

Catholic Homeschool Podcast

Learn Spanish as a Family – with Adrienne Babbitt

Hello and welcome to the Catholic Homeschool podcast. And I am your host, Paola Ciskanik.

I'm so excited today for today's podcast because we get to meet Adrienne. And just a minute, I'm going to have read her bio, but this is something so new, so revolutionary, and you know, I bet there's a lot of folks out there who have wanted to either learn a language themselves and especially teach their children that language. And I get that question all the time. So, without further ado, let's say hi to Adrienne. Hello, Adrienne. Welcome.

Hello! I'm so excited to be here.

Yes. Thank you. Thank you for taking time. I know you're a busy mom and you're running a business and a wonderful business teaching people about Spanish. So, before we get started to let people know who you are, I'm going to read your little bio here. Okay?

So, let's get a minute here to let everybody know that Adrienne is the founder of Learn With Me Languages. She is fondly known as, I love this, "Chief Optimist." She leads a team of talented teachers who help families learn languages through connecting with native speakers of the language they are learning. Families form friendships that motivate them to use the language the program was, and I love this, birthed at the beginning of COVID. And since then, they have connected hundreds of families from around the world, learning Spanish and English together through family language exchange. Adrienne is also the host of the Building Bilingual Families Podcast. And her passion is to help families become bridge builders in their communities.

So welcome, welcome Adrienne. I'm so glad that you are here with me today.

Oh, my goodness it is a treat for me and I'm really excited to meet your community and tell them about how they can be bridge builders as well.

Wonderful. So, Adrienne, tell us first a little bit. I always love to begin story. Tell me your story. You know, you have a story, right? And you want to learn Spanish and teach your children. So, tell me a little about your story and your family let's start there.

Absolutely. Well, I have a 17-year-old who's my oldest and she was the first Guinea pig that we decided to try to teach Spanish. And at the time that my husband, he had learned in college and so he spoke very well, and he was working in banks in Latin America. And so, I thought, you know, you should just give us this immersion experience, right. Just start speaking to us in Spanish and we'll soak it up. And I immediately became super frustrated because it was annoying when he was like correcting me all the time. And I had such a hard time when I couldn't, you know, find the words that I wanted to say in the moment with my daughter.

And so, I decided to do what most people do when they want to learn language. I signed up for a class at the local community college and I went for about three weeks and then I gave up.

Really, you lasted three weeks?

I did. I gave up because like most new moms, I was overwhelmed. I was working part time. I had a young toddler underfoot and it just seemed like this impossible task.

And so, I dusted that dream underneath the rug, along with lots of crushed Cheerios. And it wasn't until I had my little boom boom ching of my family, my son, who's now eight. And my kids who were five that I decided I'm going to give this a try again. And if I thought I was busy before, oh my goodness. With five kids now, I was completely overwhelmed with things to do.

And so, I thought I really need to learn Spanish somehow and weave it into my busy life. Like I definitely couldn't take a course at the community college at this point. So, I decided to do what a lot of parents might think about doing. I, I went to Spanish story time at the library. I started with duolingo, you know, just started like looking up some different phrases on Google translate. And after about three months, I felt like I knew a lot. Right. I was like, yeah, I'm a, I'm a good Spanish speaker. And so, I connected with my neighbor, Wendy, who is from Mexico. And I said, can I practice Spanish with you?

And she said, oh, Adriennita, you know me, my life is so crazy busy. I can't, but I have a good friend who just moved here from Spain 10 months ago. And she's trying to learn English and she's frustrated. She doesn't have a license. So, she's at home. Maybe you could get together and maybe you could help her.

And with that, I said, all right. And I Google translated some messages to her. And I set up our first meeting. And when I knocked on that door and she opened it so excited to see me and she started to speak very fast Spanish. I realized I knew nothing.

After all that, right.

I knew nothing. I had studied so hard, but she had gauged my language abilities based upon my Google translated messages. But what bloomed out of that very awkward and embarrassing experience was a real friendship. It was a connection where I was helping her learn English. She was helping me learn Spanish and we were really just helping each other, learn the phrases we needed to use in our regular lives, in our home, when we went grocery shopping.

And so, it's through that, that we developed, Learn With Me Languages and the Habit Spanish system, because it's helping parents learn the language as they do life and really giving you connections. So, you can actually have a purpose to learn Spanish.

You know, so Adrienne, your story is not unique, you know, and, and I bet a lot of people are listening to this and they say, whoa. I had a similar experience. And in fact, in our Catholic Homeschool Community, I got a question I want to read to you because I just really want you to hear this one, Adrienne, okay. This is somebody sent this into me today, actually right before the broadcast. She says:

"Hi. I wanted to reach out and see if anybody has suggestions for a Spanish course curriculum anything. My husband and I took Spanish in school. So, we're looking for something that will help us to brush up, but also to teach our boys who are ages three and six, something with some workbook aspects fine, but you know, more audio is what we would probably use."

And this part is the part I love Adrienne. She says:

"We have new friends at our church that have just moved from Ecuador."

