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Signing With Your Baby: Opportunities for Signing

By Monica Beyer

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Once you've been signing with your baby for several weeks or months and your baby has mastered the basic signs that cover his or her needs (such as milk, more, eat, drink, etc.), you will probably want to expand his or her signing vocabulary (as well as your own).

The world around you and your child award you with countless opportunities to do just this. You can teach your baby a sign that has significance to almost any situation you may find yourselves in.

Family members are a great way to start expanding your child's vocabulary. Starting with "mother" and "father" plus any siblings is a good way to begin, and you can create name signs for family members. One good suggestion I've heard from parents is to use the first letter of the person's name in a way that reminds you of that person. Say Aunt Samantha is a nurse – you could use the letter "s" on the wrist to combine the first letter of her name with her occupation.

Holidays and events are also interesting ways to spice up the signing activities. Think of objects you baby may see around your house that he or she may not be too sure of. For example, during Christmas, Corbin learned the signs for "Santa," "tree," "lights," and "party." It's also a good way to introduce your child to your culture and/or religion.

The natural world offers many things to learn about. Take a walk and teach your baby the signs for the animals he or she sees and signs for "flower" or "tree," "sky" or "clouds." Night time is a good opportunity to show your baby the sign for "moon," "bed," or "sleep." Take advantage of your daily routine to add signs to your baby's growing vocabulary.

Books are a great source of inspiration for us. We have books of all kinds, and the ones Corbin likes to sign with the best are the animal books. Babies love animals and this is a great way to introduce animal signs.

Television may not be the best activity for your baby or child, but when you do watch TV together make the most out of it by signing the things your baby sees on the screen. This way the TV becomes an

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interactive learning tool for your child.

All you, as a parent, have to do is recognize good opportunities for signing and act upon them when they present themselves. If you use ASL, look up signs beforehand and be ready to use them when the opportunity arises, and if you make up your signs, it's as easy as using a little creativity. 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

Signing With Your Baby: Helpful Hints

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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.

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!

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