



Parent Tip Sheet

Language Phonology

Phonology refers to the organization of sounds in languages conveying meaning. Sign Languages have a system equivalent to the system of sounds in spoken languages. The building blocks of sign languages specify movement, location and handshape. Learning language begins with the baby's ability to interpret sounds/handshapes around them.

Babies play with language through a conversational dance between parent and child and conversational turn-taking. Initially, the baby focuses on imitating the parent (e.g., the length, loudness, and pitch of the sounds) then begins to attach meaning to what the child hears, sees and produces. All of this play leads towards meaning and parents often find that their baby can communicate many things, with single sounds, syllables, hand shapes and/or movements. Gradually these turn into words, phrases and sentences.

In order to hear and imitate these sounds, if using technology (hearing aids and cochlear implants), babies who are deaf or hard of hearing need to wear appropriately fit amplification consistently throughout the child's waking hours and it needs to be in good working order.

These tips are for children who communicate in all kinds of ways; you will be able to tweak them to fit your child's needs while you build your shared language skills.



- ✓ Imitate your baby's cooing; look to see if he or she uses sounds to indicate communication or meaning.
- ✓ Attach movement to specific sounds/signs, such as an exaggerated "up" and/or pronunciation.
- ✓ Even if your child's handshape is incorrect, encourage your child to communicate. Continue to sign or say the word correctly. As long as you understand each other, it is okay!
- ✓ Wait a few seconds before giving your child what he or she wants anticipating that your child may try to say or sign a word, then reinforce his or her attempts.
- ✓ Raise your eyebrows when asking YES/NO questions. When asking the 5 W/H questions (What, Where, Who, When, How) squint your eyebrows.
- ✓ Imitate and socially reinforce your child's vocal/sign play with smiles and movement.
- ✓ Read and sing to your child.
- ✓ If your child is using hearing technology, check to see whether your child can hear the difference between two similar sounds that may be confusing.
- ✓ Identify ASL words that have the same handshape.
- ✓ Exaggerate the melody of sentences. Move your baby's body to rhythms and songs.



*Share these with your Early Intervention providers/parent to parent support providers who have experience with children who are deaf or hard of hearing and discuss ideas on how to implement these tips with your child. <https://handsandvoices.org/fl3/topics/tipsheets.html>

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