Using Sign Language as a Communication Tool to Enhance Learning for Preschool Children

Presented by
Mischel Powell, Early Childhood Educator
Tiny Tots Talking Hands
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

◆ Identify What - When - How Sign Language

◆ Examine the benefits of using sign language with young Children

◆ Explore strategies for choosing signs for infants & toddlers

◆ Review three categories where sign language can be used

1: Task-oriented (meet a need, transition between Activities or to accomplish daily routines).

2: Social/Emotional (to express personal emotions, to show gratitude, or to ask for help).

3: Descriptive/Conversational (to label objects, to acknowledge sounds, to emphasize spoken words and acknowledge children’s alphabet knowledge).

◆ Identify Signs of Progress

◆ Demonstrate how to use sign language as a communication tool with young children in the classroom.
What Is American Sign Language?

According to the National Association of the Deaf, ASL “is a visual language in which the shape, placement, and movement of the hands, as well as facial expressions and body movements, all play important parts in conveying informative. For over 30 years research has continued to prove that American Sign Language (ASL) is a valuable addition to an early education curriculum. It improves children’s literacy skills, enhances their sense of self-esteem and confidence, supports their ability to express emotions, and raises awareness of diversity.

Studies show that children learn through what they see, hear, and do. Incorporating ASL into your curriculum you are capturing the whole child — every child. You do not need to learn the structure of the language to incorporate ASL into your curriculum. What is important is to highlight the vocabulary you want children to know. An educator would emphasize the word that they want the child to remember. For instance, if you are asking an infant if they would like milk, you say, “Do you want MILK?” As you say milk you would also sign MILK. Then offer the milk to the child. This allows the child to start making concrete connections and builds their vocabulary.

- ASL incorporates kinesthetic, visual, and auditory learning and makes language more tangible.
- ASL supports developmental milestones and children’s developing self-esteem and problem solving skills.
- ASL is also a wonderful way to support early literacy and language development in all children.
- ASL enhances brain activity, brain functioning and fine motor coordination. It raises awareness of diversity and serves as a language bridge for children with special needs and children who are dual language learners.
- ASL supports all learning styles. When you use ASL in your curriculum you are reaching the whole child — every child — by having them hear, see, and move to express the concept or vocabulary you are teaching.
Ready – Set – Sign!

It's fine to start modeling signs the day a baby is born. However, many parents and caregivers prefer to start signing closer to the time the baby is ready to sign back. How do you know when a baby has reached that point? Answer the questions below, and if you find that two or more items apply, the baby may be ready to start signing. But remember, the more babies see caregivers and parents using signs, the faster they will learn them. Repetition is the key to learning!

• Is baby beginning to point to things?

• Is baby bringing toys or objects to you and looking for a response?

• Is baby beginning to wave “bye-bye”?

• Is baby beginning to shake his/her head for “no” or “yes”?

• Is baby beginning to take an interest in picture books?

• Even though a baby knows some words, there are still important things a baby would like to talk about but can’t.
A Bridge of Hands
Benefits of Sign Language in Preschool

1. All learning styles are supported. When you use ASL in your curriculum you are reaching the whole child — every child — by having them hear, see, and move to express the concept or vocabulary you are teaching.

2. Building communication with preverbal children. When young children’s needs are met consistently and with ease the bonding process moves along with simplicity, both with families and caregivers.

3. As a communication tool signing is an effective intervention model for developing pre-literacy skills since it is incorporated into all aspects of language development.

5. Sign language bridges communication for children with special needs and children who are dual language learners.

6. Sign language is a communication tool that bridges communication with preverbal children. When young children’s needs are met consistently and with ease the bonding process moves along with simplicity, both with families and caregivers.

7. Children’s pre-reading skills during story time, free play, and music time through the use of ASL: vocabulary development, print awareness, print motivation, letter knowledge, and narrative skills.

8. ASL is not just a language boost for our children; it is also a brain boost. A child that has the opportunity to learn ASL benefits from increased brain development. ASL supports early brain development in the areas of: communication, attention, bonding, and visual learning.
Choosing Signs for Infants & Toddlers

1. **Choose signs that match a child’s interests.** Children are more likely to learn signs for things they like and want to communicate about.

2. **Choose signs for objects, actions and describing words.** Young children love to sign about objects (nouns) like their toys, animals and food. They also enjoy signs about things they love to do (verbs), like PLAY, EAT and LOVE.

3. **Choose signs for words children can’t say yet.** Remember, a main goal of teaching signs is to help children communicate when they don’t have a way to express themselves with words. Even children who can already say quite a few words will appreciate signs for words that might still be too hard for them—like “kangaroo” or “toothbrush.”

4. **Choose signs for words a child doesn’t say clearly.** Sometimes young children use the same sound pattern to mean many things, like “ba” for bottle, ball, blanket, bath, and so on. If your child has a sign to use along with the word, his message will be much clearer!

