

Sign Language Can Help Your Child

by Sharon Hendrickson, M.S., C.C.C.

What is sign language?

Sign language is a means of communication. People using sign language make movements with their hands to communicate.

How is sign language used in speech therapy?

Sign language is often used with traditional speech therapy as part of a program of total communication. Sign language can help many children learn to talk. It is easier to learn new things when we are shown as well as told. A child can see an adult sign the name of an object or action while hearing the corresponding word. This helps the child understand and remember the word and its meaning. The process develops listening skills and visual attention. Both skills are important in the development of spoken language.

Signing helps the child learn a word's meaning and how to communicate it effectively. Many children who begin to communicate by signing soon learn to say the corresponding words. Then they learn how to use the words in phrases and sentences.

What are different types of sign language?

The *speech and language clinician* or special teacher working with your child will select a signing system for the child. There are many different systems of signs which vary from country to country. For instance, you may read or hear terms such as "ASL" (American Sign Language) or "SE" (Signed English).

In general, ASL is often used with children who are just beginning to develop communication skills. Many programs for preschool-level children with communication problems tend to use ASL. SE is a system of signs which more closely correspond to written English. It includes signs for many language forms including plurals and different kinds of verb forms. Programs for school-age children with hearing problems often favor the use of SE or other systems which closely correspond to written English.

How does a signing program work?

1. The first step is to develop a vocabulary which is:

- Meaningful and useful for your child
- Within your child's physical abilities to sign
- Appropriate to your child's learning level

Your speech and language clinician, working with you and your child's teacher, can choose a vocabulary of signs for your child. The following signs are often included in introductory programs:

your child's name	"go"
"eat"	"all done"
"drink"	"Mommy"
"Daddy"	"more"
"bathroom"	"milk"
"car"	"sleep"

names of other family members, pets, and favorite foods

2. The second step is to teach these signs to your child. Teach the meaning of each sign by using it together with the object or action it names. It is helpful to give as many examples of its meaning as possible.

To teach your child the sign for "cat," use the appropriate sign each time the child points to, watches, or approaches a cat. While saying "Look at the cat!" make the sign for cat. Then help your child to make the sign as well. Later on, the same series of steps is used to teach simple phrases.

During speech and language therapy sessions, the clinician may use pictures or sets of toy objects to teach the meaning of signs and to practice their use. As your child masters new signs in therapy, you may be asked to help the child practice them at home.

How can I help my child develop total communication skills?

1. Remember: parents are a child's most important teachers. You are the very special people who help your child use new knowledge in the real world. Take time to practice often with your child. Praise your child's efforts.

2. Know the signs your child is learning and use them frequently while talking.
3. Encourage your child to use signs and words instead of just gesturing.
4. Become familiar with how your child makes different signs so that you will understand what the child is trying to communicate.
5. Encourage your child to make sounds while signing.
6. Accept signs that are not exactly made. Some children will have trouble making some signs.
7. Continue to tell your speech and language clinician what additional signs would be useful for your child to learn.

Summary

Signing can give the communication-handicapped child success in conversing with others. This reduces the frustration that often accompanies speech and language disorders or delays. As a result, social behavior often improves as well. The child who can tell you that the soup is too hot is unlikely to push it over to communicate discomfort. The child who can sign "car" to ask to go for a ride has learned that signs and words can convey information and influence others. Used as part of a total communication approach to speech and language therapy, sign language has helped many children to become successful communicators.

Vocabulary

Speech and language clinician—A person who is qualified to diagnose and treat speech, language, and voice disorders.

Total communication—Use of additional ways of communicating, such as sign language or communication boards, to expand the conversational abilities of the child with severe speech and language disabilities.

For more information:

Ricekehof, L. 1978. *The joy of signing: The new illustrated guide for mastering sign language and the manual alphabet*. Gospel Publishing.

Refer to:

7.1 Help Your Child Use Gesture to Communicate



Augmentative Communication

by Sharon Hendrickson, M.S., C.C.C.

What is augmentative communication?

"Augment" means "to increase." Some people do not have the physical ability to talk well enough to communicate. These people need a way to increase their ability to communicate.

"Augmentative communication" refers to special devices and methods of communication which provide alternatives for spoken language.

We all use alternative methods of communication. People with poor handwriting may use dictating equipment or typewriters. Pictures of seatbelts on car windows remind us to "buckle up." Pictures on restroom doors provide information for persons who are unable to read printed signs.

