

PLAYROOM

Playroom is a weekly meeting of families who speak English at home with their children ages 0 to 6. In each session, we will sing songs, play games, and do a craft and then the children will then have time for free play amongst themselves.

Who is leading the sessions?

My name is Claire. I am a US American who has lived in Spain for 13 years. I work as a medical translator, but taught English for eight years before starting my translation business. I really enjoy teaching young kids because of their enthusiasm. I want them to have fun while practicing their mother tongue.

I have two small children; Alana is 2.5 years old and Noam is 5 months old. I was looking for English classes for Alana in Málaga but couldn't find anything suitable for her because she already understands and speaks English. However, the occasional park date with other English-speaking friends isn't going to allow her to learn much more of the language. I wanted something in between: a play-based guided session followed by free play with other children who are being raised bilingually. I reached out to María, who was enthusiastic about the idea. We've been working closely together to start these sessions in the wonderful micro – infantil. We are so excited to have Playroom in this amazing Montessori space in Málaga!

Why is this important?

Although we use English at home, language learning is not as automatic as most people think. A meta-analysis of studies on bilingual children has shown that **12% to 44% of children who use two languages at home will not speak the minority language**,¹ even though they hear it regularly. Many children may become passive bilinguals, meaning that **they understand the language but do not actively speak it**. Children from English-speaking households may also only learn “house English,” or English they need to use when living at home or visiting family, but cannot use English at a high level for studying or working.

Some families may not have put much thought into their child's language development, but rather simply speak to their child in English and assume they will be bilingual. If your goal is to have a fully bilingual child who can use English for work, travel, and school, it does require some work. The child needs to hear enough English (**quantity**) and a variety of English, meaning language you use at home, on the playground, at school, or in other settings (**quality**). In addition to good quality and quantity, **they need to need to use English** and see they cannot just get by in Spanish.

For all of these reasons, Playroom is designed to provide a weekly **English-immersion** space where our kids can use a greater variety of English in songs, games, stories, and crafts and then play with other bilingual children in English. This provides more quantity of English, more quality English, and a need to use English.

Is this right for my child?

Playroom is right for you if you **speak English at home regularly** and your child can understand the language. **Parents do not need to be native speakers of English**, but they do have to know enough of the language to use it with their children easily. If your child understands English but responds in Spanish, that's okay, Playroom is designed to activate the passive English they have.

This is not suitable for families who do not speak English at home but simply want their children to learn the language. There are many academies and classes for these children, but Playroom is not suitable for them.

The sessions are designed for **children 0 to 6 years old**. **It is perfectly okay to bring your baby**. Noam (my son) will be watching from his Baby Bjorn until he can sit up and participate.

How can we *make* our children speak in English?

¹ <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/304920327.pdf>

We cannot force a language on the children. We can create an environment where they need to use it to participate in the fun activities going on. Each session will start with songs and dance, a game, a craft, a story, and a visit from Steve the Alligator, who only speaks English. The children will be prompted to use the language in these guided activities.

During free play, we ask parents to remind their children who are using Spanish that this is an English-only space. Each parent should be responsible for their own children in this regard. If the child is using Spanish because they don't know how to say what they want to say in English, we can help them by **modeling** the sentence or **recasting** (repeating what they say in Spanish or another language in English). Finally, **all parents or caregivers in the space must use English at all times**. It is a no-Spanish zone!

Lastly, **Steve the Alligator** will help us take this English-only rule home. Each week, Steve will go home with a family, where the children can play and have adventures with him. But remember, Steve doesn't speak Spanish! You have to tell him what you're doing in English! Several experts I have consulted with have recommended a monolingual puppet for this age range as a successful way to create a need to use the language. Then, the following week, the children can tell their friends what they got up to with Steve. This does not have to be a lot of extra work for parents, just incorporate Steve into a fun game you play as a family or have him help with your child's bedtime routine. If you'd like to take photos to help your child remember what they did with Steve, feel free to send them to me and I will print them for you. Steve is also very cheeky, so watch out or he might take a bite out of you!

Remember, to keep this an English-only space: REMIND, MODEL, AND RECAST!

What about the songs?

I will send you a link to the Spotify playlist if you want to practice or do the songs at home during the week or to listen to in the car (my apologies in advance...). If you have any suggested songs, please let me know!

What about books?

Buying books in English for our children as they grow can get expensive. I have consulted with a Spanish mother who has successfully run a playgroup for Spanish children in Germany for over 10 years. She recommended creating a group for swapping English-language books and toys among participants as a way to reduce the cost of English books. It was very popular among her group. If you are interested in participating in a book swap, we can create a WhatsApp group.

What about holidays?

Holidays are an important way to pass along culture and language. We can celebrate major (and minor!) holidays from participants' home countries, such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, Pancake Day, Christmas or Hanukkah, or others. If you have a holiday in your country you'd like to celebrate, let me know!

What should I bring to Playroom?

Please bring clothes that can get messy so we're not worried about spills or stains during craft time. Please also bring a bottle of water and a snack if your child will need one. There is a bathroom, sink, and changing table available in the space.

Are there any rules for Playroom?

1. The most important rule is to only use English.
2. Please also only do the craft in the craft area and please only eat or drink in the craft area. That way, the rest of the play space remains clean.
3. Please remove your shoes and wear socks in the space to make sure we don't track dirt in from outside.
4. Lastly, in keeping with the Montessori philosophy of micro, the last five minutes of the session should be used to put away the toys we've used.