5. **Choose signs that can help in dangerous situations.** HOT, HURT or HELP can be valuable signs for babies in distressing situations. In fact, those signs are often referred to such signs as “safety” signs.

6. **Choose signs that can prevent frustration.** Using signs like MORE, ALL DONE and SLEEP can help give babies a stronger sense of control during mealtime and bedtime routines. This sense of control helps reduce frustration for babies, caregivers and parents.

7. **Choose signs for frequently-used words.** The more often you use a sign, the easier it will be for an infant or toddler to learn it. Choosing signs from daily routines like mealtime, play time and naptime is a great way to help you and children you care for have many chances for signing adventures!
Signing Throughout the Daily Routine

Learning and using signs for each part of your daily routine (e.g., greeting time, tooth brushing, story time, outside time) provides another way to let children know what to expect in the day ahead, adding to their sense of safety and security as they anticipate and follow the day’s events.

TRANSITIONS: Transitions within the daily routine can be challenging and sometimes stressful for children and adults. Using sign language can help make other transitions – such as going from one activity to another – go more smoothly.

Remember, when using sign language in your classroom, keep it simple, make it fun, and make it meaningful. But also be sure to give the children what they need to learn the signs: consistent exposure along with opportunities to use signing throughout the daily routine.
Choosing Signs for Daily Routines

Most child development programs are organized around set routines that provide the kind of predictability that children crave. The most common are listed below. With the specific characteristics of your own program in mind, list signs that you feel would be especially useful for each one of these routines.

1. Arrival and Separation from Parents__________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

2. Circle Time______________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

3. Snack Time_______________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

4. Outside Time_____________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

5. Handwashing Time________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________

6. Small Group Time________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________
Classroom Signs

Quiet  Swing  Big  Wait
Afraid  All Done  Angry  Book
Bubbles  Clean Up  Daddy  Diaper
Drink  Eat  Fish  Gentle
Hurt  Juice  Later  Listen
Express Yourself: Social-Emotional
(To express personal emotions, to show gratitude or to ask for help)

For preschool children feeling signs are appropriate to introduce early in the school year. The signs are very expressive and easily understandable to the children. Learning ASL signs for emotions gives children another way to express themselves and can help ease conflict and frustration.

Sometimes I’m Happy
(Tune of Farmer in the Dell)

Sometimes I’m happy, sometimes I’m happy
When I feel happy I smile a smile
Sometimes I’m happy.

Sometimes I’m sad, sometimes I’m sad
When I’m sad my face looks down
Sometimes I’m sad

Note: To add verses, let the children choose different emotions and ask them how they would show this emotion. Sign the feeling as you sing the song!

BOOKS ABOUT FEELINGS

There are a variety of ways to provide children an opportunity to learn how to express their emotions appropriately. One way is to begin with a children’s book that has a lot of different feeling vocabulary. ‘Today I Feel Silly by Jamie Lee Curtis and ‘The Story of My Feelings’ by Laura Berkner are good books to read that lead to general discussion of different emotions.

SONGS ABOUT FEELINGS

‘When You’re Happy and You Know It’……..great for younger children
For older children a fun song is...‘Sometimes I’m Happy’
Classroom Signs

- Light
- Help
- Sleep
- Bubbles
- Milk
- Mommy
- More
- Outside
- Play
- Please
- Quiet
- Sad
- Share
- Sit Down
- Sleep
- Song
- Stop
- Thank You
- Wash
- Water

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Sign To Learn Letters, Sounds and Words

Sign language is quiet, multi-sensory, and engaging. It’s a tool for communication, as well as a great strategy for beginning readers. **Letters:** Introduce manual signs to help children make letter connections. Teach them the first letter in their name and use this to dismiss children.

![Signs for A, B, C](image)

**Signs and Books—A Great Partnership**

- Books provide a great source of new ideas for signs. Watching for specific things that your baby likes as you turn the pages can give you ideas about which signs might be most welcome.
- Babies love reading the same books over and over, which makes it easy to work in lots of practice with signs.

**Literacy Corner**

[GOODNIGHT MOON](image)

