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## Ask An Expert...

**YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY MADALENA CRUZ-FERREIRA**

Have a question for our experts?  
Send it to: [editor@multilingualliving.com](mailto:editor@multilingualliving.com).

*Question: Although I'm Brazilian, I am trying to raise my seven month old baby as a bilingual child. I speak in English with him while my husband and all the country, of course, speak in Portuguese. But I'm finding myself in real big trouble because the person who helped me with my experiment has moved to an other country, and now I'm afraid of not being able to continue alone. I study English a lot but I'd like to receive your advice about what I should do, either keep studying to teach my son "good English" or give up? If I find someone else soon to help me, do you think my son will speak English even though there is so much Portuguese language around him?*

*Answer:* Let me start by saying that it is quite possible to raise a child bilingually by having one parent use a non-native language to the child. Although in the case you describe in your question, I would like to call your attention to a number of things.

First, you will need to ask yourself exactly why do you want to raise your child bilingually. Bilingualism is not an addition to everyday life, it is a necessity of everyday life. The stress here is on the words "necessity" and "everyday". People become bilingual because they have to, in order to function adequately in bilingual contexts.

Second, bilingualism is certainly not an "experiment", to use your word, that one carries out for its own sake. Your child needs you as a parent, not as a language teacher. So ask yourself also in which language do you want to nurture your child as a parent.

Third, bilingualism is a long-term commitment and your child will grow up. Ask yourself in which language you feel comfortable now, rocking him to sleep, soothing him, playing with him, feeding him, and later, discussing and telling him about the world, and listening to him tell you about his world. English may not be a good choice, if you feel, as you say, that you need to study the language in order to use it with your child. Language use in the intimacy of your home is something that comes naturally, not something you need to spend time and effort perfecting. If you choose to use Portuguese with your child and you wonder whether he will learn English in future, please don't worry. He will learn English, or any other language that he needs to learn, when he needs to learn it. Perhaps in a playgroup later on, to have fun with English-speaking children? That's what bilingualism is all about: using different languages in a natural way for different purposes.

I hope this helps, feel free to come back to me any time!

*Madalena Cruz-Ferreira is a multilingual parent, educator and linguist. She is Portuguese and she received postgraduate degrees in linguistics from the University of Manchester, UK. She is the author of Three is a crowd? Acquiring Portuguese in a trilingual environment (2006) Clevedon, Multilingual Matters ([www.multilingualliving.com](http://www.multilingualliving.com)). Her main research interests are child multilingualism, multilingual phonology and intonation, and the language of science. She has lived in Singapore for over 10 years with her Swedish husband and their three trilingual children.*

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