

Signing is fun!

Sign language has traditionally been used to communicate with deaf adults and children. However, there's growing evidence that hearing babies and children benefit greatly from its use too.

As a visual-gestural language it works alongside the spoken word to stimulate both the left and right sides of the brain. The meaning of the word is reinforced through hearing it (auditory), seeing the sign (visual) and, once the child is old enough, making the physical movement of the sign (kinaesthetic). This creates additional pathways in the brain to connect the word with the concept, thereby aiding learning and development.

Sign language gives meaning and understanding to spoken words. As a result, babies often learn to speak from an earlier age. Young children exposed to sign language have broader vocabularies which lay the foundations of literacy. At a later stage these same signs, together with fingerspelling (the spelling out of words on the hands), support the speedy development of children's reading, writing and spelling skills.

However, benefits can be seen even before speech develops. Toddlers who use sign language are much better

equipped to express their emotions, needs and wants. This reduces their frustration, results in less aggressive behaviour e.g. biting, hitting and tantrums, and strengthens the bond between you.

Basic signs are quick and easy to learn for both you and your child. Many signs look like the thing that they represent e.g. closing the eyes means 'sleep' and miming drinking from a cup means 'drink', whilst others have obvious links e.g. touching the lips means 'red'. If you introduce them gradually into everyday activities such as meal times then using signs as you speak will soon become a natural way for you both to communicate.

Many parents use signing to support the spoken word from birth. However, studies have shown that it's still effective even when introduced at primary school age, so it's never too late to start. And since those studies have also shown that children enjoy signing, why not have a go? Signing really is fun!

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"Toddlers who use sign language are much better equipped to express their emotions"



WOW Signing 'Love' copyright wowworldwide ©2005

How can I learn?

Online - There are many video clips from which you can learn the most useful first words for babies, for example, www.signsforsuccess.co.uk/parents.html

Books or DVDs - It's tricky to learn signs from a book alone but many are sold with a DVD.

Join a group - As baby signing gains popularity you may find that there is a class near you, or you could ask your toddler group leader to include some signing in your group time.

Family Ideas

E-family is Care for the Family's free monthly email newsletter with ideas and articles to strengthen you in your family life. Sign up for *e-family* at www.careforthefamily.org.uk/e-family or call (029) 2081 0800



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Your *Family* Charity

Care for the Family has been supporting and encouraging families in the UK since 1988. Its family-building events have been attended by over 320,000 people and many more have been helped through special initiatives - including stepfamilies, bereaved parents and those parenting alone. Founded by best-selling author and speaker Rob Parsons, the charity is committed to strengthening family life and helping those who face family difficulties.