

# ¡Hablemos!

A resource for Latino families navigating language, identity, and schooling in the United States



# Welcome! ¡Bienvenidos!

## About this guide. Sobre esta guía.

**This guide was made for you — whether you are a parent, grandparent, or caregiver raising a child between two languages and two cultures.**

You may have questions about whether your child's language development is on track, how to support their Spanish when you are not fluent yourself, or how to talk to their school about their language needs. You may also be navigating something harder: a child who feels ashamed of their heritage, or caught between worlds.

This resource draws on research in child development, bilingualism, and Latino identity to offer guidance that is honest, practical, and rooted in what the science actually says. You do not have to read it cover to cover — find the section that speaks to where you are right now.



### HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE / CÓMO USAR ESTA GUÍA

**1**

#### **Your child mixes English and Spanish**

What code-switching really means, and why it is a sign of strength, not confusion

**2**

#### **You want to support your child's Spanish, but do not speak it yourself**

Practical ideas for any household, no fluency required

**3**

#### **Your child feels ashamed of their Spanish — or their identity**

What the research says about identity & belonging, plus scripts for hard moments

**4**

#### **You need to talk to your child's school**

Your rights and what to say to teachers, counselors, and school administrators

Each section includes what the research says, what it means for your family, and concrete steps you can take.  
Sources are cited at the end, so you can explore further.



## Sección 1 / Section 1

# Is it normal for my child to mix languages? ¿Es normal que mi hijo/a mezcle idiomas?

If you've heard your child switch between English and Spanish mid-sentence, you may have wondered: Is something wrong? The short answer is no, and research backs that up.



## WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

**Language mixing is very common among children who grow up hearing two languages.**

Language mixing, also called code-switching, is a sign of children's developing language skills, not confusion. Children code-switch strategically to fill in word gaps and to say what they mean more precisely. They may also code-switch depending on the situation and the people around them. Code-switching shows that children are actively using two full language systems.

Source: Kuzyk et al. (2020)

## Managing two languages strengthens the brain.

Growing up hearing two languages strengthens your child's linguistic, cognitive, and cultural development. Bilingual children show more flexible thinking and attention skills. Managing two languages actually strengthens the mental skills that help children focus, adapt, plan, and problem-solve.

Source: Bialystok (2017); Planckaert et al. (2023)

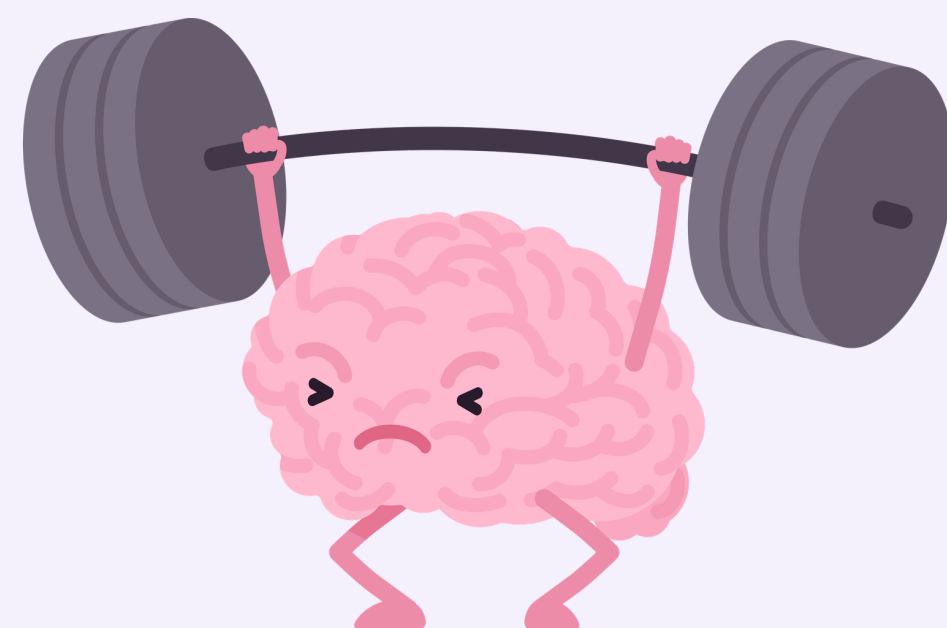


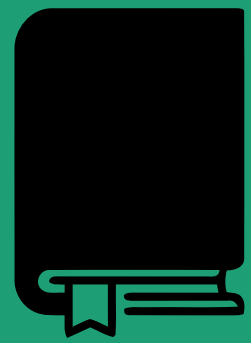
### What you can do. Lo que puedes hacer

Celebrate both languages at home.

When your child switches, don't correct them; respond naturally in whichever language feels right.

The goal is clear and confident communication, not separation between languages.





