



Let's Talk

Baby Signs and Your Child

“ My son Thomas is 10 months old. He often tries to gesture when he wants something. He cries and gets upset when I can't understand what he wants. I read that using sign language helps babies say what they want. Should I teach him signs? ” —Linda

What Are Baby Signs?

Baby signs are special gestures. The signs are taken from the sign language system used by some people with hearing loss. Signs may help babies without hearing loss “talk” even before they can say sounds or words. Even 6-month-old babies can make signs to help get what they want.

How Can Baby Signs Help My Child?

Research suggests that baby signs may:

- Help parents and caregivers know what babies want
- Lower a child's frustration at not being able to talk

Teaching your baby signs will not slow or stop your child's talking. It is one way to help your child learn to communicate. You can use signing along with talking, reading, and singing to your baby. At this time, research doesn't show that using baby signs will help your child learn to talk faster or better. If you have concerns about your child's speech and language development at any age, contact a speech-language pathologist, or SLP, for help.

How Can I Start Teaching My Baby to Sign?

You can start using signs with your baby at any time. Your child may start using signs as early as 6 months. Start with words that are a part of your child's daily life, like eat, drink, more, or bye-bye.

Some baby signs:

- Eat – bring fingers to your mouth
- Drink – act like you are bringing a cup up to your mouth
- More – touch fingertips of both hands together
- Bye-bye – waving

Fast facts

- Babies may use gestures when they want something.
- Signs are special gestures that can help babies tell you what they want.
- Baby signs can be fun but probably won't help your child talk earlier or better.

Tips for teaching baby signs:

- Always say the word when you sign. For example, say the word “more” when you make the sign for more.
- Do not make your baby use signs if he is not interested.
- Respond in a natural and positive way when your baby tries to tell you something, either using signs or by talking.

“ I decided to start using some signs when I talk to Thomas. I was surprised when he began to use signs for things that he wanted. When I showed Thomas the sign for *read*, he began to open his hands like a book when he wanted me to read to him. He learned the sign for *eat* and now points to his mouth when he’s hungry. ”

—Linda

Baby signs are a fun way to communicate with your child.

To learn more about speech and language development or to find an SLP near you who has been certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), visit www.asha.org or call 800-638-8255 or (TTY) 301-296-5650.

My SLP’s name is

Appointment

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