

Baby Sign Language – Fun for Parents and Baby

Babies can use their hands before they know words. Their ability to understand language precedes their ability to form words. Therefore, a growing number of parents choose baby sign language to communicate with their baby.

Like American Sign Language for the deaf, baby sign language uses gestures and signs. They help a baby express needs, wants and feelings - without words. Both parents and babies use these signs before the baby learns to speak.

Baby signing is an easy skill. Any parent can learn the basics without attending a class. The benefits of signing far outweigh the small amount of time and energy it takes to teach a baby signs and gestures.

Parents and babies who sign:

- Have less frustration.
- Enjoy better communication.
- Develop a special bond.

Children who use baby sign language know more words by age 2 than children who do not sign.

Parents can begin baby sign language with their newborn. However, most parents start signing around 6-9 months -



when their baby babbles and is more social. Ask your day care provider if they teach signing. You could follow the same program.

Begin signing by choosing 1-3 words you want your baby to learn. Most parents begin with eating signs for *milk, eat, more, done*.

Speak the word slowly and clearly as you show your baby the sign. Use the sign before, during and after the word or activity. Be consistent. Sign each time you use the word. Make sure your baby watches you speak and sign.

Be happy and excited as you sign with your baby. You want signing to be fun. Use lots of praise and patience. It will take time for your baby to learn to sign back.

You can teach caregivers to sign. However, it is their choice. If they show a willingness to learn to sign, make them a chart of your words and signs.

Find simple signs and gestures in books or on the Internet. American Sign Language has signs for thousands of words. You can even use your own signs. What is important is that you and your baby know what the sign means.

*Brought to you by Parent Help Line at HSHS St. John's Children's Hospital
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1-217-544-5808 or 1-888-727-5889
10 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week
www.parenthelpline.org

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