

Especially for parents of infants!

What's Your Sign?

Gestures and Signing

Some infants have difficulties letting others know what they are trying to say. Not to worry! Teach your child a few signs to ask for things or to tell you what she wants. This will go a long way toward making your child a communicator.

What is the practice?

This practice uses simple sign language to help a young child communicate with and talk to others. The best signs are ones that can be used to ask for "more" or to say "yes" or "no." The first signs infants often learn are those for **eat**, **drink**, **more**, **up**, **down**, **yes**, and **no**. Check out the *Infant Signing Dictionary* practice guide for other easy-to-learn signs.

What does the practice look like?

A baby girl sits in her high chair ready to eat. She knows that if she signs **eat** her mom will feed her. Her favorite foods work best. Mom always describes what her daughter is asking for. She knows it is important to use the spoken words with the signs. This lets her baby hear her talk about what she is asking for and what she is doing. As soon as the little girl is finished eating, she signs **up**. She knows that her mom will take her up out of the chair.



How do you do the practice?

Here are some things you can do to decide which signs are likely to work best with your child.

- Start by identifying things your child wants and likes to do. Include things that frustrate your child because he isn't able to use words to tell you what he wants.
- It is best to pick two or three signs to get started. Choose ones that include movements your child is already able to do (for example, shaking his head).
- Show your child a sign while saying the words that go with the sign as part of an activity. This can be something like "Do you want to eat?" while using the sign for **eat**.
- As your child learns to use a sign, add another one into the activity. This might be "Do you want more to eat?" while using the signs for **more** and **eat**.

- Start using new signs with your child. This will help him be able to talk to you and ask for things he wants.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Is your child trying to use signs more often to communicate with you?
- Does your child try to combine signs to ask for what he wants?
- Has your child become less frustrated when trying to communicate and "talk" to you?

Take a look at more fun with signing

“MORE, please!”

One-year-old Kayla especially enjoys playing lap games. She tries to tell her big brother Trey she wants to continue a game they are playing. But it is difficult for him to know exactly what Kayla wants or is trying to say. Trey asks her, “Do you want to play again? Do you want more?” while helping her sign **more**. It doesn't take Kayla long to figure things out. She taps her fingers and hands together a few times to get to play the game again. Kayla now uses the sign for **more**. She uses it to ask for more to eat and for more toys to play with.



Mealtime Signs

Meal times used to be messy events with 9-month-old Tyler. If his mother would give him the “wrong thing” it was surely going to wind up on the floor! Not anymore. Tyler learned the signs for **eat**, **drink**, **more**, and **finished**. Now Mom begins meals like this. She asks Tyler if he wants something to eat or drink while signing each of the words. As he finishes, Mom asks her son if he wants “more to eat?” while using both signs together. Tyler answers by signing **more**. Mom responds by signing **more drink** and saying “Tyler wants more juice to drink.” When Tyler seems about done, Mom asks, “Is Tyler finished?” while signing **finished**. Tyler repeats the sign and meal time is once again a big success.

Improving Communication

Martin is an 18-month-old with Down syndrome. He can say about 10 words, but most people have difficulty understanding what he is saying. His parents learned that using sign language can help children with Down syndrome communicate better and improve their speech. They decide to give it a try. They start with four signs that “go with” things Martin especially likes. They pick the signs for **up**, **again**, **bath**, and **down**. **Up** is used to ask to be picked up. **Again** is used to ask to keep playing a game, Martin's favorite is peek-a-boo. **Bath** is used to ask to play in the bathtub with his toys. **Down** is used to tell Mom and Dad he wants to get out of his high chair. Martin uses the signs more and more often. When he says the words that go with each of the signs, they are becoming easier for others to understand.

