

Especially for parents of infants! 

Infant Signing Dictionary

 Gestures and Signing

Sign language is one way infants can communicate before they learn to talk. This type of communicating is especially useful for children who may never talk because of a disability. This idea page includes some simple signs that you may find useful with your own child.

What is the practice?

Before children learn to use words to communicate, they use gestures to interact with others. Sign language is a special kind of gesture for “talking” with others. Infants who use sign language are able to communicate more effectively with others. They also are more likely to easily learn the words that go with signs.



What does the practice look like?

Infant sign language sort of looks like the signs used by an older person. The signs do not need to be exactly right to work. The important thing is for a child to make the connection between a sign and its effect on others. This might be the sign for *more* to ask for more food. Or to get someone to play a game over again.

How do you do the practice?

The best signs are ones used to do or ask for things a child wants and likes to do. Search the Web using **infant sign language** and you will find many examples of infants signing to communicate with others. Here are some simple signs that make sense for most young children.

Bath (*Rub hands on the chest or stomach in a circular motion.*)

Book (*Fold both hands together and then open them up.*)

Bye (*Wave hand, palm outward, back-and-forth.*)

Change (*Twist the hands together in front of the body.*)

Down (*Point the finger down two or three times.*)

Drink (*Place hand in cupped position and tip up as if drinking from a cup.*)

Eat (*Place one hand with the fingers together toward the mouth.*)

Help Me (*Pat the palms of the hands on the chest several times.*)

Hug (*Criss cross arms across the chest.*)

Hurt (*Make a fist with each hand and have the index fingers touch one another.*)

More (*Cup hands facing down and tap fingertips together several times.*)

No (*Shake head side to side to indicate “No.”*)

Sleep (*Fold hands together and hold against cheek of tilted head.*)

Up (*Point the finger up two or three times.*)

Yes (*Shake head or fist up and down.*)

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child use gestures and signs to get things he wants?
- Does he look at you while making the signs?
- Does your child try to repeat sounds or words that you say when he is signing?

Take a look at more first signs for babies

A Hug or a Kiss?

Nine-month-old Cheryl becomes excited any time her mother and father give her hugs and kisses. Mom and Dad have turned this into a game. Cheryl uses the signs for *hug* and *kiss* to get her parents to “do it again.” Cheryl especially likes to play the game while on Mom’s or Dad’s lap facing them. They start the game by asking, “Does Cheryl want a hug or a kiss?” Sometimes Cheryl does not use the sign for either type of affection. The parents repeat the question while using the signs for *hug* or *kiss* as they say the words. This almost always gets her to use one or the other sign. No sooner has she received what she wants than she uses the other sign.



Cure for Frustration



Mark, age 13 months, often gets upset when things don’t go his way. Frustrations include not being able to reach for something he wants. Or not getting out of his high chair fast enough when he finishes eating. His mother uses a few simple signs like *help me* and *down* to ease Mark’s frustration. Mark tries to take off his clothes but often gets stuck! He uses the sign for *help me* to get his mother to assist him. His mother, father, and big sister have learned that when he signs *down* it means he is finished! Mark has also learned to shake his hand *yes* and *no* to answer questions like “Do you want more?” Sign language has been a big plus for Mark in making himself understood.

Aids to Interaction

Sandy is 18 months old. Her mother takes her out and about as part of running errands. Sandy isn’t able to talk clearly because of a hearing problem. Mom has begun teaching her signs to interact with people while they are out. Mom started with a few simple signs like *good-bye* and *hello*. Her mother’s friends like to play with Sandy. The signs for *up* and *down* have really come in handy. Sandy and her mom sometimes have lunch at a friend’s home or at a fast-food restaurant. She uses the signs for *eat*, *drink*, *more*, and *finished* to tell her mom and others what she wants.

