



# Baby Sign Language

## A Bridge to Communication

Mikaila Fager, Speech-Language Pathologist, M.S.

Infant sign language, also known as Baby Sign Language (BSL), is a modified form of American Sign Language (ASL). This can be used to empower infants and toddlers to express their immediate wants and needs before the development of verbal language. Here's what you need to know about Baby Sign Language:

### Baby Sign Language (BSL) vs. American Sign Language (ASL)

ASL is a complex language system with its own set of rules, while BSL involves using simple signs from ASL or self-generated signs suitable for infants and toddlers. It is common for young children to use approximations of signs, allowing them to communicate effectively.

**Benefits for All Children** Contrary to misconceptions, the benefits of learning BSL are not exclusive to nonverbal children. In fact, any child, regardless of their verbal abilities or diagnoses, can benefit from the use of sign language. It provides them with a valuable tool to communicate their immediate wants and needs.

**Impact on Speech Development** Far from hindering speech development, research indicates that the use of sign language can actually enhance a child's verbal language skills. BSL promotes language, and the introduction of a secondary form of communication can stimulate linguistic development in young minds.

**When to Start Teaching** Parents and caregivers can start introducing BSL to their children at any age. However, it's important to note that infants and toddlers may not be able to use signs until they are around 6-8 months old. The timing can vary, with some children picking up sign language earlier or later. Patience and consistency are key during the learning process.

**Continued Use and Integration** While it's common for children to decrease their use of sign language as spoken language develops, toddlers may continue to use signs in specific situations. For instance, when they are upset and unable to find the right words or when they want to communicate complex ideas that are challenging to pronounce.

**Getting Started** Parents can start incorporating sign language into their daily routines by selecting a few simple signs that are meaningful for their child. Common signs include "eat," "milk," "more," "all done," "help," "drink," "water," and "sleep." Integrating signs during daily activities such as meals, diaper changes, and playtime provides continuous models and reinforces learning. Here is a good website to start with: <https://bit.ly/3FYawCr>



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### Undergraduate Degree

Communication Science & Disorders,  
University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire

### Graduate Degree

Communication Science & Disorders,  
University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point

### Years of Experience

3 years

### Specialty Interests

Pediatric Speech and Language  
Therapy, Syndromes

### Philosophy

I believe that an individual does best when communication strategies are incorporated into a meaningful, fun and natural environment. My therapy involves collaboration with family members and caregivers in the intervention process, as well as collaboration with other professionals within CP Therapy Services. I like to work close with the families and other professionals in my clients' care to ensure consistency of treatment and to enhance generalization of progressing communication skills.

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