



Tips for Parents: Teaching Babies Sign Language

Sign language used to be only for the deaf and hard of hearing. Now, sign language is being taught to non hearing impaired children as early as 6 months for a variety of reasons. Some of those reasons include:

- Helping children to communicate at an earlier age.
- Providing a way for children with behavior disorders to communicate even if speech is difficult.
- Giving parents the ability to teach manners and reduce temper tantrums (often due to an inability to communicate a want or need).
- Research shows that children that are taught sign language between 6 and 9 months had higher IQ's at 7-8 years than those not taught sign language.

Communication at a Young Age

Verbal communication usually starts between 12 and 19 months. Infants understand what they want as early as 9 months, but usually do not have the ability to use verbal communication at this young age. Sign language provides infants and toddlers the ability to communicate their wants and needs.

Children with Behavior Disorders

With autism on the rise, as well as other behavior disorders that effect communication sign language has been found to be the excellent means of communication. Teaching sign language in conjunction with verbal communication has been shown to accelerate a child's ability to learn to speak. Teaching two forms of communication will stimulate the language part of the brain twice as much, helping to accelerate verbal communication.

Teach Manners and Avoid Temper Tantrums

The words "please" and "thank you" are difficult words for a very young child to say. With sign language, young children can be taught simple manners such as "please" and "thank you," and later, when the child is able to verbally communicate, they will have made a habit of using those words.

Perhaps more importantly for the many parents tired of temper tantrums, sign language offers children a way to communicate what they want. Temper tantrums are most often a result of a child's inability to verbalize their wants and needs. When children know how to sign, they are better able to communicate their wants and needs at an earlier age, therefore avoiding the tantrums and showing improved behavior.

Higher IQ

Published research shows a strong connection between children being taught sign language as infants and higher IQ later in life. Children were taught baby sign language and were revisited at eight years old and given an IQ test. On average the children that had been taught sign language scored 114 points, and children that had not been taught sign language scored an average of 102 points. That is a 12 point difference by those who were taught sign language.

Tips for Parents on Teaching Infant Sign Language

- Choose a few words you believe would help your child communicate things they want most often. Example: stop, more, please, finished, eat, milk, water, stinky.
- Show the child the sign, say the word, and help the child make the sign.
- Say the word and give the sign at the same time.
- Use the sign consistently, every time you need to say the word.
- Encourage other family members to also learn the signs.

For more information:

The Handspeak.com website offers a dictionary of common words and includes videos to show you how to sign them.

Visit your local library for books and videos on baby sign language.

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