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**Signing With Your Baby**

**By Monica Beyer**

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A conversation between my 18-month-old son and I is one that a passerby isn't likely to forget.

There have been countless meals at restaurants where my family has been the subject of curious glances, stares and even questions from perfect strangers.

And best of all, he can tell my husband and me that he needs a drink of milk, is scared of the thunder or wants down from his high chair, all without making a sound.

This seeming miracle of communication was made possible by American Sign Language, the primary means of communication used for hearing impaired individuals. With the help of Dr. Joseph Garcia's book and video Sign With Your Baby, I was able to integrate sign language into my son's life and use it as a means of communication, starting when he was 11 months old.

Through my 18 months of sign language experience, I've learned exactly what works and what may not. Here are a few hints to get parents started signing with their infants:

1. Choose a sign (or signs) to begin with. Many parents choose milk, more, eat, drink or a favorite toy.
2. Show your child the sign (or signs) during an activity (for example, during nursing, if you choose to begin with milk, or before dinner, if you choose to begin with eat).
3. Use the sign(s) before or during the activity, and show your baby the sign every time you do the activity.
4. Use your chosen sign(s) until your baby begins to sign back to you, then choose another sign and start the process over again. The more signs your baby knows, the easier it will be for him or her to pick them up.

## Signing With Your Baby

Some parents have started signing from birth, but the parents I've talked to have reported success from six or seven months. It usually takes some time before a child begins to sign back to you. You will probably notice that he or she recognizes and understands the sign before attempting to sign it. For example, I started signing when my son was 11 months old and he first signed back to me five weeks later.

There are many resources online and sign language dictionaries in the local library, as well as books specific to this subject.

The key to success is to be consistent, show a smile, applaud your child's efforts and be patient. Someday, you will be attracting attention at the mall, too! And you will know so much more about what is going on in your baby's head, and your bond will be that much closer.

Good luck!

Monica Beyer is the mother of two sons and has been signing with her younger son for over 1 year. Visit her website at <http://www.signingbaby.com> or email her at [monica@signingbaby.com](mailto:monica@signingbaby.com)

### **Signing With Your Baby: Helpful Hints**

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#### **Signing With Your Baby: Helpful Hints by Monica Beyer**

While there aren't any solid rules regarding signing with your baby, I've had enough experience signing with my own child that I can pass along some helpful hints.

Be consistent. Use the sign the same way every time for the same action or object. This will help your baby become familiar with the sign and she will be able to sign it back to you sooner.

Be happy. Frowning and bored voices will not make a baby eager to sign.

Be open to interpretation. Babies will not always make a sign correctly the first time they sign it, just like they won't speak a word correctly the first time they speak it. Keep signing the word the correct way and your baby will soon grow more accurate.

Be open to suggestion. Sometimes a baby will create a sign for herself. Feel free to continue using it, and applaud her creativity.

Be praising. Act excited when the baby uses a sign correctly, and let your baby know how wonderful you think he is.

Be expressive. Use your face and body in addition to your hands. You can also say the word as you sign it.

## Signing With Your Baby

Be patient. Babies can take weeks or even months before they make their first sign.

Most importantly, don't think of signing as a skill that has to be mastered. Instead, think of it as what it is intended to be – a bridge of communication before your baby can talk!

Monica Beyer is the mother of two sons and has been signing with her younger son for over 1 year. Visit her website at <http://www.signingbaby.com> or email her at [monica@signingbaby.com](mailto:monica@signingbaby.com)



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