. Two- and 3-year-olds are not only increasing their vocabularies, they're starting to recognize the speech patterns they've been hearing since birth. The earlier you introduce a second language, the easier it will be for your child to pick up its unique sounds. The ability to hear different phonetic pronunciations is sharpest before age 3, and we lose the capacity to hear and produce certain sounds if we aren't exposed to them early on, according to François Thibaut, director of the Language Workshop for Children, in New York City. So just hearing a television show, listening to music, or learning a few words in a second language will give your child essential tools for appreciating it now and learning to speak it later.

»Create a casual learning environment. The best way for a child to learn to understand a new language is for him to hear people speaking it fluently, says Thibaut. If he's exposed to conversations, he'll begin to pick up the sounds and the natural accent. Choose a language that is spoken in your neighborhood, on a television show your child can watch regularly, or one that is offered in classes or playgroups in your area. "If you have a bilingual babysitter, encourage her to speak her native language to your child exclusively," says Rhodes. Two- and 3-year-olds love to mimic what they hear, and soon they'll begin to understand the meanings of short words and phrases.

Play and Learn When you shop for bilingual toys, games, and CDs, make sure the words are spoken clearly and by a native speaker with a proper accent. Your child will have a fiesta learning a new language with these.



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Expect minor mix-ups. It's natural for a child to confuse the word order or use words from both languages in the same sentence. He'll quickly learn to separate the languages.

Don't underestimate her progress. Even though many people think learning two languages causes speech delays, that is not the case. Your little one might say fewer English words than other kids her age, but if you add in the words she knows in her second language, her total number of words will probably be more than that of her peers.

as they grow



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