So, trying, you know, our boys want, they're motivated to learn, to have some conversation in Spanish with this other family. Isn't it amazing? So, it just connected me with you again today to just say, Adrienne, you need to hear this. This is what our families need. This is what they're looking for. So, you know, why don't apps work, Adrienne?

Yeah, that's a great question. And you know, I think what's interesting is that we think technology is the solution for everything nowadays, but ponder this question for a second, Paola, how did you learn your first language? Was it through an app?

No, it was through my family, my parents.

Yeah. It was just in your home of your mom speaking the language to you. And was it okay that you were making mistakes at the start? Absolutely. The pronunciation wasn't perfect for a very long time, but guess what? You speak perfect English now. Right. I think what a lot of language learning programs completely missed the boat on is that in order to learn, to speak a language, you need to have someone to speak it to, you know, with two eyes and mouth and a nose and some of the safest people to speak it to are right in your own home in that comfort, you know, parents, children, and you can have a lot of fun with it and you can weave into your busy life.

It doesn't have to be another class or another project. We show you how you can just put little pieces, really just starting with one word and then realizing how words can build around that one word. So, you can become fluent in the language and more importantly, so that you can be confident to try to reach out to that neighbor from Ecuador or to talk to that person in the grocery store.

Right? So, like you were saying, you know, when you began, you know, you thought you knew it from your apps, from your courses and this and that, but the minute you connected with a real human being, it all fell apart.

Was there like a key moment? You know what I mean? That actually started you in this friend, you know, to really speak with each other.

Yeah. Well, we sat down with each other with this sincere desire to communicate and realizing that everything that we said led to something else that we didn't know how to say. And so, we used a lot of Google translate. We used a lot of hand actions. It's really the foundation of what we teach in our habits, Spanish and our family language exchange. Just how to communicate with someone, even when you have gaps in your abilities. But I realized that we could actually build a really strong friendship, even though there were a lot of gaps. She's actually one of my best friends now, even though our conversations for a long time, didn't go very deep, but it was because we were helping each other.

And I think that's one thing that people don't realize is the magic of language learning is that when you're vulnerable, when you really try to share a few words of another person's language, it makes them feel like you are equal. It really shows that you care. And when that happens, there's a magic that you can collect gems on the duolingo. But it's really motivating when you're collecting new friends and you're helping each other.

That's, you know, and that's why I just, I knew I had to get you on this podcast because this is so exciting because it's so different from anything else. And at the heart of it is this idea of service to one another. And that, you know, in God's beautiful world, we are created to relate, and you know, languages are only like this minor, temporary barrier. So, so I hear from you the one hand you want to have that for your children, you talk about building bridges, you know, and connecting with your community. One thing you mentioned too, was this idea, and I really want to break down before, you know, for people, you mentioned two things, okay. Because I'm sure you stumbled upon it.

And now you've organized it into a really, really thorough program that works. So, there's this habit Spanish, right? That's coming up this summer, but then you also have the other program. Can you talk us a little bit about what, what the program looks like and what those two things actually, how they work?

Yes. Yes. Oh, I love that. So, in the comfort of your own home with your kids, you can develop habits, speaking Spanish together in just short phrases, things that are easy to remember, and we give you what we call memory, sticking methods, and those are things, so you don't just learn it and then you forget it, but you learn how to recall and how to tie it to experiences.

One of the best examples that I share about this is I volunteered at my daughter's preschool last week to San Marcus. And many of the students are Spanish speakers there. And one of the little kids made a block tower and she knocked it down and said, se cayó. Well, I figured that meant it fell down, right? So, I built another block tower with her. She knocked it down, said, se cayó again. And immediately that experience made those words, se cayó stick in my memory. I'll never forget what it fell down meant.

And so, we help parents have these experiences with their kids with that first short phrases, but then it builds and it gets to be more and more. And as you do that, as you communicate often in the comfort of your home, then you feel more confident speaking with native Spanish speakers. So, our habits Spanish is the foundation in your home. And then it guides you into our family language exchange. And that is where we actually have native Spanish speakers and English speakers from around the world. And we help you facilitate to build friendships together and to communicate with each other.

Oh gosh. That's so it sounds very exciting and very, you know, natural, you know, I would want to say it's like why didn't people think of that before, so it just seems, but I love how there you are, your mom who had a need and you just, you know, we're able to put that into practice. Well, here's this other thing too. That's kind of nagging at most families I hear... and, and you know, I can relate to this. Are you too old to learn a new language, Adrienne?

Well, I was over 35, so you're never too old. And certainly, with children, people will always say, well, when they're young, they're just like sponges. If I haven't captured them, then, then you know, there's no chance when they're a teenager. You know, my dad he's actually going through cancer treatments right now. And his geriatric oncologist recommended that he learns Spanish because it helps with brain connections. It helps with cognitive function for someone who's gone through those treatments, you know, he's in his late sixties. So really any age is a great age to start learning Spanish.

