

Signing for Babies

A growing number of parents are teaching their baby to use sign language. Signing uses hand gestures to communicate. American Sign Language, ASL, is a language most commonly used with people who are deaf. The ASL and the *SIGNWITHyour BABY* programs help hearing babies communicate with their parents. Babies can use these hand signs before they can speak.

Baby signing is easy to use. Signing classes might be fun, but they are not necessary. Parents teach their baby hand movements for certain words. For example:

To eat or food—put your finger tips to your lips.

More—tap fingertips together.

All gone—move your hands, palm up, back and forth.

Babies as young as 6 months have been taught to sign. Usually 8 to 10 months is a good age to teach your baby to sign.

- Start with 5 or 6 words. They should be words that interest your baby.
- Show your baby a simple sign for each of these words.
- Use just one sign per sentence.
- Use what works best for you and your baby. It does not have to be a specific sign.
- Every time you use the word, show your baby the sign.
- Always use the same sign for the same word.
- Speak slowly and clearly. Repeat the word often. For example: “Do you want *more*?” – “Would you like some *more*?” – “Let’s get you



some *more*.” Make the sign for *more* each time you say the word *more*.

Experts tell parents to use signing only as a tool for their baby to tell them something. They should not expect their baby to perform “on demand.” Signing is really a language like speaking.

When teaching their baby to sign, parents should be patient and relaxed. It should be fun for both parent and baby. Use lots of praise. Teaching babies to sign has many benefits.

- Parents and baby communicate better.
- Babies may have less frustration. Even a few simple signs like *eat*, *drink* or *more* can be helpful.
- Parents and baby develop a special bond. They naturally spend more time together.
- Babies usually speak earlier. Two year olds usually know more words if they have used signing.

Experts also tell parents to teach their baby to point. Pointing to and naming an object helps a baby learn language skills. Babies learn by repeating. The more a parent names things, the more the baby learns.

Signing can be useful for babies, but it is not the only way for parents to communicate with their baby. Parents who are “in-tune” to their baby’s needs know their baby’s cry, moods, patterns and facial expressions.

Parents and babies have always used hand gestures. Saying bye-bye, (waving hands) and all gone (holding hands out palm up and moving back and forth) have been used for years. They are a natural part of our language system.

Call the Parent Help Line. We listen. We can find you help.

1-217-544-5808 or 1-888-727-5889 from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. , 7 days a week.