

## Speech and Language Therapy

### Top Tips for Using Signing

Signing can be used to help people understand spoken language as the signs provide extra clues. Signing can also be used to help people who have problems speaking e.g. making sentences or producing the necessary sounds. Signing can also be used for people with learning difficulties in order to give them a basic means of communication.

It can be easier for people to learn signs rather than spoken words for various reasons:

- ✓ They are often better able to cope with 'looking' tasks than 'listening and saying' tasks.
- ✓ It is far easier to help someone move and shape their hands than their tongue/mouth.
- ✓ Often, they already use their hands to communicate and explore e.g. touching, grasping, pushing away.
- ✓ Some signs have a direct link to the word they represent (e.g. 'drink' and 'house') and therefore may be easier to learn than words.

#### Signing and Speech

There is no evidence from research that a person who learns to sign gives up on speech. Generally, using signs improves vocalisation and speech. The person often feels less pressured and his/her first attempts at speech can be understood as they are backed up by signs.

#### Rules for Signing

- ✓ Always use normal speech at the same time as the signs.

- ✓ Only sign the key words in a sentence, e.g. "what do you want to eat?"
- ✓ Use appropriate facial expression.
- ✓ Always use your preferred hand for signing. Be consistent.
- ✓ The signs should be used whenever the person is present so that they are seen as acceptable.
- ✓ Introduce a few signs at a time for words you will use regularly with your child, and which are interesting for him/her. Some ideas for signs to use are enclosed, and activities for introducing them are described below.

### Activity ideas for using early signs

1. Play games where the child has to request "more" e.g. getting a brick to add to a tower, blowing bubbles etc. Between each turn pause, giving the child the chance to request continuation of the activity (e.g. by looking at you, reaching, making a noise etc.). Then say "you want more!" and sign "more."

2. At snack-time model some of the important words. You could try 2 or 3 of the following: apple, orange, banana, biscuit, juice, water, milk. Say the word and use the sign as you give the food or drink to the child.



Once the child is familiar with the signs, offer him/her a choice. E.g. "do you want apple (sign) or biscuit (sign)" Reward any of the child's attempts to make the sign, and model back to him/her the word and sign e.g. "you want apple (sign)."

3. Take it in turns to roll a ball between you and the child. Each time just before you roll the ball to the child say "ball" and use the sign.



4. Create a feely bag of a few toys which readily lend themselves to signing, e.g. car, ball, book, cup, teddy. Encourage the child to feel inside the bag and bring out a toy. As he/she does so say the name of the toy and use the sign. When all the toys are out, say the name and use the sign for each toy and see if the child can find it

and put it back in the bag. If not, show the child and model the word and sign again.



5. Hide animal toys around the room, and see if your child can find them and put them in a toy barn / field. As he/she finds each one say the name and use the sign. Once you have done the activity, ask your child to help you put them away, e.g. "where's the pig (sign)?" If this is too difficult for him/her show the child the right animal and model the word and sign again.

6. Play "stop and go" games, e.g. with wind-up toys, cars etc. Each time you release the toy say and sign "go!" and then as the toy comes to a standstill say and sign "stop!"



#### Further information:

[www.makaton.org](http://www.makaton.org) the online shop has some free resources

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/somethingspecial/> : This site has clips and pictures of some signs