



USING SIGNING TIME® IN
EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS
A GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



Written for Two Little Hands Productions by
Robin L. Williams, MA
Kyle L Stielow



USING SIGN LANGUAGE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS

Using American Sign Language (ASL) signs with infants, toddlers and preschool children will help you fulfill the three most important responsibilities you have as an early childhood educator:

- **Teaching language and thinking skills**
- **Teaching social-emotional skills**
- **Managing conflicts to providing a safe and secure environment for all children**

Signing supports the fulfillment of each of these responsibilities and fits naturally into every part of your day, while adding an element of fun to your existing lesson plans. In this guide, we will help you learn about the benefits of signing in your classroom, tell you how to get started and introduce you to some Signing Time resources that are ideal for early childhood settings. We've also included a sample lesson plan for you.

BENEFITS OF SIGNING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD SETTINGS

With ASL signs, young children can:

- **tell teachers and peers what they want — without getting frustrated**
- **let you know if they are hurt or sick**
- **express their feelings**
- **learn important manners**
- **learn to get along with others**

What this means is that when signs are used in the classroom, there are fewer incidents of tantrums, hitting, biting, and other types of aggression.

In addition to creating more peaceful learning environments, signing helps teachers address the learning styles of all the children in the classroom. When signs and words are used together, auditory learners hear the word, visual learners see the sign and kinesthetic learn-

ers can use their hands to make the sign. In other words, signing creates a strong multi-sensory learning environment that positively impacts the development of children of all ages – infants, toddlers and preschool children alike. In fact, research shows that infants and toddlers who use signs:

- **learn to talk sooner**
- **understand and use more words**
- **use longer sentences**
- **are more secure and confident**

In addition to boosting language skills, signing significantly impacts cognitive development of young children. One study found that children who signed as infants and toddlers scored an average of 12 points higher on IQ tests when they

were tested again at 8 and 9 years of age.

Research also indicates that preschool children who are taught signs as a part of their reading instruction score higher on standardized reading tests. This is not surprising, given that signing facilitates the development of critical early literacy skills by helping children:

- **Become more engaged in reading**
- **Form more positive attitudes about reading and books**
- **Learn letters, numbers and sight words more easily through physical movement**
- **Increase understanding of words because signs are often iconic (they physically represent objects, feelings and ideas)**



GETTING STARTED

There are two things you should know before you get started:

You don't need to create new lesson plans. There's no need to set aside a special time of the day for signing. You can do this, of course, but most often, signs can simply be added into your daily routines and existing lesson plans. You'll learn more about how to do this later in this guide.

Take it easy - learn one sign at a time. Some teachers who have never signed before may feel a little overwhelmed by the idea of signing in their classrooms. Remember you do not need to learn a lot of signs at once - you can learn right along with your children. Pick just a few signs to start with (see suggestions below) and get into the habit of using those signs every day. Each week, add a few signs to your day. For example, you can introduce weather signs one week and the next, add a sign or two during table activities. You'll be amazed at how quickly your signing vocabulary grows.

Here are some simple tips for signing to help get you started:

How to teach a sign

Make eye contact.

Sign and say the word at the same time.

Repeat! Look for natural opportunities to use the sign throughout the day. The more often children see a sign; the faster they will learn it.

Tips for signing with infants and toddlers

Choose a few signs to start with. MILK, MORE and ALL DONE are good starter signs. Once you get into the habit of using those signs, add a few new signs or combine signs for sentences like "MORE MILK?"

Look for understanding. Babies will recognize your signs before they can sign back to you. Babies may smile, kick their feet or look in the direction of the object you are signing about to show you they understand.

Wait for it! Babies who are 6-9 months old may take two months or more to make their first sign. Older babies and toddlers may sign back sooner, depending on how many times they've seen the sign. Parents can help by signing at home with their child.

Praise any attempt babies make to sign - even if the sign isn't perfect. (Their fine motor skills will catch up and eventually they'll make the sign correctly.) The important thing is to let them know how excited you are that you understood their sign!

Tips for signing with preschool children

Choose signs for each of your daily routines (see suggestions below).

Introduce new signs during lesson times that support your theme/topic.

Encourage children to sign with you and with each other - and praise them for their efforts (even if their signs aren't perfect). Ask your experienced signers to teach new children as they come into your program.

Keep an ASL dictionary handy. Teachers tell us that when children start signing, they get so excited, they beg for more signs!