What types of augmentative communication devices are available?

Augmentative communication devices vary in expense and type of material used. Every individual is unique. Every augmentative communication system must be specially designed to meet the needs of the person who will depend upon it. There are many types of augmentative communication devices. New materials and new devices are rapidly being developed to help people with communication problems.

Communication notebooks and boards are made to show common pictures, and sometimes letters, numbers, and words. To communicate, the person points to the appropriate part of the notebook or board. Specialized electronic devices may provide sound as well as pictures. Various switches enable people to control microcomputers by blowing, sucking, blinking eyes, or making some movement other than touching the keyboard.

What type of augmentative communication device is best for your child?

Augmentative communication devices are usually designed by a team of special education or rehabilitation specialists. An occupational therapist may determine the type of body movement which can best be used. For example, it may be easiest for your child to point to a communication board or use a switch on an electronic device. The *speech and language clinician* will use information provided by parents

and teachers to determine the vocabulary items to use. Together, team members will select an augmentative system which will:

- Allow the individual to communicate most effectively
- Be easiest to operate
- Be most economical while meeting the person's needs

Team members consider many factors in developing an augmentative communication system. These include:

1. Physical ability

Can the person write or operate keys on a typewriter or computer? Can the person point accurately to pictures or printed words? Even head movements or "chin-pointing" can be used to indicate one of just three or four items per page. If the person has this ability, a multi-page communication notebook arranged by topic may be a good choice. Electronic communication devices now on the market can be controlled through finger movements, hand movements, or movement of almost any body part, including eye movements, head movements, or even blowing and sucking.

2. Choice of symbol system

Popular ways of representing words or ideas on a communication board or other augmentative device include pictures, Rebus symbols and, of course, the printed words themselves. For example:

- Pictures (photo or drawing)
- Rebus symbols
- Words

Some electronic systems also store phrases and sentences which may be combined for spoken or printed output.

3. Method of item selection

If a person cannot point or push a button to indicate desired items on a board, a scanning method of item selection will be used. With a manual communication board or notebook, the caregiver points to each item across the surface until the individual indicates that the desired item has been reached. Any movement under the

individual's control may be used as a signal. A two-step scanning procedure may be used with either communication boards or electronic devices. The individual signals when the desired row of items has been indicated. This is done by a pointing helper or by movement of a light along a row of words or other *symbols*. The helper or light begins to indicate items in that row until the communication-impaired individual again signals. This shows the final choice of word or phrase.

Some devices allow an individual to select a series of words or phrases before printing them or repeating them aloud. Using such a sophisticated device, persons with severe communication and physical disabilities may learn to write homework, print letters, and even program computers.

4. Materials available

There are many materials commercially available to construct individualized communication systems. Choice of materials depends on sturdiness, attractiveness, and cost. Electronic devices and systems involving microcomputers are generally more expensive.

5. Method of transportation

Does the device have to be mounted on a wheelchair? Must the device be hand-held?

The Role of Parents

Parents and other family members are people who can "make or break" their child's augmentative communication system. With a simple communication board or a sophisticated computer-based device, it still takes people to send and receive the communication. Parents can help their child by:

- Contributing useful, meaningful items to the system's vocabulary. For instance, one mother asked that her daughter's vocabulary include names of soap operas which the two watched together. Family members, friends, and teachers are more likely to use the communication system for conversation if it includes really interesting things to talk about.
- Using the augmentative communication system creatively. If a person is asked the

same questions day after day, answering those questions will soon become a chore. Talk about your child's preferences; ongoing, past, and future activities; holidays; pets; and other members of the family. If the communication system contains questions or single words like "what," "who," or "where," encourage the person using the system to ask such questions. Many people require extra practice, since they have never before been able to ask questions.

- Providing many opportunities for communication.
- Encouraging your child to use the device to communicate at a comfortable language level. Your child's speech and language clinician will be able to help you do this.

Summary

It is important for communication-impaired persons and their families to remember that we are living in an exciting time. Advances in augmentative communication are occurring every year. Everyone should have assistance in developing and using as much spoken language as possible. Augmentative communication devices may then help to close the gap between the individual's need to communicate and the ability to do so.

Vocabulary

Augmentative communication—Refers to special devices and methods of communication which provide alternatives to spoken language.

