

Signing in your Infant / Toddler Program



Introduction

Using some simple signs while speaking with infants and toddlers, starting as young as 6-8 months, is an excellent way to enable them to communicate before they can speak. Whether they ask for food when they're hungry, tell you when they need their diaper changed, or simply identify objects in their environment, preverbal children love to participate in communication. Our SIGN *with your* BABY® Complete Learning Kit is the best resource to help you get started using American Sign Language signs with your preverbal children (The UK version of the Complete Learning Kit features the use of British Sign Language.) Some ideas for using signs successfully in a childcare environment are provided below.

Getting Started

To maximize the benefits of this program, please review and have each staff member review the entire SIGN *with your* BABY® Complete Learning Kit. The book and video each take about an hour to review and offer important information that will provide a strong and common foundation from which all staff members can operate. Post the Quick Reference Guide in a convenient location to which all staff members have easy access. This guide can also be used to provide a quick overview of the most used signs for part-time help, parents, or substitute teachers.

Signing in Daily Interactions

We recommend that you don't "teach" signing to your children! Simply incorporate the use of signs into your normal daily activities. It's best to start by introducing a few simple signs like, "Eat," "More," and "Finished" at mealtimes. "More" and "Finished" can easily be combined with other signs and used in a variety of contexts: "More Play," "More Dancing," "More Book," "Play Finished," "Dancing Finished," "Book Finished".

When you see children struggling with an activity, show the sign for "help" while asking them if they want help, and before providing assistance. Use it whenever you offer them help: assembling a puzzle, tying their shoes, or putting a toy back on its shelf.

When tension arises between preverbal toddlers, suggest they use signs like "Stop," rather than pushing, screaming or biting.

You can say, "Use your signs" just as you would direct verbal children to, "Use your words".

Model the behavior you want to see from the children. Don't expect them to sign just because you suggest it. Repetition is the key to this program. Your children need to see the signs used regularly and consistently by adults before they will want to try signing themselves.

Create games, songs or stories that use signs. Make these activities fun for children, so they will want to participate. Make them part of daily activities, like circle time. Check the Sign2Me® Web site (www.sign2me.com) for more information about our Pick Me Up! Music CD and Activity Guide, which will provide you with an ASL music curriculum.

Be patient and never show disappointment or frustration if a child does not produce a sign. All children are different and need to be treated according to their own learning styles, timetables and behaviors.

Involving Parents and Families

Explain to parents the signs you've introduced so they know what to look for and how to respond at home. Provide information as to where parents can buy copies of the SIGN *with your* BABY® Complete Learning Kit. Offer them a brochure, the www.sign2me.com web site or other resources so they can decide if they wish to use this method at home. If parents don't wish to buy these items, offer to loan copies of the video and book to them so that all caregivers for each child will be responsive to their child's efforts to communicate.

Bring up the topic at parent meetings and explain the benefits of using signs both in the classroom and at home. Use anecdotes from experiences at your facility. If signing is new to your program, draw from the stories of others, like the Infant /Toddler pre-school at Ohio State University where they are conducting ongoing studies of the efficacy of using signs with preverbal children.

Web Link: www.newswise.com/articles/1999/1/SIGNLANG.OSU.html