## Sección 2 / Section 2

# Quiero apoyar el español, pero no lo hablo

# I want to support my child's Spanish, but I don't speak it

**You don't need to be fluent in Spanish to raise a child connected to their heritage language and culture. What matters most is your relationship with them — and your intention.**



### WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

A 2022 study of Mexican American teens found that their Spanish-language ability was more closely related to family relationship quality than to the language spoken at home.

**Strong parent-child bonds create the conditions for heritage language growth, even when parents aren't Spanish speakers themselves.**

Source: Updergraff et al. (2022)



### Your commitment matters more than your fluency.

Research also shows that when parents believe maintaining Spanish is important, they act on it, and children follow.

Source: Gámez (2023); Mercado Ramos et al. (2025); Ronderos et al. (2023)

## ☰ Practical ideas — no fluency required. Ideas prácticas



### Books & media

Find bilingual books or Spanish-language shows your child enjoys. You don't have to understand everything — be curious alongside them and ask questions in any language.

Here is a book list we've prepared for you and your child to explore!



### Extended family

If grandparents or relatives speak Spanish, create regular opportunities to connect — such as calls, WhatsApp, voice messages, or visits. These relationships are powerful language teachers.



### Community Programs

Attending Spanish classes, cultural centers, or heritage-language programs lets your child hear Spanish from peers, which makes a big difference.



### Honor culture, not just language

Music, food, celebrations, and family stories are all bridges to Latino identity — and they don't require fluency in Spanish to share.

Here is a playlist we've prepared for you and your child to explore!



### A word of encouragement. Una palabra de aliento

You do not need to speak Spanish fluently to raise a child who feels connected to their heritage. Your effort, curiosity, and love are the most powerful things you can offer.

Start wherever you are — it is enough.





### Sección 3 / Section 3

## Mi hijo/a siente vergüenza

## My child feels ashamed about their Spanish, or not speaking it at all

**Many Latino children, especially those born or raised in the U.S., navigate an in-between: not Latino enough for some, not American enough for others. This is a real and well-documented experience — and it is not anyone's fault.**



### UNDERSTANDING WHY THIS HAPPENS

Language loss across generations is not a personal failing, but a pattern shaped by immigration pressures and school systems that have historically discouraged languages other than English.

Research shows that younger Latinos often face pressure to speak Spanish in ways that others expect, which can lead to shame and withdrawal from the language entirely.

Source: De Jong (2021); Torres (2019); Zheng (2023)



### Latinidad is more than just language.

78% of Latino adults say speaking Spanish is not required to be considered Latino. Among Latinos born in the United States, that rises to 92%. Latino identity is more than language, and research consistently shows that bilingualism and biculturalism support positive ethnic identity development, resilience, and well-being in children.

Source: Lopez et al. (2017); Mora & Lopez (2023); Pew Research Center



### Scripts for hard moments. ¿Qué puede decir?

#### If a well-meaning family member or peer criticizes your child's Spanish:

- “They actually understood exactly what you said! We are really proud of their progress”.
- “We're practicing every day and just having fun with it. What matters most is that they can communicate with their family.”
- “They are learning and building their vocabulary every day! Mistakes are just how they learn”.

#### What you, as a parent or caregiver, can tell your child:

- “Everybody makes mistakes when they are learning a new language. It's part of how our brain grows.”
- “I'm so proud that you're practicing!”



### What you can do. Lo que puedes hacer

Avoid correcting; instead, celebrate any connection to Spanish or Latino culture as a bridge, not a barrier. Positive experiences with culture in any form support healthy identity development. Research shows this is especially important for children whose appearance means their Latino identity is not always visible to others.



## Sección 4 / Section 4

# Necesito hablar con la escuela I need to talk to my child's school

**As a parent, you have real rights regarding your child's language education. Here is what to know — and what to say.**



### **Your rights. Sus derechos.**

Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), schools are required to identify English learners, provide language support services, and notify parents in their home language.

- ✓ If your child is identified as an English Learner, you must be notified in writing within 30 days of the school year starting.
- ✓ You have the right to information about what program your child is in and to ask questions about it.
- ✓ You do not need a lawyer to ask questions, and you deserve clear answers.

Source: ESSA Title III (2015); Colorín Colorado ELL Advocacy Guide



## **? Questions to ask at school. Preguntas que puede hacer**

**You can direct these questions or similar ones to your child's teacher, counselor, or at school meetings:**

"Can you explain what language program my child is currently in, and how long they are expected to be in it?"

"What support does my child get to keep developing their Spanish while learning English?"

"How is my child's progress in both English and their home language being measured?"

"What can I do at home to support what you're doing at school?"

"If I disagree with the placement, what is the process to discuss that?"



### **If something doesn't feel right. Si algo no se siente bien**

You can contact your school district's Office of Bilingual Education or your state's Department of Education if you believe your child's rights are not being met. In New York, for example, parents can reach out directly to the Office of Multilingual Learners. You don't need a lawyer to ask questions, and you deserve clear answers.



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