

# Parenting Together

VOLUME 6, ISSUE 3

March 2020

## *A Look into Baby Sign Language*

Baby sign language—a specialized sign language used to communicate with preverbal infants and toddlers—has become increasingly popular over the last few decades. Signs can help very young children express their needs & wishes earlier than they could otherwise. Baby signing experts believe that frustration and tantrums can be reduced by closing the gap between desire to communicate & the ability to do so.

Around 6 to 7 months, if babies are exposed to signs regularly and consistently, they can begin to learn basic signs, which cover such objects and concepts such as “thirsty,” “milk,” “water,” “hungry,” “sleepy,” “pacifier,” “more,” “hot,” “cold,” and others.

**Some of the benefits babies and toddler may gain from learning sign language are:**

### **Eliminate frustration**

Babies and toddlers may throw tantrums, cry, or fuss out of frustration. It isn't that they don't know what they want, but usually they simply can't communicate what they want. A lot of frustration is eliminated with baby sign language. Young children begin to have the ability to communicate their needs, wants, and even feelings to you in a way that you can understand. It also eliminates frustration



on your part as you can stop playing the “What do you want?” game. “This, this, or this?” You can more easily find out what your child is trying to ask about.

### **Promotes language skills**

Children have the ability to start understanding language and how it works before they actually have the physical ability to say what they are thinking. Sign language promotes this development by giving the baby/toddler something to work with and a way to practice language.

### **Develops understanding of emotions**

When children can start to identify what they need, want, and how they are feeling, they have come a long way. This is something that can help toddlers work towards identifying their feelings and emotions more accurately and more often.

### **Creates feelings of satisfaction & accomplishment**

We have all seen when a baby or toddler feels proud of themselves. This is something that happens a lot when a child does something new – like learning new words and new signs. Children have a great sense of pride when they are able to successfully communicate their wants and needs.

The ability to communicate is one of the greatest benefits baby sign language offers; both to children and parents/caregivers alike. It works a lot toward eliminating frustration and even guesswork. This makes it easier to work with your child and to have a happy and healthy relationship with them.



**Oregon State  
University**

# Myth Busters

There are many myths surrounding baby and child sign language and there are a couple, specifically that we should clarify:

## Teaching a baby sign language will delay speech

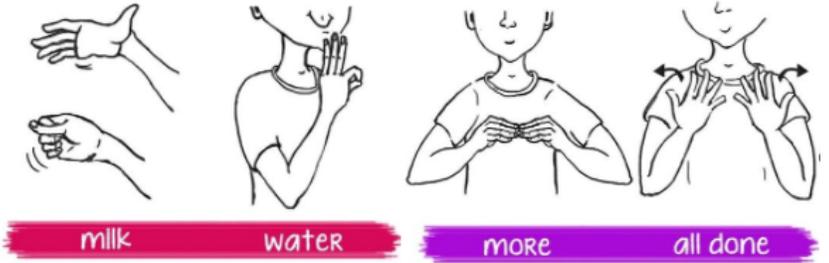
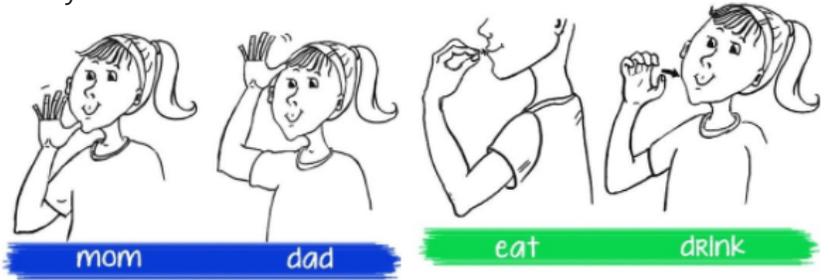
This is often a concern that surrounds teaching children signs. However, research (and experience) has shown that babies who learn sign may actually speak sooner than their peers. Signs can also be used to help provide a non-verbal child with a way to communicate. We know both of these things to be true because children enjoy communicating, love being understood, and they learn that they can accomplish these things with signs.

## Young babies can't learn sign language

Many people believed that it isn't possible to teach young children signs. After all, how could a baby who is only six or seven months communicate effectively? Well, the truth is that with exposure, many babies, even very young babies can make very simple signs. Most advocates of baby sign language suggest starting to show children signs by using them yourself at about four to six months of age. However, you can start earlier or later in their life. It is never too early or too late to start signing with your baby or toddler.

## All in All

Baby sign language has a lot to offer, but at the same time, it can take a lot of work. If you have the time, patience, and discipline needed, signs can be a wonderful tool for you and your child. Signs can be fun to learn with your child as you watch them grow, usually with great excitement, in their skills. It will take work and it will take patience. Just remember to take it slow and enjoy time with your baby (which is much more important than getting your baby to sign!). Baby and toddler sign language should be fun for both of you and there are a multitude of resources at your disposal to help you teach your children.



## The Book Nook

*Family and Friends /  
Familia y amigos*  
By Kathleen Petelinski

*Baby Signs*  
by Joy Allen

*My First Signs*  
by Annie Kubler

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For your local parenting  
resources visit us at:

[orparenting.org](http://orparenting.org)

## References

How Can I Practice Baby Sign Language?

<https://pathways.org/how-can-i-practice-baby-sign-language/>

Is baby sign language worthwhile?

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/infant-and-toddler-health/expert-answers/baby-sign-language/faq-20057980>

Teaching Your Baby Sign Language Can Benefit Both of You

<https://psychcentral.com/lib/teaching-your-baby-sign-language-can-benefit-both-of-you/>