INTEGRATING SIGNS INTO YOUR CURRICULUM

In this section, we'll share some guidelines and resources for using signs in an early childhood setting to:

- **Teach language and thinking skills**
- **Teach social-emotional skills**
- **Manage conflicts in the classroom**
- **Involve parents in signing at home**

You'll find the sample lesson plan, "Let's Be Friends," in the next section.

Teaching Language and Thinking Skills

Any time you are using signs with the children in your classroom, you are reinforcing language and cognitive skills. The best way to use signs in your classroom is to simply use them during your daily routines to have conversations with the children in your classroom – even with children who are non-verbal. For example, when children are drawing, you can say and sign: "Your picture has lots of colors. I see RED and BLUE. Which color do you like best?" Signing RED and BLUE will give the children a clue and they will be able to sign back to you their favorite color. Here are some guidelines for signing in these typical routines and activities:

Recommended Resources for Early Childhood Educators

Full Integration of Signing Across the Curriculum

The Signing Time Classroom Edition has everything you need to fully integrate signing into your existing curriculum. It features 8 DVDs and 16 units of themed lessons with original songs, poems, games, and activities to help teach and reinforce ASL signs. Includes tips for using signs in during transition times, for classroom management, and enhancing literacy. Lessons and activities meet national standards.

Teaching Language and Thinking Skills

- Baby Signing Time Vol. 3: A New Day DVD
- Baby Signing Time Flashcards
- Signing Time Board Books
- ABC Wall Posters, Flashcard Set 5, Vol. 5: ABC Signs DVD

Teaching Social-Emotional Skills

- Baby Signing Time Vol. 4: Let's Be Friends DVD
- Signing Time Vol. 2: Playtime Signs DVD, Board Book & Flashcards
- Signing Time Vol. 4: Family, Feelings & Fun DVD, Board Book & Flashcards

Managing Conflict

- Baby Signing Time Vol. 2: Here I Go DVD
- Signing Time Vol. 13: Welcome to School DVD

Involving Parents

- Baby Signing Time Vol. 1: It's Baby Signing Time DVD
- Signing Time Vol. 10: My Day DVD

Meal Time

Use signs like EAT, MORE, FINISHED, PLEASE and THANK YOU to converse with students during mealtime or snack time.

Calendar & Weather Time

Use signs like SUNNY, WINDY, CLOUDY, RAIN, and for days of the week.

ABC Time

Teach the manual alphabet to give children a tactile memory aid they will always have with them. Sign the manual alphabet as you sing the ABC song each day.

Story Time

Choose a few key words from



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a book and teach your class the signs for those words prior to reading. When you say the key words aloud during reading, ask your class to sign along with you. Add new signs each time you read the story aloud to help expand your class' signing vocabulary.

Outside Play Time

Using signs such as SHARE, TAKE TURNS and HELP will help children develop important social skills during play time.

Teaching Social-Emotional Skills

Infants/Toddlers

When pre-verbal children want to play with a toy that another child is using, their natural tendency is to reach over and grab the toy away from the other child. Sharing doesn't come naturally to children, so you'll need to teach them how to do it. The first step to teaching a child to share is to ask for something instead of taking it. A good way to do this is to teach children the sign for PLEASE. Then, if a child starts to grab a toy away from another, encourage the child to say/sign PLEASE in order to ask for the desired item.

Preschool

Children at this age are beginning to understand other people's feelings. Here's an example of how you can use the sign for SORRY to help children develop their capacity to feel empathy:

If a child hurts another in your classroom, stop the behavior immediately. Then, tell the offender what they did and how it made the other child feel: "You took Jimmy's toy and that made him feel mad. When he tried to get his toy back, you hit him, and that hurt. Let's say SORRY to help Jimmy feel better." If may be easier for the offender to sign SORRY rather than to say it. If this is the case, acknowledge and praise the offender's effort: "You signed SORRY. That will help Jimmy feel better."

Managing Conflicts

In this section, we'll recommend specific signs to help you avoid or manage conflicts in your classroom. Use these signs often. The more often children see the signs, the faster they will learn them - and the sooner you'll have a more peaceful classroom.

Infants/Toddlers

The number one cause of

frustration among infants and toddlers is the inability to communicate their needs. This frustration leads to tantrums, meltdowns and conflict. With signs, young children can start to communicate their needs directly without crying. There are three signs in particular that every infant and toddler in your care should know: MORE, HELP and FINISHED. Why these signs? These signs are extra helpful in decreasing frustration because children can use them in many different contexts and for many different reasons.

MORE: MORE is a very empowering word for young children. You can ask a child if he would like more snack, more music time, or to play peek-a-boo again. Young children learn through repetition. Being able to sign MORE gives them control of this repetition and lets you know they enjoy an activity. The MORE sign is a great tool for classroom management. For example, if you are reading with a child and lunch time is coming up, you can help that child get ready to transition by saying, "We can read this book one MORE time, then it is time for lunch."

