



Parent Tip Sheet

Visual Language Development



Language development and communication can be supported using other senses such as vision and tactile input. There are many ways in which visual language can be used to communicate. Visual attention is important for Deaf children in order to access information visually to learn. It's also important to allow time for a child to explore objects before providing linguistic input.

Here are some terms you may want to know:

- Pragmatics refers to social language skills, including understanding and differentiating facial expressions (such as anger versus friendliness), and conversational turn-taking.
- Phonology is the smallest unit of language: handshape, movement locations, palm orientation, and facial expressions. Babies' first ASL signs use simple handshapes (e.g., c, a, s, 1, 5).
- Semantics refers to the meaning of vocabulary (babies recognize their own name sign and name signs of family members).
- Syntax refers to sentence structure (baby points to self and objects in his or her environment).

- ✓ Establish eye contact visually by waving, tactilely by floor/table vibration or tapping shoulder, or linguistically by utilizing larger signing space.
- ✓ Frequently use facial expressions to convey feelings and read a picture book of emotions with your baby.
- ✓ Follow your child's lead and pace to increase conversational turn-taking. Use signs like YOUR-TURN/NEXT and AGAIN to promote conversational turn-taking.
- ✓ When reading books, ask HOW, WHY, DO-DO questions (e.g., what will the character do next) about the story.
- ✓ Provide time for your child to explore his or her environment by using wait-time for eye gaze to you before providing linguistic input; engage in sequential turn-taking; follow your child's lead for sustained joint attention.
- ✓ Look at pictures of people and use descriptive sign words to describe people.
- ✓ Point to people and objects and label them; show the child the sign. Sign as much as you are able to provide rich exposure to language.
- ✓ When you and your child finish an activity, discuss the activity and point out what was already done. Example: READ BOOK FINISH.
- ✓ Encourage your child to communicate even if his or her handshape is incorrect. Example: your child may sign BATH using the "5" handshape. Continue to sign the word correctly (a handshape).



*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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