

Early Signs



more



help



milk



all done



please

HOW TO USE SIGNS WITH YOUR CHILD

Please don't avoid using signs with your child because you are worried it will hold them back from talking verbally. It's actually the opposite! Using signs with your child in the right way can actually help encourage your child to talk and use those first words sooner. Teaching your child signs before they consistently use real words, can help reduce frustration and help them be more motivated to communicate with you! As always, please have your child evaluated if you have concerns about his speech, language, hearing. If your child is not making progress with these signs and/or with his communication, please reach out to a professional. Before you teach your child signs, please read below HOW to introduce, teach, and use them.

SAY THE WORD AND SIGN TOGETHER

It is important that as you introduce signs, you are always using the verbal production as well as the sign at the same time. This is important, because your goal is to teach the meaning of the word with the sign, but also how to say the word. Your child needs to learn the meaning of the word, see the sign, and hear the model of the word over and over. In order to do this, your child needs many many many exposures to **seeing** the sign and **hearing** the spoken word before he uses and says the sign himself.

USE SIGNS IN CONTEXT

When you are teaching your child signs, you will be modeling the signs in context for your child. You always need to be using the sign when it makes sense and during a situation your child would actually **want** or **need** to communicate whatever the sign is. You don't want to model signs randomly or out of context for your child when it's not relevant. This will make it difficult for your child to understand the meaning of the sign. Make sure you always use the sign when appropriate and when it would be meaningful and provide a **want** or a **need** for your child.

DO NOT EXPECT YOUR CHILD TO SIGN RIGHT AWAY

Make sure you aren't expecting your child to sign before he/she is ready or before your child has had a lot of exposure and modeling of the signs in context. I know you are motivated and excited to get your child to communicate, but make sure you are not withholding items until he signs, or not do whatever he is asking you to do until he signs, or you will only be creating more frustration for your child. So what should you do? Instead, just model the sign, say the word, and do whatever is expected after you model the sign. Remember - as long as your child is hearing and watching, he is learning from your model, even if he doesn't actually do the sign or say the word yet. Overtime, as you model signs over and over during everyday routines, your child will learn to do the signs. After you have modeled the sign many times for your child in context, make sure you pause and give him time to respond with the sign when appropriate. If he still doesn't do the sign, you can encourage your child (gently and playfully) by holding his hands and helping him do the sign along with you in context.

ACCEPT ANY ATTEMPT YOUR CHILD MAKES AT THE SIGN

When your child is first learning signs (just like when they first learn to talk), he might not do the sign exactly as you do. When learning to talk, your child might say words differently than the adult production at first, which is a normal part of development. Example- your child might say “poon” for ‘spoon’ when he is first learning to talk. Your child’s first attempts at the sign may not be the exact way that you produce it, and that’s ok. Your child’s attempts at signing, are your child’s attempts to communicate with you! So, accept any attempt at the sign that your child makes and remember to continue to model the sign for him so he can continue learning how to use and produce the sign in a more accurate way and closer to adult production of the sign.

These signs are great as first signs to teach your child if he is still learning to talk. There are many other signs and these are not the only recommended first signs. Please take your daily routines and your child’s wants and needs into consideration when choosing and teaching signs. You know your child best!

Most importantly, make it fun! The best time to teach signs is when your child is having fun, paying attention to what you’re doing, and is motivated to communicate. See below for ideas of how to teach and use each sign.

SIGNS

MORE

This sign is done by putting your fingers and thumbs together and touching the tips of your fingers to each other.

This is probably the number one sign I recommend parents teach first to their child. This is a great sign to introduce during mealtimes. It is a fun sign to learn, and there are a lot of ways to model and practice it! It is so motivating for your child to be able to communicate in a way that causes something to happen (he signs and then makes something happen). He signs 'more' and you give him.... more food, more playing, more tickling, more music.... There are so many fun ways to use this sign!

This is a really great sign to use during mealtimes or snack time. Model the sign at first, when your child may want more of a snack. Instead of giving him an entire bowl of cheerios, for example, try giving your child one or two at a time. Then, look at your child, get his attention and model the sign 'more' while you ask your child "Want more?" Then, give him more of the snack. Don't worry if your child doesn't do the sign at first. Over time, he will learn it if you model it consistently for him.

HELP

This sign is done by placing one hand flat and facing up, then the other hand on top of that hand in a fist, with your thumb up.

This is another great sign, and also an important one to hopefully reduce frustration for your child. If you see your child struggling to do something, before you jump right in, take a second to pause, model the sign and ask your child, "Do you need help?" as you sign the word.

If they needed help with something, they will be able to communicate that to you, rather than just crying or yelling in frustration

ALL DONE

This sign is done by holding your with your elbows bent at your side. Then, turn your palms to face you and then flip your hands over so your palms face outward.

This is another sign you can use during mealtimes. It is helpful for your child to be able to communicate to you that they are all done! This is motivating to your child to have that 'power' of communication before they can actually communicate those words. Of course, if your child is saying 'all done', but you aren't quite ready for them to be done, it's ok to say no, but please make sure you always acknowledge their communication attempts! If they want to You could say, "Oops! We're not all done yet.... First let's do _____, then you'll be all done!"

MILK

This sign is done with one hand held up in a fist. Then, you open and close your fist several times.

This can be a powerful sign for you and your child to indicate they want milk. It can be a very helpful sign for your child to learn because if your child is crying and you are not sure why, they can tell you if they are hungry by signing “milk”. Or... if they are crying you are not sure what is wrong, can say and sign to them, “Milk?” and then they can respond accordingly. This is something you would do once your child has learned the sign. Once they are consistent in using this sign, it can be very helpful, because if they are crying and not signing milk, then the crying may be for another reason.

PLEASE

This sign is done by placing one palm on your chest and moving it in a circle.

This sign can be introduced a little later, as it's not as necessary or as urgent as the other signs. Unless you are also teaching your child “I want” (which is another great sign to teach), you may end up using this as a combination of “I want and please”, which is fine. As long as you and your child know what the sign means, it can work really well for both of you!

Feel free to use this with your child before giving them something they want. Remember to model it, say it, and then give your child what he wants, until he learns it. After that, you can pause and give him time to use the sign “please” before giving them something. If he forgets, no worries! Just jump in there and model the sign, say the word, and give your child the item he wants.