Communication notebook or board—An aid for people with speech difficulties, containing pictures or representations of numbers, the alphabet, and commonly used words. The person uses the board to communicate by pointing to the pictures which express the desired message.

Impairment—Physical weakness or damage, or a functional problem.

Symbol—A sign that stands for or represents something else.

Refer to:

- 7.1 Help Your Child Use Gesture to Communicate
- 7.2 Sign Language Can Help Your Child

Reading With Your Child

by Linda M. Levine, M.Ed.

Introduction

Learning how to read is one of the most important areas of language development. Parents often ask teachers, "How can I help my child with reading?" The answer might surprise you. You can help at home even before your child is ready for school.

Experts studied a group of school-age children who were good readers. The good readers had had several things in common when they were of preschool age. They had family members who:

- Read books, magazines, and newspapers
- Looked at books and magazines with them, and who READ TO THEM
- Talked to them about what was happening around them
- Pointed out words in books and other media
- Took the time to teach them new words

Pre-reading Activities

One of the most important things you can do to help with reading is something that does not involve books. It is teaching new vocabulary words and language skills during everyday activities. Even a trip to the market can be important for teaching pre-reading skills. Take time to help your child name the different kinds of fruit and vegetables. Help your child "read" the words on the boxes and cans. (This word is "soup.") Thinking skills can be developed while sorting the laundry. (My shirt is bigger than your shirt.) All this new information will help your child improve language skills and help get ready for reading in school.

Why read together?

Reading books or magazines together can be an enjoyable experience for parents and children. Reading to children will encourage good language development. Listening to stories is the basis for good reading. Children learn how a book works, where the beginning is, and how the story goes from page to page until the end. They learn that the pictures can be clues about the story. When they hear new ideas and new words, children expand their world and develop their thinking skills.

Tips On Reading With Your Child

Reading to your baby

You can start reading to your child when the child is very young. Eight to ten months old is not too early. Babies can enjoy looking at pictures in cloth books, in magazines, and even in toy catalogs. It is not necessary to read a story to a baby who has not yet learned how to speak. Just looking at the pictures is fine.

1. Sit in a comfortable chair with the baby on your lap.
2. Hold the book so that the pictures can be seen. Point to the pictures on the page. Raise and lower your voice, with lots of OOOHs and AHHHHs.
3. If the baby points to something or imitates the sounds you are making, give hugs and praise.
4. Lift the page a little, and encourage your baby to help turn it.
5. As the child learns to speak, start reading the stories. Take time to look at the pictures together. Stop reading the story if your child wants to talk about a picture. You may be surprised at the creativity and intelligence of some of your child's ideas.
6. When your child is able to take care of a book, get some books the child will enjoy. Owning books is as important as owning toys. Some good books can be bought inexpensively at supermarkets, bookstores, or rummage sales.
7. Take your child to the library as soon as the child can sit still for the toddler story time.

Reading to the preschool child

1. Set aside some time each day to enjoy reading together. Choose a quiet, special time when the child is not doing something else.
2. Allow your child to choose a book for you to read.
3. Take time to look at the pictures. Help the child name things and tell what is happening. Use books with large and colorful pictures.
4. Raise and lower your voice as you are telling the story. If you are paying attention to what is happening, so will your child.

Reading with the school-age child

When your child starts school and starts learning how to read, it becomes a good opportunity for the child to read to you! Continue reading together daily.

1. You and your child can take turns reading to each other. Praise what your child does well. Avoid criticism.
2. Remember that reading together should be fun. Don't use story time to teach reading. Remember to stop before either one of you becomes restless, tired, or bored.
3. Take advantage of your child's interests. Choose dinosaur books for dinosaur fans, etc.
4. Don't make your child choose between reading and watching television or playing outside. Let these activities all have their own place in your child's daily life.
5. If your child misses or stumbles on a word while reading out loud, just say the word. Don't make your child feel like a serious error has been made.
6. Ask your child's teacher for suggestions for reading to your child. If your child is reading a book at the proper ability level, the child will have good feelings about reading.
7. Remember that children learn by imitation. The BEST way to encourage reading is by reading yourself.

For more information:

Beck, Joan. *How to raise a brighter child*. New York, NY: Pocket Books.