STARS  MOON

LIGHT  MOUSE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Related Signs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>cat, dog, fish, duck, bunny, turtle, bear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby</td>
<td>baby, Mommy, Daddy, love, diaper, milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circus</td>
<td>happy, lion, elephant, balloon, clown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Seuss Birthday</td>
<td>balloon, candle, song, happy, cake, ice cream</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>tree, flower, outside, bug, clean up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farm</td>
<td>chicken, mouse, spider, cow, pig, horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting Dressed</td>
<td>shoes, socks, hat, diaper, coat, comb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Safety</td>
<td>hot, hurt, help, wait, stop, gentle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice Cream Party</td>
<td>ice cream, eat, milk, cold, cake, all done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jungle</td>
<td>monkey, lion, tree, water, snake, hot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids at Play</td>
<td>play, slide, swing, ball, outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Mommy, Daddy, love, book, happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mealtime</td>
<td>eat, drink, more, milk, all done, bib, cereal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night Time</td>
<td>light, moon, star, book, love, sleep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocean</td>
<td>water, bubbles, fish, turtle, swim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pets</td>
<td>cat, dog, bird, fish, turtle, bunny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet</td>
<td>bed, quiet, song, listen, night, book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rainbows</td>
<td>red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring</td>
<td>flower, tree, butterfly, duck, bunny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>car, train, boat, airplane, helicopter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under the Sea</td>
<td>water, bubbles, fish, turtle, swim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vacation</td>
<td>airplane, car, play, trip, Mommy, Daddy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weather</td>
<td>rain, snow, hot, cold, sun, rainbow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“X” Marks the Spot</td>
<td>boat, water, find, “X”, look</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yummy</td>
<td>eat, drink, juice, cookie, milk, banana, yogurt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zoo</td>
<td>bear, giraffe, elephant, kangaroo, monkey, lion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# Baby Signs® Observation Log

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>Afraid</th>
<th>All Done</th>
<th>Angry</th>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Bubbles</th>
<th>Clean Up</th>
<th>Daddy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/15" alt="Angry" /></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning:</th>
<th>Using:</th>
<th>Learning:</th>
<th>Using:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/15" alt="Learning" /></td>
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<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/15" alt="Learning" /></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diaper</th>
<th>Drink</th>
<th>Eat</th>
<th>Fish</th>
<th>Gentle</th>
<th>Hurt</th>
<th>Juice</th>
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<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/15" alt="Diaper" /></td>
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<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/15" alt="Fish" /></td>
<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/15" alt="Gentle" /></td>
<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/15" alt="Hurt" /></td>
<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/15" alt="Juice" /></td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Later</th>
<th>Listen</th>
<th>Milk</th>
<th>Mommy</th>
<th>More</th>
<th>Outside</th>
<th>Play</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/15" alt="Later" /></td>
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<tr>
<th>Please</th>
<th>Quiet</th>
<th>Sad</th>
<th>Share</th>
<th>Sit Down</th>
<th>Sleep</th>
<th>Song</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stop</th>
<th>Thank You</th>
<th>Wash</th>
<th>Water</th>
<th>Notes:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/15" alt="Stop" /></td>
<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/15" alt="Thank You" /></td>
<td><img src="https://via.placeholder.com/15" alt="Wash" /></td>
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Steps the child in your care will take in the journey from the sign to word:

- Uses word only
- Uses word with sign
- Uses sign spontaneously
- Uses sign when asked
- Imitates the sign
- Shows understanding of sign
- Watches teachers' hands
BABY SIGNS in BILINGUAL SETTINGS

By Linda Easton-Waller, MA Linguistics

Q: I want to encourage my baby to use signs. However, we are already using two spoken languages in our home. Will my baby get confused if we add signs to the mix?

When children first start learning about language, they make one-to-one correspondences between words and the objects (or actions) they represent. For example, a baby in an English-only environment makes the connection,

the white stuff in my bottle = 'milk'

However, babies in bilingual environments will have two labels from which to choose. For example, infants from a Spanish/English setting can use either 'milk' or 'leche.' However, because of their developmental need to establish a one-to-one correspondence, these babies will initially choose either 'milk' OR 'leche,' but usually not both – at least not at first.

the white stuff in my bottle = 'milk' OR 'leche'

As babies grow into toddlers and acquire larger vocabularies, they start to figure out that there can be two totally different words that share the same meaning. In other words, through exposure to both languages, children eventually conclude that

'milk' = 'leche'

So in addition to learning what words mean, bilingual babies are doing the work of separating out the words, assigning each one to a particular language set (Spanish or English), and then linking the meanings of the corresponding words to each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'leche'</td>
<td>'milk'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'mas'</td>
<td>'more'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'libro'</td>
<td>'book'</td>
</tr>
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</table>

This process can take a while, especially if a child is hearing a mixture of English and Spanish words within the same sentence. Research shows that there are many, many advantages to learning two languages, but it is important to understand that bilingual babies have a lot of figuring out to do – even before they start talking!

This is where using signs can help. By giving infants the same visual symbol (sign) for both 'leche' and 'milk,' you make the job of connecting the object with the meanings of both words MUCH easier for babies. When the baby hears the Spanish word “leche” and sees it paired with the same sign used when he hears the English word “milk,” the result is “Aha! These words mean the same thing!” Simply put, the sign speeds up recognition of the equivalence between the two words. Result? Less confusion and easier learning!

= 'leche' = 'milk'

Rather than confusing your bilingual child, Baby Signs will help smooth the road to understanding and speaking both languages.

3 Baby Signs Inc. www.babysigns.com