



HOW SIGNING HELPS CHILDREN WITH SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DISORDERS

Often the goal of therapy is to improve a child's overall ability to communicate through functional communication strategies. Functional communication is a "by any means necessary" approach which does not limit a child to using verbal communication. It allows children to get their messages across using spoken words, printed words, gestures or pictures on a communication device. The use of ASL as a functional communication strategy has grown in popularity in recent years because both parents and professionals appreciate the convenience it affords. With signs, there is no communication device or book to tote, no charging or replacing batteries, no forgetting it at home. Your hands are always with you!

In addition to providing a convenient form of functional communication, signing helps children with speech and language disorders improve both their receptive and expressive language skills:

Receptive Language

Signing contributes to the development of receptive language skills - the ability to understand what is being communicated. For children with receptive language disorders, parents and therapists

must help children connect the printed words, spoken words, signs and pictures with their meanings.

Children learn best when their senses are engaged, by *doing* and experiencing life. By adding ASL to a child's communication options, you are giving them the opportunity to hear the word (when spoken), see the word (on both the lips and hands) and "do" the word by signing it. This multi-sensory form of communication helps children acquire vocabulary more quickly and efficiently.

Expressive Language

Signing is also useful for helping children develop expressive language- the ability to effectively communicate thoughts and feelings to others. It is especially helpful for children who have good receptive language skills and can formulate their thoughts, but lack the oral skills to speak clearly. A child may choose to only use signs, or may mix signs and spoken words to form their first phrases. With signs, children can overcome barriers to spoken language and successfully communicate. This success gives them a sense of empowerment, which can lead to increased self-esteem and confidence.

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Speech and Language Bundle
SigningTime.com/speech-language



HOW TO USE SIGNING IN SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY

Using ASL signs is an extremely useful tool and will help your speech and language therapy sessions go from good to GREAT! Here are some specific tips for using ASL signs with children who have speech disorders, language disorders and medical/developmental disorders:

Speech Disorders

Use signs as a visual prompt to elicit spoken responses.

Teaching the ASL vocabulary to go along with your target words will help you to illicit “spontaneous” responses when no verbal imitation is present. For example, during a therapy session in which final /k/ at the word level is the target, the therapist can begin the session with a vocabulary lesson in which all of the signs for the target words are introduced. As the session(s) continue and the child begins feeling comfortable with the signed vocabulary, the therapist can use the sign instead of the spoken word to illicit the target words from the child. As the sessions progress and move to phrase- or sentence-level work, the therapist can use a sign to illicit a “spontaneous” verbal response. Suppose a therapist wants a child to say the sentence “I see a book” aloud. She can say, “I

see a...” and then make the sign for BOOK, allowing her to elicit the target word without saying it aloud. Carrier phrases and whole sentences could also be signed as a prompt to elicit verbal responses in therapy.

Use signs to help with fluency.

Signing may help a child overcome dysfluency – the repetition of sounds and/or pauses between words. During a structured conversation, specific words that cause dysfluency in the child’s speech can be targeted. The therapist can then teach the signs for these words. Secondary movement often helps a child through a dysfluency, so it may be useful for the child and/or therapist to sign that word when it occurs in the structured conversation.

Use signs to reinforce wanted behavior.

Therapists can teach children signs such as GREAT JOB, WONDERFUL, YES, TRY AGAIN, AWESOME, GOOD WORK and use them to praise, reward or encourage a child when working in a class room, small group or individual setting. This highly-visual, non-verbal form of praise is fun and exciting, and can help a therapist keep a child engaged, motivated and focused during the session.

Use letter signs as a visual cue for speech sounds.

Therapists can teach children the manual alphabet. When working with specific sounds or multiple sounds, use the manual alphabet as a visual cue to help children remember each sound and produce it correctly.

Language Disorders

Use signs to help build vocabulary.

Teach signs that go along with your lesson/activity themes to teach and reinforce the meanings of target words. As we mentioned earlier, using signs and words together creates a multi-sensory experience for children that facilitates learning. In addition, ASL signs are often iconic, meaning that the hand shapes and/or movements of signs physically represent distinguishing features of the objects or concepts they represent. For example, the sign for GIRAFFE involves moving the hand up the neck. This sign helps children learn how giraffes are different from other animals by pointing out the physical feature that makes it unique – its long neck!

Use signs to clarify messages.

Signs can be used to clarify your verbal statements, or they can be used to help clarify the child’s messages. If a child has



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word-finding issues or is learning to use new groups of words, provide him with the sign for the target vocabulary so that when the word is required of him, he is still able to communicate.

Use signs to help a child learn to say a word.

Oftentimes signing facilitates the development of verbal communication. When a child learns to sign a word, he or she is more likely to learn to say that word. So teach the signs for target words in your therapy sessions and encourage children to use the sign and its corresponding spoken word together whenever possible.

Use signs to help a child feel empowered.

Oftentimes a child with a language disorder is limited to no spoken words or vocabulary. Using ASL signs is a quick way for him to gain vocabulary and control of his world. Teach the signs for frequently-used words such as EAT, MORE, ALL DONE, YES, NO, HELP, PLEASE, THANK YOU, WANT and SLEEP. Using these basic signs in his everyday communication will allow the child to more easily communicate – and connect – with the people he loves.

Medical and Developmental Disorders

Use signs to both facilitate speech production as well as two-way communication.

Research shows that using ASL as a part of the therapy process can provide benefits for children with a variety of diagnoses. Read these online articles for more information about using signs in therapy sessions with children who have:

Apraxia of Speech

Using Sign Language With Children Who Have Apraxia of Speech by Sharon Gretz, M.Ed.
<http://bit.ly/apraxia-kids>

Down Syndrome

The Use of Signs by Children with Down Syndrome by Marita R. Hopmann, Ph.D.
<http://www.csdsa.org/artsigns.asp>

Teaching Sign Language by Claire Donovan, S-LP(C)
<http://www.csdsa.org/arttsl.asp>

Using Signing Time with Children who have Down Syndrome by Annie Young, M.Ed. and Colleen Brunetti, M.Ed.
<http://www.signingtime.com/down-syndrome>

Autism

Signed Speech or Simultaneous Communication

by Stephen M. Edelson, Ph.D.
<http://legacy.autism.com/families/therapy/sign.htm>

Using Signing Time with Individuals on the Autism Spectrum by Kimberly Fries MA, CC –SLP and Brenda Gardner-Jones MA, ECSE /Autism

<http://www.signingtime.com/autism>

