

Especially for parents of preschoolers! 

Sign a Song

Gestures and Signing

Sign language is a good way for preschoolers to communicate. It helps improve their language and fine motor skills.

What is the practice?

When children sign words to favorite songs they start learning to sign. Songs with lots of action words that repeat work well. The children can learn signed hand movements that go with the lyrics.

What does the practice look like?

Making hand motions to the 'Itsy Bitsy Spider' or "Wheels on the Bus" is one way to sing and signing. The sign language motions match the words of a song to make the signs easier to learn.



How do you do the practice?

Singing can build sign language into your child's day. You can help your child learn that the signs used for singing are used in other ways too.

- Start with songs your child likes and knows. Show him the signs as you sing. He might copy you right away, especially if he likes to move a lot.
- Tell your child that sign language helps people communicate if they have trouble hearing or speaking. Start with a few simple signs from your song. It's best to start with signs that are easy to copy. For example, putting a hand to the mouth for "eat."
- As your child learns signs during songs, help him use the signs in other ways. For example, use the sign for "eat" when it's lunch time. Use the sign for "sleep" at nap time.
- Let your child be creative and pick songs to try to find signs for. Ask him to think of hand movements that fit with what he wants to say.
- If your child has fine motor problems, slowly make the sign. The first step is for him to link the hand movement with what it means. Smoother movements will come later.
- You can find simple signing dictionaries online by looking for "preschool sign." There are also books with simple signs in children's bookstores. Many DVDs of children's songs have signing with singing.

How do you know the practice worked?

- Does your child enjoy singing while he sings?
- Does your child use signs at other times?
- Does your child ask to learn more signs?

Take a look at more songs and signing

More Times To Sign

Four-year old Dax knows many signs for words in his favorite songs. Now his mom is helping him use signs he knows in other ways. One of Dax's favorite songs is "Go In and Out the Window." When they're walking downtown one day, Dax gets excited when he sees a pet shop. Mom asks him, "Where do you want to go, Dax? Use your signs. Tell me where you want to go." Dax tries it. He makes the sign "in." "Very good! Let's go in!" says his mother. When they're in the store, Dax uses the signs he knows for "cat" and "dog" when they see kittens and puppies for sale.



Add a Few More

Lucho is an active and curious child. His mother plays Lucho's favorite CD. She tells him they are going to try something fun. "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star" begins to play. Lucho's mother starts with just the signs for "little" and "star." At those words in the song, they sign them, instead of singing them. Lucho loves this game. Every time they listen to the song, his mother adds a few more signs. Soon Lucho can sign the whole song.

A Way To Share

Five-year old Nori uses sign as her main way to communicate. Sometimes she enjoys trying to teach her nine-month-old sister some simple signs for words in her favorite songs. She holds her baby sister's hands and moves them as they listen to music. That way the two of them have fun "singing" along to songs together.

