



The Research Behind BABY SIGNS

The decision to recommend Baby Signs to families and child care providers is based on the results of two decades of carefully crafted research studies by **Linda Acredolo, Ph.D. and Susan Goodwyn, Ph.D.** from the University of California, Davis, including a long-term study of eleven-month-old babies funded by the National Institutes of Health. Here are highlights from this study:

- **Participants:** The participants included 103 families, thirty-two of whom were asked to encourage their babies to use Baby Signs, and seventy-one who were not. The groups were equivalent at the beginning of the study in terms of the following characteristics: sex, parents' education, income, birth order, verbal vocabulary, and tendency to vocalize.
- **Assessments:** Children were assessed using standardized language measures at 11, 15, 19, 24, 30, and 36 months. In addition, as many children as could be relocated were assessed at age 8 using the WISC-III IQ test.
- **Results:** Comparisons of the Baby Signers with the main group of non-Baby Signers consistently indicated that the Baby Signing experience was helping children learn to talk sooner. Examples:
 - **24 months:** The Baby Signers on average were talking like 27 ½ month olds, representing more than a three month advantage over the non-Baby Signers. In addition, the Baby Signers were putting together significantly longer sentences.
 - **36 months:** The Baby Signers on average were talking like 47 month olds, representing an almost five month advantage over the non-Baby Signers.
 - **Age 8:** The Baby Signers scored significantly higher (Mean IQ = 114, 75th percentile) on the WISC-III IQ test than the non-Baby Signers (Mean IQ = 102, 53rd percentile).

Conclusion: Using Baby Signs helps children develop both language and cognitive skills.

For more information, visit: www.babysigns.com



The Benefits of BABY SIGNS in Child Care

Benefits for Children

- **Builds a Bridge Between Languages:** ESL children adjust more easily to a second language environment having a form of communication used by everyone in the classroom.
- **Encourages Problem Solving:** Children gain positive conflict resolution skills by using communication to express themselves rather than acting out.
- **Reduces Frustration:** Infants are active in getting their own needs met and can communicate what they need; infants' needs are met more quickly and accurately reducing frustration for both children and caregivers.
- **Aids Emotional Development:** Baby Signs provide infants with more coping tools, allow children to tell their caregivers how they feel, and let children learn about and display empathy by talking about the feelings of other children.
- **Increases "Active" Learning:** Children use signs to observe and label, compare and contrast the objects and experiences in their environment. Children engage caregivers in their observations, providing more opportunities for joint attention.
- **Allows Communication Between Babies:** Preverbal infants can communicate with one another through signs. Toddlers who "lose their words" when frustrated rely on gestures to express themselves to one another.
- **Makes "Circle Time" More Fun:** Children actively participate in Circle Time by signing during songs and making clear requests for their favorites.

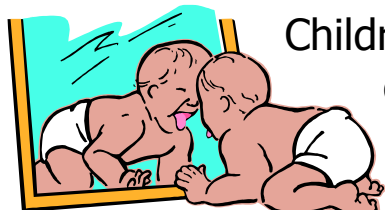
Benefits for Caregivers

- **Builds knowledge of infant development:** Caregivers understand infant behavior as infants display their learning processes through signs.
- **Increases respect for infants:** Caregivers gain respect for infants' amazing capacities as they begin to see into infants' inner worlds.
- **Speeds up knowledge of individual children:** Caregivers get to know children individually as infants communicate their own needs and thoughts.
- **Helps caregivers to follow the child's lead:** Caregivers can follow the child's lead as children draw caregivers' attention to their own interests.
- **Promotes observational skills:** Caregivers look more closely at children's behavior because they expect behavior to be meaningful.
- **Increases caregiver sensitivity:** Baby Signs help caregivers slow down to the child's pace in one-to-one interactions. Caregivers become more sensitive and responsive to infants as they observe infants' body language.
- **Increases positive interactions between children and caregivers:** Interactions which include Baby Signs are more likely to include smiles because children feel understood and communication is rewarding.

- **Promotes family-staff teamwork:** Parents and caregivers have a lot to talk about when sharing Baby Signing stories!



Using **BABY SIGNS** in your Child Care Center **Baby Sign Principles:**



Children learn Baby Signs by watching us use them consistently. Children learn best when we talk to them about things that we notice *they* are interested in.

Baby Signs are an opportunity to communicate to a child about daily routines and transitions such as saying "good bye" to mom or dad, going outside, nap time, or snack time.



Baby Signs are an opportunity to give a child warning about upcoming activities such as diapering, washing up, cleaning up, or getting noses wiped.

Baby Signs are an opportunity to clarify what the child needs or wants – in daily routines, or in conflict situations – instead of having to guess what the child is feeling.



Baby Signs are facilitated when we are at the same physical level as the child.



Most Helpful BABY SIGNS for Infants and their Caregivers

Talking about animals often a fun way to start using baby signs because it gets the children's interest quickly. The animals most likely to be seen around a child care center are birds (outside) or fish (inside). But there are signs for almost any animal that might capture a child's interest during storytime or songs, or from a picture on the wall.

- **Bird:** Flap arms.
- **Fish:** Smacking puckered lips or Swim hands away from body.*
- Any other animals represented in the classroom or seen outside: See Baby Signs by Acredolo & Goodwyn, or make up your own.

