

Sign language for hearing children

How can sign language help a child who can hear?

Communication begins before your child speaks his or her first word. Making eye contact, gesturing, making sounds, and pointing are some of the ways that children can tell you what they want and need. When shown simple sign language, children often can communicate basic wants and needs earlier than they could using words. Then, as spoken language develops, sign language usually decreases.

Children need a way to communicate to control their environment and to ease frustration. They need to make choices and have some power in order to develop independence. Some children who are not developing speech at the expected rate will express frustration non-verbally before they learn to use the appropriate words. Sign language can give children more opportunities to make choices and control their environment.

Will sign language discourage learning to talk?

No. Signs are always paired with spoken words. Learning a sign helps the child make a connection between an object and its label. Signs teach the power of language; after learning a few signs, many children are eager to use words, too.

How can I help my child?

Here are some natural gestures to help you and your child communicate:

- waving (“Hello,” “Bye-bye”)
- arms up (“Pick me up?”)
- head shake (“Yes,” “No”)
- pushing away with hands (“I don’t want that.”)
- clapping hands (“Let’s play,” “Yay!”)
- kissing or blowing kisses (“I love you.”)
- pointing to desired toy when given choices
- face expressions to convey emotions (such as happy, angry, sad)
- routine games and finger plays (“Itsy bitsy spider,” “Peek-a-boo,” “Pat-a-cake”)

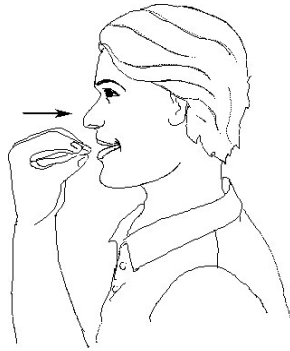
Several simple signs are pictured on the next pages. Choose only a few signs to start with, ones that are important for your child. For example, if your child loves balls, start with the sign for “ball.” Generally, signs for “more” and “all done” will be among the first taught. As you teach each sign, say the word out loud.

Don’t expect your child to use the signs right away. Family members can help children learn by using signs repeatedly, and in context. For example, at mealtime, it is easy to use the signs for “eat,” “more,” and “all done.” You can also help your child make a sign by moving the child’s hands.





