

# Every Child a Talker Every Adult Involved

## Using sign language with babies and young children

Many Early Years practitioners and parents are taking an interest in using sign language with babies and young children. Not because the children have a hearing impairment, but because it can have big benefits for communication between children and adults.

Signing is very popular: most young children who watch BBC CBeebies will know about signing, because they watch *Something Special*. The programme was originally designed for young children with learning needs, and features a clown called Mister Tumble, who uses the MAKATON signing system. The programme is a huge hit with children, and many will be aware that using their hands to make signs that can help communication.

How can signing help children? There are several organisations in the UK that promote signing with babies and young children. They use British Sign Language, (which is also the language used by many deaf people). Their reasons for using signing are summed up below:

- Signing provides your baby with the ability to communicate his wants, needs and observations before he can talk.
- Signing eases frustration for both you and your baby, reduces the number and duration of tantrums and offers you a new insight into your baby's world.
- Signing strengthens the bond between you and your baby, increasing self-confidence for both of you.
- Signing accelerates your baby's language development, so that when he or she begins to speak, the content is more sophisticated.

Some organisations claim that signing with young children can increase intellectual development.

Whether this is the case or not, parents, practitioners and children can get a huge amount of pleasure from signing together. Surely anything we do that strengthens the bond between children and their parents through improved communication will make children more confident and happy: and isn't this the foundation for all learning?

There are benefits for older children too. 'Sing and Sign' is very popular with babies and older pre-schoolers, where children learn to use signs by signing as they sing popular songs.

Practitioners have commented that using signing helps in many ways: "It makes us more aware of how we communicate with children: when you sign you slow down how fast you talk, and children can literally see what you are talking about. This can be very helpful for children learning English as an additional language, or if they have special needs."

Do you need to learn hundreds of signs and go on lots of specialist training courses? No, but it is important to have some training and be prepared to learn basic signs, and to keep learning! To find out more visit [www.signingbabies.co.uk](http://www.signingbabies.co.uk) and [www.singandsign.com](http://www.singandsign.com)



**Children and Learning**