Songs & Games

Children and adults learn signs easily when they are associated with a song or game. After learning them in the song, children often generalize them and use them in different contexts. Some popular song-associated signs are:

- **Spider:** Index fingers together, twisting back & forth.
- **Star:** Wiggle fingers up high.
- **Where?:** Move palms up and out.*

Learning about Feelings

Even very young children are capable of learning about and talking about feelings, both their own and those of other children. "Sad", "Mad", and "Hurt" signs can be used to help children distinguish between emotions. "See" and "hear" can be used to talk to a child about the emotions they feel, or about the emotions they may be seeing on another child. "Mom" and "Dad" are also important signs for children when it comes to talking about the reasons they might be sad.

- **Sad/Cry:** Finger tracing tear down cheek.*
- **Mad:** Clench fists near chest, scowl.
- **Hurt:** Hand on chest circling, OR touch index fingers together.*
- **Gentle:** One hand strokes back of other hand gently.
- **Mom & Dad:** Some children use "mom" and "dad" signs separately; others combine them into one sign.
 - **Dad:** Tap thumb on forehead with fingers spread apart.*
 - **Mom:** Tap thumb on cheek, fingers spread apart.*
- **See:** Index finger moves from eye outward.
- **Hear:** Index finger to ear.

*** Indicates Baby Signs that are also ASL signs.**

Most Helpful BABY SIGNS for Infants and their Caregivers , continued

Learning to Wait

Particularly for toddlers, signs that use time concepts can help children learn to wait if it's necessary in the childcare routines. Toddlers can use "Stop" to tell another child that they are not ready to give up a toy. "Later" and "wait" can be used to help children wait for snack, for playtime, or for Mom and Dad to come. Finding a specific point in time that occurs every day, such as "Circle Time", when Mom or Dad return for them can reassure children that their environment is stable, and that their parents will come for them at the end of the daily routine.

- **Stop:** Shove palm forward OR use side of hand to hit palm sharply.*
- **Later:** Right thumb in palm of left with fingers open, twisting right hand forward.
- **Wait:** Tap closed fists together.
- Specific time references such as "Popsicle Time" or "Circle Time" at the end of the day.

Participating in Routines

Both infants and toddlers can begin to participate in daily routines. Having signs helps them feel included and gives them a way to let caregivers know what they need.

- **Washing:** Rub palm of one hand over back of other, alternating.
- **Diaper/Diaper Change:** Pat hip.
- **Cold:** Arms close to body, shivering.*
- **Sleep/Naptime:** Rest head on hands.*

Making Requests

By far the most popular signs are those used at snack time! But, other requests are also common, such as "play" and "outside."

- **Snack/Eat/Hungry:** Place fingertips to lips.*
- **More:** Tap palm with fingertips OR tap fingertips together.*
- **All Gone/Done:** With palms down, move hands back and forth.
- **Play:** With thumb and little fingers up, twist hand.*
- **Outside:** Turn pretend doorknob.

REMEMBER: You *and the children* can invent new signs that make sense for your classroom!

Have Fun! It's all about the joy of Communication.



BABY SIGNS:

How to Talk with Your Baby Before Your Baby Can Talk

*From the book by Linda Acredolo and Susan Goodwyn

Did you ever notice how easy babies learn how to wave “bye bye” and shake their heads for “no” or nod for “yes”? Eventually babies learn to speak, but in the meantime these simple gestures help them to communicate quite effectively, even months before they can use spoken words. Most parents usually stop right there, never realizing their baby’s potential for learning other gestures to communicate. What kinds of signs can babies learn? Here are just a few examples:



Drink, eat, more, all done, hot, diaper, book, dog, fish, flower, bird, hat, kitty, car, airplane, ... and many more that families and children use together. Just about anything that a child is interested in can be made into a sign. These gestures that you can teach your child—what we call “Baby Signs”—give your child

more tools than just pointing, crying, or an urgent “Uh uh uh” to get a message across. With Baby Signs, your child can enjoy interactions with you that otherwise would have to wait until s/he could talk.

How do I start using Baby Signs with my baby?

Teaching babies how to use Baby Signs can be simple task. As you show the motion to your child, you also say the word so that they understand that both the gesture and the word mean the same thing. Here are a few tips on getting started:



- **Start with just a few signs.** At the beginning, it’s easier to remember to model the signs you’ve chosen if there aren’t too many.
- **Choose signs that will be important to your**



baby. We all remember better the things that we care about. For example, a pet in the family makes that type of animal a great choice.



- **Repetition is the key to success.** Just as any type of learning, the more exposure, the better. Keep your eyes open for opportunities to use the signs you're working on—with books, with TV, on family outings, and during normal daily routines such as meal-time.



- **Model the word along with the sign.** It's both natural and useful to pair word and sign. Doing this gives your baby the choice of what to use and speeds the transition to speech.

- **Choose simple physical motions.** If you try a sign other than those we've suggested, make sure you choose an action your baby can easily do.

- **Watch your baby.**

Watch for signs that your baby might make up herself. Once you figure out what she means, use them with her on a regular basis. This will let her know that you are paying attention to her.

- **Relax and have fun!** Remember, Baby Signs are just an extension of what babies and parents do naturally.



When should I start?

Children can use signs as young as 10 months, but not all babies learn at the same time. A good sign that your baby is ready to start learning Baby Signs is when he begins to wave "bye bye."



A common concern about Baby Signs.

Many parents ask, "Won't the use of Baby Signs

keep babies from learning the vocal words?" The answer to this question, based on 10 years of research with hundreds of babies, is a definite NO. In fact, it has just the opposite effect. Baby

Signs provides babies with the kind of interactions that helps to encourage language development, not slow it down.

Have fun talking with your baby!

Remember, Baby Signs are a natural form of communication, relax and have fun with your child.