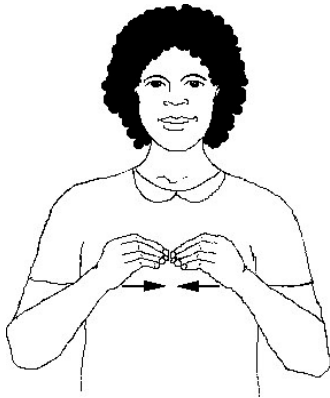
all done



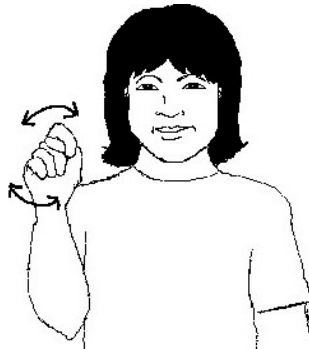
eat



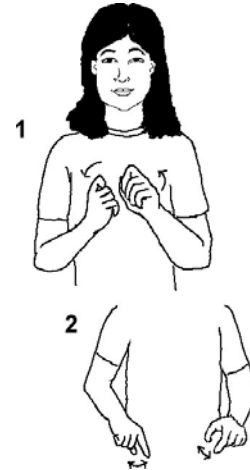
drink



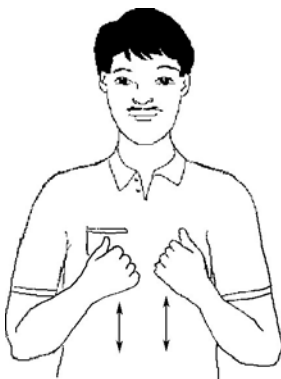
more



toilet



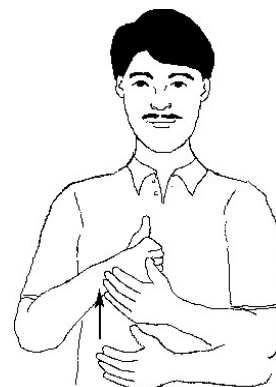
change diaper



bath / wash

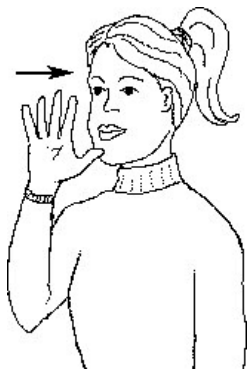


sleep



help

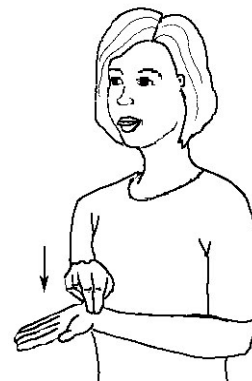




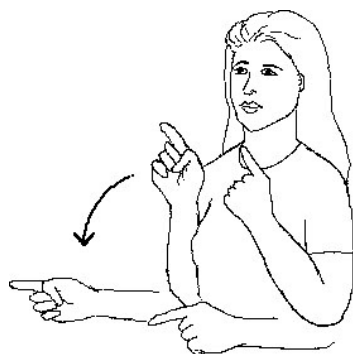
mother



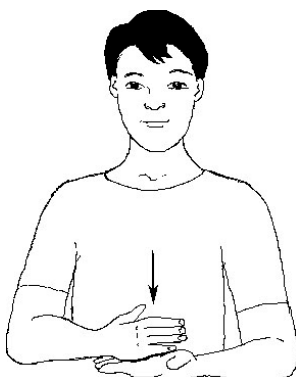
father



doctor or nurse



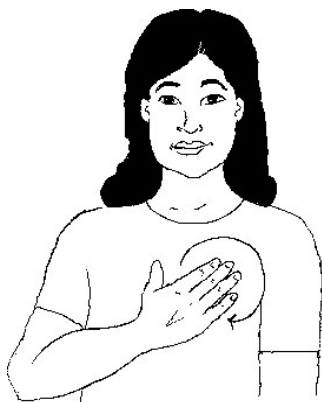
go



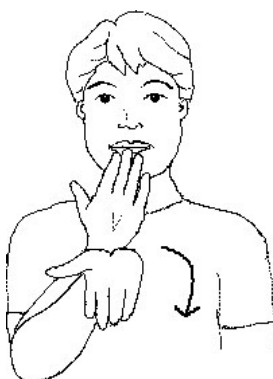
stop



wait



please



thank you

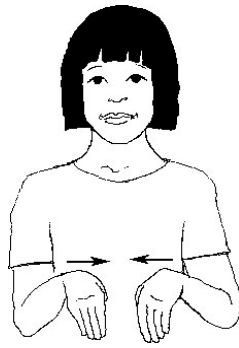


my / mine





open



close (shut)



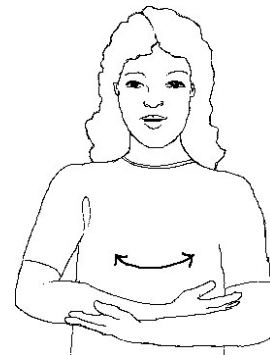
pain or hurt



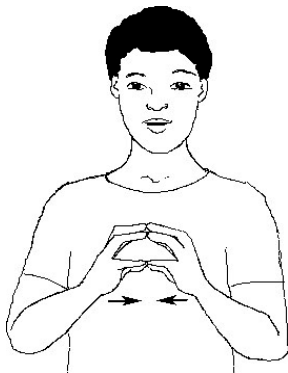
play



want



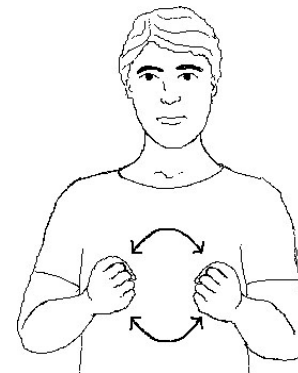
baby



ball



bubbles



car

Questions?

If you have any questions, please call your speech therapist in the Developmental and Rehabilitation Services Department.

Children's Hospitals and Clinics of Minnesota
2525 Chicago Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55404
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