

¡Hola!

Spanish at home from age one

A guide for parents of children aged 1 to 3

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A note for parents

Between ages 1 and 3, children learn to talk through back-and-forth play with an adult. This guide uses the same approach (play, no pressure, a warm playmate) to explain how you can bring Spanish into your child's life at home.

The two most important things: keep talking a lot in Chinese, and leave Spanish to a "live voice" that speaks it. You don't need to speak Spanish.

How children this age learn to talk (5 points)

1. Back and forth — The child makes a sound or gesture, the adult responds and waits for their turn (Harvard, "serve and return").

2. Name what they're looking at — If they're looking at a dog, say "dog!": that's when words stick best.

3. A live person beats a video — Children learn more from someone who responds to them than from recorded video.

4. Understanding comes long before talking — Many children listen for a while; answering in Chinese means they understood.

5. No pressure — No quizzing, no "show Auntie!": children learn best when happy and relaxed.

What to expect from a little Spanish each week

The closest study comes from Madrid: children aged 7 to 33 months played in English with native tutors 1 hour a day, learned quickly and kept it (Ferjan Ramírez & Kuhl, 2017). But that was about 5 hours a week, every day, and the program belongs to the researchers themselves.

With a little Spanish each week, the realistic goal is getting used to the sounds of Spanish, understanding some words and routines, enjoying the language, and maybe saying a few words. That is valuable, but it is not "bilingual".

What to do at home: 12 ideas

These ideas come from research and expert guidance, mostly about a first language or English; some are Emi's practice and we say so. Every child is different.

1 Keep talking, singing and reading a lot in Chinese

And in Taiwanese or Hakka, if you use them.

Specialists recommend speaking the language you're most comfortable in; a strong first language helps with others.

2 Spanish through a live voice

A tutor, friend or relative who speaks Spanish, in person or by video call.

Children learn more from a person who responds than from recorded video (Roseberry et al., 2014; Strouse & Samson, 2021).

3 Spanish songs as audio, screen off, singing and moving together

Better than background music.

Singing and doing actions with babies worked better than background music (Gerry et al., 2012); Taiwan's 國健署 advises avoiding screens under 2.

4 A little Spanish tied to a routine

A bath song, "agua" at meals, "buenas noches" at bedtime, "chau" when leaving. A little, every day, for a long time.

Practice: it gives repetition and shared attention; not measured in toddlers.

5 Point and name what they're looking at

If they're looking at the dog: "¡perro!"

Children learn words for what they're already paying attention to (Tomasello & Farrar, 1986, first language).

6 Wait for their turn

After saying something, pause, look at them and respond to their sound, gesture or Chinese word.

Back-and-forth with waiting is what helps language most (Harvard; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2014).

7 Picture books: talk about the pictures in Chinese and add one Spanish word

One they heard from the tutor or a recording.

Talking while reading from birth is well supported and recommended by 國健署 (AAP, 2024, first language).

8 No quizzing

No "How do you say...?" tests, no showing off to relatives. If they dance or clap to a song, celebrate!

At this age children understand long before they speak; 國健署 recommends a relaxed, no-pressure mood.

9 Mixing or answering in Chinese is perfect

It means they understood.

Mixing is normal, and two languages don't confuse or delay children (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013).

10 Learn a few words and a song, and show you enjoy it

Make mistakes cheerfully: children imitate what they see.

Emi's experience; in Chinese families with older children, parents' encouragement went with more motivation (Nie & Mavrou, 2026). No studies at ages 1–3.

11 On a video call, sit beside them and join in

Short, with someone who responds. Under 2, 國健署 advises avoiding screens.

A parent sitting beside the child helped toddlers learn most from video chat (Myers et al., 2018).

12 Notice what they understand, not what they say, and don't compare

If you're worried about their Chinese, ask early and don't blame Spanish.

A real language problem shows up in every language, and early help works best.

Frequently asked questions

Isn't my child too young to start?

There's no "too young" for hearing Spanish through play. But starting earlier doesn't guarantee more: with little exposure, consistency and enjoyment matter most.

Will one session a week make my child bilingual?

No. It's a small amount of exposure; the realistic goal is getting used to the sounds, understanding some words and routines, and enjoying the language.

We don't speak any Spanish. Can we help?

Yes. Keep talking and reading a lot in Chinese, sing along, repeat a word in daily routines, and leave "real" Spanish to someone who speaks it well.

Can my child watch Spanish cartoons?

Taiwan's 國健署 advises avoiding screens under 2; from age 2, no more than 1 hour a day, ideally together. Songs can be audio only, singing and moving together.

Will Spanish slow down their Chinese?

No: research shows two languages don't confuse or delay children. Chinese stays the main language at home.

They've heard Spanish for months and say nothing. Is that normal?

Yes. With little exposure, children usually understand a lot before saying anything, or answer in Chinese.

When should we see a speech-language therapist?

If you're worried about how they understand or speak Chinese, if they don't respond to sounds, or if they lose words they used to say. Ask at the pediatric check-ups (兒童預防保健). Don't wait, and don't blame Spanish.

What people say, and what research shows

"Babies learn from foreign-language videos"

9-month-olds learned foreign speech sounds from a live person, but not from the same content on video or audio (Kuhl et al., 2003). The person is the key.

"The earlier, the better"

Hearing Spanish early is fine, but with little exposure research doesn't show that starting earlier is always better. Consistency and enjoyment matter more.

"Two languages delay speech"

No. Counting both languages, bilingual children's vocabulary is similar to that of children who speak one (Byers–Heinlein & Lew–Williams, 2013).

Sources

Almost all of these studies are about a first language or English, not Spanish or children in Taiwan; some are correlational. This guide is general information for parents, not medical or speech–therapy advice.

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[Questions? Message me on LINE: emi–alma](#)