

# Top tips for motivating bilingual children to speak their languages



## Immersion

The most frequently mentioned tip was definitely to immerse your child in the language you want him or her to speak more of. Note that you can use the immersion technique in many different ways and it can be for shorter time spans as well as for longer time periods.

**Maria** from [Trilingual Mama](#): *“Immerse your child in a deep pool of rich language, be patient.”* I love all her suggestions and especially the one to take frequent walks in nature and use these moments for deep talks and new vocabulary.

Reserve certain times of the day solely for the lesser spoken language – **Frances** from [Discovering the World Through My Son’s Eyes](#) calls this setting a ‘*Language boundary*’: *“This eventually led to full conversations in the minority language, and it’s the ‘secret’ language that my child and I use.”* She also recommends travelling, playdates and creating a “*text-rich home environment*”, not forgetting more structured language programmes and bilingual schools, where they are available.

**Marianna** from [Bilingual Avenue](#) encourages you to make it a habit to talk as much as possible with your child: *“‘Say What You See’ when playing with your child to influence their vocabulary input and you are*

*likely to see a great deal of impact on the level of motivation” – I am a great believer in this easy-to-implement strategy!*

## Books & Reading

Books are a very effective way of enhancing your child’s knowledge of a language, I couldn’t agree more with everyone who had [reading](#) at the top of their list of suggestions.

*Lisa* from [Cooking with Languages](#) says it perfectly: *“Reading books, suitable for your child’s level of language, is a fabulous way to expand their vocabulary and understanding of that language.”*

Not only is reading beneficial for the overall mastering of the language but, as [Maria](#) says, it *“helps emergent readers make the connection between spoken language and the symbols on the page.”*

## Emotional attachment & Need

For a child to make a language his or her own and to want to speak it, there should be an emotional attachment to it and a need to use it in the day-to-day life. When [Frances’s](#) son wanted to speak to his friends, he *“had a reason to speak the minority language.”*

*Olena* from [Bilingual Kids Rock](#) has written a very insightful post on what *actually* motivates us and our kids, and I love the conclusion: *“It’s not rational understanding but emotional experience that motivates adults and children to take an action.”* If we really want something, we find a way to achieve it!

I certainly played on my daughter’s heartstrings when I looked for ways for her to embrace Swedish! [Pricken – the Swedish-speaking kitten](#) to the rescue! Caution – this certainly won’t work for everyone, you need to find your kid’s very own “kitten”: *“Think carefully about what is important (or fun!) for your child, put yourself in their shoes, then find a way to make this motivator part of the language learning and use.”*

## Play & Fun

*“Minkä ilotta oppii, sen surutta unohtaa”* is a Finnish proverb which means: *“What you learn without joy, you have no trouble forgetting”* Nothing can be truer for a child learning to appreciate, love and use a language. Make language learning fun and engaging for your kids!

*Ilze* from [Let the Journey Begin](#) points out the importance of incorporating play and activities when encouraging your children to learn a language: *“I believe it is especially important for children to learn by experiencing various things and by trying everything out by themselves.”*

*Galina* from [Raising Trilingual Children](#) agrees and gives many great ideas on how to motivate different age groups: *“give your child what he enjoys the most and what he is interested in.”* Giving your children their own notebook where they can practice their language skills is a great idea!

## Technology

Many of us have learnt our languages purely from our parents or at school, but today there is a lot of [technology](#) that can help you on the way. Use free online video connections to stay in touch with family and friends and keep the languages going – or find your child’s favourite cartoons on YouTube (in the right language, of course!)

*Ayesha* from [Words ‘n’ Needles](#) has successfully used a language app with her kids: *“Whatever language you are focusing on, show your child poems, conversations, cartoons or mini documentaries in that language.”* Which language could you introduce to your kids this way?

## PULL – don’t PUSH

Getting your children to want to speak a language does however not only depend on motivators specific to the kids’ own interests, wants and needs. Being the right kind of role model and language promotor for your kids can not be underestimated, and I am happy that so many of my friends picked up on this. Your parenting skills will allow you to pull your children towards a language, without pushing!

*“Ignore them!”* is the surprising advice given by *Esther* from [Third Culture Mama](#), but it all makes sense: *“I believe that it’s important for kids to see how much their mother enjoys language learning but also, that can involve courage and self-discipline”* and *“Inevitably, your own natural passion for language will be contagious and grow in them a beautiful thirst for learning and using their weaker language(s).”*

*Elisabeth* from [Spanish Mama](#) has gone to great lengths to be able to bring up her child in a language which is not her mother tongue, and we can all take a leaf out of her book and implement her ideas: *“raising my children in Spanish as a non-native speaker is a decision I’ve never regretted. The gift of bilingualism is worth the sacrifice.”*

Varya from [Creative World of Varya](#) has found that her children actually do pick up the language, even when she thinks nothing is sticking: *“unconsciously I have been actually helping my children become interested in their mother tongue, which has become the minority language.”*

[Lisa](#) makes an important point: *“We know not to push too hard. We are taking our time and every little step in an achievement.”* I fully agree with [Galina](#) when she writes that *“being motivated yourself is a part of successfully raising bilingual /trilingual children”*. We have to be the role models for a positive learning experience – and we have to stick with it, like [Frances](#) says: *“If there is one thing that I’ve learned during our language learning is to follow the three P’s: patience, persistence, and perseverance as my child develops fluency in the second language.”*

## DON'T STRESS

Whatever you do, please [be kind to yourself](#) and don't pile on the pressure as a parent. If you are stressed out about how your kids are progressing, you will also struggle to motivate them in a fun and natural way.

If there is only one thing that you take away from this article, listen to [Annabelle](#) from [The Piri Piri Lexicon](#): *“Read all the wonderful tips you can find. Try a few. Don't give up. But don't stress yourself about language. You are doing your best. In the great scheme of things, there are so many important things in life.”*