

Why and how to sign with children

Who benefits from signing?

All children! Even those with no known language difficulties can benefit from signing. However it can particularly help children who are late to start talking, those with comprehension difficulties and children who find it hard to express themselves clearly.

Why does it help?

- ◆ Signing while you talk encourages children to look at you while you are talking. This in turn helps them to see how to say different sounds and words clearly.
- ◆ Signing helps you as an adult to keep your sentences short and simple. This will help your child to understand you better.
- ◆ Signing helps you to speak more slowly.
- ◆ Being able to sign to ask for what they want reduces a child's frustration. The more they are understood, the more they will want to communicate.
- ◆ We all learn best when things are presented in a variety of ways. Signing a word to a child as well as saying it, helps them to remember words better. Then they are better able to remember them when they want to use them.
- ◆ Children who sign learn all about conversation even if they do not yet have the words. They can learn about turn-taking, asking for things, commenting and even putting words together if their signing skills become advanced enough!



Look at these websites to find out more

<http://www.makaton.org/aboutMakaton/>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/shows/something-special>

<http://www.tinytalk.co.uk/>

What signs should I use?

There are lots of signing systems. These include Makaton, Sign Supported English, Paget-Gorman Signed Speech and baby signing systems such as Tiny Talk. Makaton is probably the most widely used in the UK. However, in many ways, it doesn't matter which system you use. Just try to make sure that everyone working with your child is using the same signs!

Who should sign with a child?

It's most effective if everyone who is involved with a child signs with them. This may include parents, nursery or school staff, siblings and/or grandparents. If this seems like a daunting task, don't worry! Start small by just using a few signs yourself and gradually increase the number of signs and the people who sign with your child.

How should I introduce signing

- ◆ Introduce a few signs at a time. Start with things that your child is motivated by and wants to say. Use the signs when you are talking and hopefully your child will start to copy. This may take a while.
- ◆ If, after a while, they still aren't copying you, try putting your hands over theirs and showing them how to sign. It doesn't have to be perfect as long as it can be understood.
- ◆ When you sign, always say the word as well. If your child signs instead of speaking to begin with, that's fine. Praise the successful communication. When the pressure to be able to say words clearly has reduced, your child will almost certainly start to vocalise and experiment with saying words as well.

Which words should I start with?

Start with a few simple, motivating words that you use frequently. Here are some ideas:-

More	Go	Up	Teddy	Ball
Mummy	Daddy	Food/ Eat	Car	Drink