

## Get movin' . . . and make a difference!

*What does research tell us about the way using motionese affects literacy and language outcomes of infants and toddlers?*

Communicating with *motionese*—that is, changing and simplifying gestures, actions, or manual signs when interacting with infants and toddlers with and without hearing impairments—is as natural as using *parentese* or “baby talk” to communicate with young children.

Researchers at the Center for Early Literacy Learning (CELL) analyzed eight studies of adult use of motionese to determine its effects on young children’s literacy and language development. Their purpose was to gain insight into whether this form of communication is an evidence-based, recommended practice for supporting early literacy and language learning.

In these studies, five different characteristics of motionese were examined: Adult affect, repetitions, modifications (simplification and exaggeration), object actions, and pace of the gestures or signs. The researchers analyzed the differences in the ways motionese and standard signing or gesturing affected children’s visual attention to these types of communication, their affective behavior, and their engagement with objects or toys. They found that the young children in the studies responded to motionese with more positive affect, increased visual attention to the adult gestures and signs, and more behavioral engagement with adults, objects, and toys. The result is that use of motionese makes it easier for infants and toddlers to understand what the adult is trying to communicate, and that creates very positive conditions for introducing child learning opportunities.



**When interacting with infants and toddlers, parents and caregivers can boost the effectiveness of their communication by enriching the spoken words with *motionese*—broad gestures, simplified signs, positive facial expression, slower pace, repetitiveness, and including relevant objects.**

The CELL analysis also has implications for resolving the question of whether sign language or natural gestures are better for supporting the communication of infants and toddlers with hearing impairments or other disabilities. Findings suggest that a balance between the two should be recommended since modifications of natural gestures and sign language had similar effects.

This *CELLnotes* summarizes findings reported in Dunst, C. J., Gorman, E., & Hamby, D. W. (2012). Effects of motionese on infant and toddler visual attention and behavioral responsiveness. *CELL-reviews* 5(9), 1-9.

# Acting on the Evidence

Download free, two-page *CELL*practices guides in versions for parents or practitioners at [www.earlyliteracylearning.org](http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org)

Staff of CELL have created a number of practice guides especially for parents and early childhood practitioners to encourage putting this research evidence to use in home, community, and classroom settings. All of the two-page practice guides listed below are available for free download on the CELL project web site: [www.earlyliteracylearning.org](http://www.earlyliteracylearning.org). At this web address you can also find interactive posters called *CELL*pops and multimedia practice guides such as videos that illustrate practices supported by this research.



## Especially for PARENTS

**Infants:**  
Give Me, Give Me  
What's Your Sign?  
Infant Signing Dictionary

**Toddlers:**  
Sign Me Up  
Speaking Without Words

**Preschoolers:**  
Sign Song

## Especially for PRACTITIONERS

**Infants:**  
Infant Gestures  
Sign Language Activities  
Infant Sign Language  
Dictionary

**Toddlers:**  
Simple Signing

**Preschoolers:**  
Sing and Sign