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Signing With Your Baby: What is Involved?

By Monica Beyer

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Some parents may be hesitant to begin signing with their baby even after hearing all of the wonderful benefits that come from signing with your baby. After all, sign language takes years to learn, doesn't it?

Not at all! Learning to sign with your baby is as easy as reading a recipe.

Teaching sign language isn't a time-consuming chore. Rather, it can be worked into your life as a natural part of communication with your child as well as the rest of your family. Think of it as an extension of speech, and you talk to your baby every day.

You can start as early as six months of age. Remember, though, that babies can take weeks or even months before making their first sign.

No prior knowledge of sign language is required. Many parents learn right along with their children, and it is even possible to make up signs that make sense to you and your baby, rather than worrying about finding and using the "correct" sign.

There are many resources available through the internet as well as your local library. There are also books available that deal specifically with this topic.

Simply choose a sign to begin with and use it when you have your baby's complete attention. For example, use the sign for "milk" before nursing or giving a bottle. Use it consistently, and soon your baby will begin to imitate you.

Most importantly, have fun! Encourage others to join in. Make it a family affair. Make it a game, rather than a burden.

Remember these helpful hints and soon you will be a pro at signing.

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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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