

## [5 Tips for Parents of English Language Learners](#)

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“English Language Learners have a superpower,” says Dr. Zane Hasan.

Yes, according to Dr. Zane Hasan, English Language Learners (ELL) are a step above because they are in the process of becoming bilingual (or trilingual, etc).

Annette Miller echoes these thoughts by adding, “Many ELL kids are super intelligent, but they don’t always get the support they need to succeed.”

So, we talked to two experts to put together academic tips for parents of ELL students to help them be successful!

Dr. Zane Hasan, who has an EDD from the University of Florida in Curriculum and Instruction, and a focus in Bilingual Education, has been working with ELL kids for 14 years. And, Annette Miller, Sylvan Learning Franchisee in Florida, has vast experience helping ELL students over the last 25 years at her Sylvan Learning Centers.

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## 1. Validate your child's feelings.

Your child may not fully understand why your family made the decisions that brought them to another country. He or she may be feeling sad and upset to have left friends, family, their home and the comforts of familiarity.

It's important to acknowledge these feelings and give your child reassurance that teachers are here to help. Remind your child that it takes time to learn a new language – 5-7 years to learn everyday language, and 7-10 years to become proficient in academic language. When kids are adding a new language, they're sifting through *double* the vocabulary. They just need time to process and be comfortable with it taking some time.

Did you know ... Students can even go through a *silent period* when they are first learning a new language? This *silent period* can be as short as 6 weeks or can last as long as 2 years. During this time, students are making observations and trying to understand how the second language works. Just be patient with your child. It will happen!

## **2. Advocate for your child.**

Some bilingual families think school is the teacher's domain, home is the family's domain. But in North America, families are encouraged to get involved in their child's schooling.

In the United States, everyone has access to education. Period. Even undocumented families still have rights. And, it's illegal for teachers or the school to ask about immigration status\*.

So, don't be afraid to ask your child's teacher for help or to advocate for yourself and your child! As an ELL student, your child is entitled to certain services. Keep calling and asking about services that you are supposed to be getting at school. If you're not getting answers from the school, go to the next level authority, such as your local county's, region's or state education's ELL department.

## **3. Continue to use your native language at home.**

It doesn't help English language acquisition to use broken English at home. But, "If a child is really strong in ONE language, this will transfer to the second language," says Dr. Hasan.

So, don't feel insecure about letting your child use your native language in the home. ELL kids have another identity associated with their native language, and some things don't translate well in English, so it's important to still talk in their native language to make sure they're able to fully express themselves. Continuing to

use the native language will help keep the child's cultural identity alive and well, which also helps with his or her emotional health.

#### **4. Provide a literacy-rich home.**

Keep books around in your native language. Literacy-rich environments contribute to the facilitation of a new language. Over meals, have conversations with your child. What did you do today? What are you doing tomorrow? Fill your home with language! If your child is a more advanced English speaker, let him or her answer in English. But if your child isn't comfortable with English yet, let him or her use whatever language he or she is comfortable speaking.

#### **5. Parents should go through any available school training with their child.**

If there are tutorials or training available for your child, do the training with them. This is especially important for digital learning, which is like a third (or fourth or fifth) language. It's important to do these trainings with your child so you can help answer questions or troubleshoot any problems.

"Parents have to be proactive," said Annette. She advises that parents "find someone who can help and support your child."

*And, to ELL students, Annette says:*

*“You’re not alone. It’s not going to take as long as you think it will for you to become proficient in English. And you’re smarter than you think you are. Trust and work hard.”*

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*\*According to the 1982 court case, Plyler v. Doe it is illegal to deny any student the right to an education or to inquire about immigration status.*