

Baby Sign Language

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Baby Sign, the teaching of sign language to hearing babies. Why? When? How?

I have always had an interest in sign language since knowing my deaf aunt and uncle as a little girl. I myself know a little sign for worship at church. I read about the new idea of teaching sign to hearing babies and immediately knew I would like to do that with Haley. My adopted daughter will be 1 year old on Tuesday.

I admit I did not teach sign to my 3 teenagers when they were babies. However with baby number 4 in my home and with me at age 40, there are a lot of things I do differently this time around.

Sign language for babies uses a different part of the brain than speech. Studies have shown that these babies who learn sign are less frustrated because they can express their wants and needs. It also says that these babies are actually ahead, not delayed, in speech development. Babies are able to do many signs before they can speak the words.

Our babies all do some signs without us even thinking about it. They wave Hi and bye-bye. They point to things they want. They make animal signs or sounds. Haley loves to do fish lips and blows kisses, nod yes and no. When your baby starts learning to wave it is a perfect time to begin teaching other signs.

When Haley was about 8-9 months old and could wave I started showing a few signs consistently. Milk, more, kitty, all done. I remember well the day Haley got the sign for MORE (fingers tips together in front of your chest). She has always been very verbal and clear about what she wants. That usually meant yelling at you. I was working on the computer. I had a bag of baby cookies. She would have one, then come back and scream indicating she wanted another and I gave it to her. After 5 or 6 times I thought, "Wow, I am teaching her to scream for what she wants." The next time she came I said "MORE?" and did the sign with my fingers. I repeated that for several times. Then the next time I did it with her fingers and said the word. We did that a couple times. Then she came up and did the sign the next time, without screaming. YEAH! Success! That was way too easy. I realized how quickly she got it and started showing her other signs.

I did a similar thing for nursing. Her usually way was to lay down in my lap or tug at my shirt. I taught her the sign (squeeze the hand together like milking a cow. Yah I Know LOL). I started using it with her before and during the time she nursed. At first she would reach up and do the sign while she was nursing. Now part of the time she will come up and do it to tell me she wants to nurse.

She loves animals so we are working on naming all the animals both in words and signs. Her first few attempts at kitty (fingers across the cheek like whiskers) were actually done on top of her head. Now she can get one finger across her cheek and she says the word also. For Big Bird, she does one finger on her nose instead of the beak motion with two fingers. It is not so important that babies do the signs perfectly but that you and she both understand.

I hope this article will encourage you to teach your baby a few signs too. They really think it is a great game. Give it a try.