

Baby Sign Language

Why Teach Your Baby to Sign?

Learning to talk is hard. Babies have to have excellent motor control of the mouth, lips, and tongue, which most have not started to develop until around 15 months. Signing is much easier – as they have much better gross and fine motor control of their arms and fingers by 9-12 months. Infants as young as 6 months are able to understand and communicate their needs. A very common sign that all babies do by 9 months old is to wave “bye-bye” to parents and grandparents – and when they experience the excitement of being able to communicate, they will wave to the cashier at the grocery store, the man walking his dog down the street, and the mailman.

Research has shown there are many advantages to teaching your baby sign language – it boosts self-esteem and self-confidence, stimulates the brain, reduces temper tantrums and frustration by the child, teaches the infant how to start and carry on a conversation, and strengthens the bond between the parents and the child.



What Is Baby Sign Language (BSL)?

Baby sign language is a method of communication between the caregiver and the infant using specific hand motion and hand shapes to consistently convey a word or thought. Most of the BSL is based on standard American Sign Language (ASL), although there are a few adaptations. In addition, you can make your own adaptations to BSL or ASL– what sign you choose for a word can vary, as long as you are consistently using the same sign each time with your infant.

At What Age Should I Start Signing With My Baby?

This is totally up to you. Do not attempt before 6 months old, if you are ambitious, you may want to start introducing signs at 6 months old, however, most babies do not start signing until around 9 to 12 months old. If you start early, do not get frustrated if you do not see results early. Use the sign repetitively in front of the baby – it may take a few weeks for your infant to get the hang of it.





What signs should I start with?

You generally want to start with 4-5 simple signs of objects that interest your baby – “milk”, “dog/cat”, “more”, and “eat” are just a few. Depending on your infant’s fine motor skills, they may not be able to repeat the sign exactly, so watch closely for an interpretation of the sign. Make sure to get between your baby and the object, in direct line of sight while making eye contact, and repeat the sign 2-3 times every time you give your baby some “milk” or something to “eat”. Infants also love animals; so re-reading the same picture books with animals are excellent for getting babies to start signing.

Resources:

Online – www.babies-and-sign-language.com
www.babysigns.com

Books – Sign with your Baby by W. Joseph Garcia

Baby Sign Language Basics by Monta Z. Briant (just the right size for the diaper bag)

The Baby Signing Book by Sara Bingham

*I recommend with any books to make sure that they actually contain some pages of actual signs, and are not just theories of baby sign language.