HELP: The sign for HELP can be an amazing tool in the classroom. Young children need to be provided with the opportu-



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nities to try new things on their own. Teaching them the sign for HELP will encourage them to request assistance when they need it, rather than fussing or whining. You will need to teach this sign directly and then show children how to use it in different contexts. One great way to model this sign is to join a group of children in play. For example, if a group of children are playing with blocks, sit down with them and ask them if you can HELP them build a tower. Not only have you modeled the word and sign, but you are showing them how to respectfully join a group. Build the tower together. When you are done, or when the tower falls down, sign MORE to ask if the children want to build it again. If so, sign HELP to invite them to join in.

FINISHED: This sign will help transition times run more smoothly and can be used throughout the day. When children are completing an art project, say and sign: “Are you FINISHED (or all done)?” or if it is really time to move on you can say: “We’re FINISHED now! Let’s clean up our crayons.” Ask children during meal time if they are FINISHED – and soon you won’t have to ask – they will happily tell you when they are all done eating. Often at

meal times, if one child announces she is all done, the entire class follows. If a child signs FINISHED rather than saying it, the class is less likely to follow.

Preschool

Preschool children enjoy playing with each other but are still learning how to listen and negotiate. Teaching children how to use the signs for HELP SHARE and HURT can help preschoolers learn to listen, cooperate and offer help to one another.

SHARE: Teach children to ask their friend to share a toy or book. Using the sign occupies the hands of the child requesting the toy. This helps children self-regulate, prevents them from grabbing the item away, and it gives the other child a visual/verbal cue that someone else would like to play with the item.

HELP: Encouraging the children in your classroom to help each other creates a sense of community. Not being able to complete a task or get a friend to listen can be very frustrating. When a child uses the HELP sign, it lets a teacher – and the other children – know when a child is frustrated. This visual cue gives children in the classroom the opportunity to come

to the aid of their friends. Older children are engaging each other more and more in their play and the sign for HELP allows them to independently ask for and receive help from their peers.



HURT: Sometimes children don’t understand that their rough behavior (pinching, pushing, squeezing) can hurt others. Using the sign for HURT will help children begin to understand that others feel the same pain they do when they are hurt.



INTEGRATING SIGNS INTO YOUR CURRICULUM

Involving Parents in Signing

It's important to explain the social-emotional and educational benefits of signing to the parents in your program – and encourage them to support their child's development by signing at home. Check in with parents on a regular basis to update them about the signs their child is learning and using in the classroom. Signing Time offers two great resources to help you get your signing program off to a strong start:

Signing Time Classroom Edition

This complete set has everything you need to fully integrate signing into your existing curriculum: 8 DVDs, 2 CDs and a binder with 16 themed units of ready-to-use songs, games and activities. Includes printable flash cards for children and handouts for parents.

Your Local Signing Time Instructor

Signing Time Instructors are prepared to support your signing program in many ways. They can give a class to parents or staff to kick off your signing program – or they can help you select Signing Time resources that are a good fit for the children you serve.

FREE RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

at SigningTime.com

Free Samples from the Classroom Edition

Please visit <http://www.signingtime.com/classroom-edition> to download free samples from the Signing Time Classroom Edition including Outline, Teacher Tips, Introducing Signs, Games and Activities, and Flashcards. There is also a brief video introducing the Signing Time Classroom Edition on this page.

Guide to Enhancing Literacy Instruction

You can also visit <http://www.signingtime.com/early-literacy> to download the free 10-page guide. Studies have shown that literacy skills are improved when American Sign Language is used in the classroom and at home.

Parent and Teacher Resources

Please visit <http://www.signingtime.com/resources/activities> to download fun activities, games, crafts, and more! Song lyrics may also be printed off for use in your childcare center or classroom.



Childcare and Preschool Starter Kit

SigningTime.com/childcare



SAMPLE LESSON PLAN: LET'S BE FRIENDS

Target Age: 1–5.

Purpose:

This activity introduces children to the signs for FRIEND, PLAY, SHARE, TOGETHER and helps them understand friendship through examples of what friends do together and how they treat each other.

Signs:

FRIEND - Hook your pointer fingers together - first one way, then the other.

PLAY - With thumbs and pinky fingers out, twist your hands back and forth a few times.

SHARE - Sweep one hand back and forth on the other hand. It's like you're dividing something up: Some for you, and some for me.