Cullinan, B.E., and C. Carmichael, eds. 1977. *Literature and young children*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Dodson, F. *Give your child a head start in reading*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Dodson, F., and A. Alexander. 1986. *Your child: Pregnancy through preschool*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Hendrick, J. 1980. *The whole child*. St. Louis, MO: C.V. Mosby Company.

Larrick, N. 1969. *A parent's guide to children's reading*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster (also Pocket Books, paperback).

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

1834 Connecticut Avenue, N.W.

Washington, DC 20009

(800) 424-2460

Send for their list of publications, including their guide for selecting, purchasing, and using children's books.

Refer to:

2.1 Language Development

3.1 Infant Stimulation

4.1 Learning New Words

5.0 Home Activities for Speech and Language Development

8.2 Suggested Reading for Children

8.3 Pre-Reading Skills



Suggested Reading for Children

by Linda M. Levine, M.Ed.

There are hundreds of excellent books for children. The following lists provide a good beginning. Ask your local librarian to help you with additional authors and titles.

For the Baby and Toddler

Author	Title
Richard Scarry	Early Words Little Word Book
Dorothy Kunhardt	Pat the Bunny
Stephen Lewis	Zoo City
Any toy catalog	

For the 2- to 3-year-old

Tana Hoban	Count and See
Leo Lionni	Swimmy
Anne Maley	Have You See My Mother?

For the 3- to 5-year-old

Mercer Mayer	Frog Goes to Dinner
Maurice Sendak	Where the Wild Things Are
Dr. Seuss	The Cat in the Hat
Paul Galdone	The Little Red Hen

For the 6- to 8-year-old

Dubose Heyward	The Country Bunny and the Little Gold Shoes
James Marshall	George and Martha
I CAN READ BOOKS, published by Harper and Row. Authors include Syd Hoff, Edith Hurd, Carla Greene, Nathaniel Benchley, Russell Hoban and Lillian Hoban. They also publish I CAN READ sports books, EARLY I CAN READ BOOKS, I CAN READ science books, and I CAN READ mystery books.	

For the 8- to 10-year-old

Laura Ingalls Wilder	Little House on the Prairie
E.B. White	Charlotte's Web

For the 10- to 12-year-old

Author	Title
Roald Dahl	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
Judy Blume	Are You There God, It's Me, Margaret

50 of the Best Authors for Young Children

Author	Title
Anno, Mitsumasa	Anno's Alphabet Anno's Counting Book Anno's Journey
Bemelmans, Ludwig	Madeline Madeline and the Bad Hat Madeline in London Madeline's Rescue
Brown, Marcia	The Three Billy Goats Gruff All Butterflies How, Hippo Once a Mouse Stone Soup
Brown, Margaret Wise	Four Fur Feet The Noisy Book Nibble, Nibble The Runaway Bunny 1,2,3 An Animal Counting Book Where Have You Been?
Buckley, Helen E.	Grandfather and I Grandmother and I Michael is Brave My Sister and I
Burningham, John	Mr. Gumpy's Outing Mr. Gumpy's Motorcar Seasons John Burningham's ABC
Burton, Virginia Lee	Mike Mulligan and His Steamshovel Katy and the Big Snow The Little House
Carle, Eric	The Very Hungry Caterpillar Do You Want to Be My Friend? 1,2,3 to the Zoo

Author	Title
dePaola, Tommie	Strega Nona Charlie Needs a Cloak The Cloud Book Watch Out for Chicken Feet in Your Soup Nana Upstairs, Nana Downstairs
de Regniers, Beatrice S.	May I Bring a Friend? A Little House of Your Own Poems Children will Sit Still For It Does Not Say Meow What Can You Do With a Shoe?
Domanska, Janina	The Turnip Din, Dan, Doin, It's Christmas I Saw a Ship a-Sailing If All the Seas Were One Sea Spring Is What Do You See?
Dr. Seuss	The Cat in the Hat Green Eggs and Ham Horton Hatches the Egg Horton Hears a Who The Sleep Book The ABC Book The Shape of Me and Other Stuff
Duvoisin, Roger	Petunia Petunia, I Love You Petunia's Treasure Veronica See What I Am
Ets, Marie Hall	Play With Me Gilberto and the Wind In the Forest Talking Without Words
Fisher, Aileen	Cricket in a Thicket Feathered Ones and Furry Going Barefoot In One Door and Out the Other Listen Rabbit The Ways of Animals Where Does Everyone Go?
Flack, Majorie	Ask Mr. Bear The Story about Ping
Freeman, Don	Dandelion Corduroy Mop Top Quiet! There's a Canary in the Library
Gag, Wanda	Millions of Cats Nothing at All