And you know, it was a really sweet experience. I went out to visit him and started using this habit, Spanish, you know, method with him. And within that first week, he was meeting with the neighbor from Peru, and he's lived next door to him for 10 years. Never had a very long conversation and they were out there connecting on the back porch, talking together. They'd been meeting every single week since that. And so, I just think about that. And I think, gosh, you know, if my dad who's, you know, going through cancer treatments, almost 70 years old can be a bridge builder can learn the Spanish language thing. You can too, as a parent, as a child, it is never too old.

And it's okay if it's not a full fluency, fluent, full fluency may not be the goal. That's all right. It's whatever you can. So, you can be able to reach out to the other person and really show that you care.

Yeah. Would you say now again, I know there's a lot of, you know, we're homeschooling podcasts here. Would you say by doing that, the immersion conversational method, it actually helps lay some of the groundwork for, you know, and again, like you said, you hit the point when you're really little, you know, you're not doing workbooks and grammar, you're learning by immersion, but does it lay the foundation for, you know, higher being able to write in Spanish eventually?

Absolutely. Absolutely. When you lay that foundation of learning the language of actually speaking it just as you learn to speak before you learn to read and write, that's the natural order.

So, like my kids, they're reading in Spanish, it started first with them speaking, then me reading to them. And now they're reading in Spanish and eventually we'll get to more writing, but it's, it's a journey. It's a process just like homeschooling is. And all you need to do is just take one step at a time. Just one step.

I love it because it really... it kind of like works with the dignity of the person. You know, we're taking, what's naturally our ways of learning. It's almost like, you know, people are problem solvers, so where do we connect first? And then we moved to the natural stages of learning and being able to connect with each other.

So great. So, before we wrap things up here, can you walk me through, I know that one of the things and I just a little spoiler here is that I'm going to invite you people to a webinar workshop that Adrienne, I have wrangled her into doing for us. And that's going to be in May, May 19th, but I'll be sending out notices on that. They'll also be links below on this video but tell us a little bit about this program coming up this summer, because I think that habit Spanish is so powerful. Tell me exactly how does that work again?

Yeah absolutely. Well, many parents have their summer vacations planned. They've got a busy, you know, time laid out. They'd love to do Spanish, but they don't want to add another thing to their list. They don't want to complicate the schedule. Well, Habits Spanish is going to help you learn the Spanish habits as you are doing life, which is amazing because you can really make your whole summer a language immersion experience, whether you're traveling somewhere or at home. And so, we're going to show parents this habit, Spanish method, and then we're going to give them a taste and a try as they're learning these habits of doing some of these language exchange type experiences through some live classes. So, we're really excited to bring it to parents. It's super flexible. It's done on your terms.

And I think the best part is that you get to start connecting with people and if you've ever started something and been like, well, like I did, I gave up, right. And the reason why I didn't have connection, right. But once I did, it was amazing. And you know, I would just share quickly. We have a story of a wonderful woman in Bolivia who's been a part of our family language exchange. She lost her job during COVID she language exchanged with one of our families. She tested at a higher level of English. She got a new job. And so, you want to do something as a family to make a difference either around the world or just right in your own parish or neighborhood. This is the place that you can start.

Oh my goodness. That's just so amazing. It was really beautiful. You had mentioned. So how are people going to get ahold of this? I know that if they go to their website, learnwithmelanguages.com, you already have like a nice guide for people to start already some of those habits, right?

Yeah, absolutely. It's called the Speak Spanish Everyday Guide and you can get it at learnwithmelanguages.com and we'll be diving more into it at the workshop on May 19th. I'm so excited, such a treat, but certainly if this has piqued your interest, don't wait, go to learnwithmelanguages.com, snag that free guide for you. And as soon as Paola gets the information up, get signed up for our webinar workshop. It's going to be amazing.

Okay, great. So, I will put the link. We'll have the link below this video for learnwithmelanguages.com. So, people can get the guide and get started right away. And then we'll be spreading the news about the workshop that's coming up in May, but we're recording this of course ahead of time. And I want to wish everybody cause we're releasing this podcast on May 5th, Cinco de Mayo. We did that on purpose. Yay!

So happy Cinco de Mayo to the families out there and again, our community is worldwide. We have many Spanish speaking families, you know, the ability for them to connect with each other within our own community and to perhaps begin with a unified approach, this beautiful, natural, just I really, it is a godsend Adrienne and I really, really thank you from the bottom of my heart for sharing something that has, has really been inspirational for you and has already changed lives. So, thank you Adrienne, for joining me today, I look forward to the workshop and everything more, anything parting words you want to leave us with in terms of learning a language?

Yeah. I think what I would just share is that if you have this little fear inside of you, that you can't, that maybe you've had an experience of trying to learn a language in the past and it was too hard or you felt embarrassed, just know that, you know, God is on your side, and he could help you. You know, he can really help you in this process because you can do the good work of connecting with other people and helping them feel valued when you take on this wonderful journey of learning Spanish.

Beautiful. Thank you again, Adrienne. And may God bless you all abundantly. Thank you. Bye now.