Author	Title
Hoban, Russell	A Birthday for Frances A Bargain for Frances Bedtime for Frances Bread and Jam for Frances
Hoban, Tana	Look Again Is It Red? Is It Yellow? Is It Blue? Circles, Triangles and Squares Dig, Drill, Dump Over, Under, and Through Push Pull, Empty Full
Hutchins, Pat	Rosies's Walk Changes, Changes Don't Forget the Bacon Goodnight, Owl The Surprise Party
Keats, Ezra Jack	The Snowy Day Goggles Hi, Cat Louie Peter's Chair Whistle for Willie
Krauss, Ruth	The Carrot Seed The Backward Day A Hole is to Dig A Very Special House
Langstaff, John	Over in the Meadow Frog Went a'Courtin Oh, A-Hunting We Will Go
Lionni, Leo	Swimmy Alexander and the Wind Up Mouse Fish is Fish Frederick Little Blue and Little Yellow On My Beach There are Many Pebbles Inch by Inch The Biggest House in the World
McCloskey, Robert	Make Way for Ducklings One Morning in Maine Blueberries for Sal Lentil
Milne, A.A.	When We Were Very Young Now We are Six
Minarik, Else H.	Little Bear Father Bear Comes Home A Kiss for Little Bear Little Bear's Friend Little Bear's Visit

Author	Title
Munari, Bruno	Bruno Munari's ABC Animals for Sale The Birthday Present Bruno Manari's Zoo The Circus in the Mist The Elephant's Wish Who's There? Open the Door
Pienkowski, Jan	Shapes Numbers
Piper, Watty	The Little Engine That Could
Potter, Beatrix	The Tale of Peter Rabbit The Sly Old Cat The Tale of Benjamin Bunny The Tale of Jemima Puddleduck The Tale of Jeremy Fisher The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy Winkle The Tale of Tom Kitten
Reiss, John J.	Numbers Colors
Rey, H.A.	Curious George (and The Curious George Series) Anybody at Home?
Rockwell, Harlow	My Doctor My Dentist Machines I Did It
Scarry, Richard	Best Word Book Ever Cars and Trucks and Things That Go Best Counting Book Ever All Day Long Busy Busy World Find Your ABCs
Sendak, Maurice	Where the Wild Things Are Pierre Chicken Soup with Rice Alligators All Around In the Night Kitchen Really Rosie
Slobodkina, Esphyr	Caps for Sale
Spier, Peter	Fast-Slow, High-Low Crash, Bang, Boom The Erie Canal To Market, To Market
Steptoe, John	Stevie
Tresselt, Alvin	Hide and Seek Fog The Beaver Pond The Dead Tree The Mitten

Author	Title
Viorst, Judith	Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day
Waber, Bernard	Ira Sleeps Over A Firefly Named Torchy The House on East 88th Street Lyle, Lyle Crocodile
Wildsmith, Brian	Brian Wildsmith's Mother Goose Brian Wildsmith's ABCs Brian Wildsmith's 1,2,3s Brian Wildsmith's Wild Animals
Williams, Garth	The Rabbits' Wedding Baby's First Book
Yashima, Taro	Umbrella Crow Boy Momo's Kitten Plenty to Watch Seashore Story Youngest One
Zion, Eugene	Harry the Dirty Dog (and the Harry The Dog Series) Dear Garbage Man The Plant Sitter
Zolotow, Charlotte	William's Doll The Hating Book My Grandson Lew When I Have a Son Big Sister and Little Sister Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present

Recommended Magazines for Children

Highlights for Children, 2300 West Fifth Avenue,
Columbus, OH 43216
Ages 2-12

Humpty Dumpty's Magazine, Parents Magazine
Enterprises, 52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York,
NY 10017
Ages 3-7

Jack and Jill, 1100 Waterway Blvd, Box 5678,
Indianapolis, IN 46206
Ages 5-12

Sesame Street Magazine, Children's Television
Workshop, 1 Lincoln Plaza, New York, NY 10023
Ages 3-5

Refer to:

8.1 Reading With Your Child
8.3 Pre-Reading Skills