TOGETHER - Put two fists together (palms facing each other) and make a circle in front of your body.

Introduction:

Introduce the lesson by teaching the signs above. Talk and sign with the children about friendship and sharing. Here are some questions to ask to get the conversation started: Do you have a FRIEND? What do you and your friends do TOGETHER? When you and your friend PLAY together, sometimes you have to SHARE. What kinds of things do you

SHARE with your friends? Do you like it when your friend SHARES? How do you feel when your friend won't SHARE with you?

Activities:

AUDITORY LEARNING ACTIVITY

An activity that supports auditory learning

Teach the children the song "The More We Get Together" (*Sung to the tune of "Did You Ever See a Lassie?"*):

The more we (get, PLAY, SHARE)
TOGETHER, TOGETHER, TOGETHER

The more we (get, PLAY, SHARE)
TOGETHER, the happier we'll be.

'Cuz your FRIENDS
are my FRIENDS
and my FRIENDS
are your FRIENDS

The more we (get, PLAY, SHARE)
TOGETHER, the happier we'll be.

VISUAL LEARNING ACTIVITY

An activity that supports visual learning

Read a book talking about the concepts you introduced. Sign where appropriate. Suggested books:

How Do Dinosaurs Play with Their Friends by Jane Yolen

Just My Friend and Me by Gina and Mercer Mayer

KINESTHETIC LEARNING ACTIVITY

An activity that supports kinesthetic learning

Classroom Mural

Materials: roll of paper, crayons or markers

Cover a table with a large piece of roll paper.

Write the words SHARE, TOGETHER, PLAY and FRIEND or your favorite friendship quote on the paper.

Have the children in the class **work together** to create a beautiful wall hanging as a group. Remember to engage the children in conversation while they are creating their mural. Talk about the likes and dislikes that friends in the class share. Comment on the colors in the mural, and how well it works out when everyone works together.





WHAT IS SIGNING TIME?

Signing Time is a family of products (DVDs, Music CDs, books, and flashcards) that teach American Sign Language (ASL) vocabulary. Signing Time products are created for children from infancy through age 8, but appeal to all ages and abilities. Signing Time DVDs feature children and adults who model each sign, original music, real-life scenes, and animated segments. The combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic teaching results in an effective, multi-sensory approach to learning. Each DVD in Series 1 teaches approximately 25-30 signs.

At the time of this publication, there are 34 DVDs available for purchase. The co-creator and host of Signing Time is Rachel Coleman, who is a mother to two girls: Leah, who is deaf, and Lucy, who has cerebral palsy and spina bifida. Rachel and her husband Aaron began signing with Leah when she was diagnosed as profoundly deaf at 14 months old.

Prior to learning that Leah was deaf, Rachel was a singer and songwriter. She has personally written all the songs in the Signing Time series and her fascinating life story has been featured in numerous national publications and media programs, including NBC's TODAY show.

Signing Time appeared on public television stations from 2006-2009, for which Rachel received an Emmy® nomination for the category entitled "Outstanding Performer in a Children's Series." Coleman co-created the series with her sister, Emilie Brown, who is the mother of two boys, Alex, and Zachary. (Cousins Alex and Leah are both featured in Signing Time along with Rachel.)

As the host of Signing Time, Rachel teaches each sign and then uses the signs in an original song, featuring video clips of infants, toddlers, young children and parents who sign the targeted words in a real-life context. The added visual component of the printed vocabulary word, along with an illustration, increases retention and comprehension of the new word and its sign. Verbal vocabulary often increases as ASL vocabulary increases.



The key mission of Signing Time is to make basic sign language simple and engaging, not only for the child, but for everyone in that child's life.



SUCCESS STORIES

Home-Schooling with Signing Time

I just want to share with you how Signing Time has been such an amazing gift in my family. We started to use it as part of our home-school second language curriculum for our four-year old daughter, Sabrina, who has an incredibly huge signing vocabulary. We usually watch Signing Time and then set out to apply those vocabulary words into the “real world.” We use home-made flashcards to reinforce the signs shown on the DVD and play games of “I Spy” using sign language. My daughter practices writing the words from the DVDs as well, so that she can start recognizing them in print. She also practices fingerspelling each word. We sign everywhere.

It seems there is always an opportunity to learn and reinforce the words and signs while we take our field trips. When we go to the grocery store I will sign what is on my list to my daughter and she will go find the item. When we go to the zoo or aquarium, we do the same thing. We both practice signing the animal we see, as well as characteristics describing that animal. We also use ASL when we practice math or when we practice counting, including everything that is added or



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Bridget E., Elkton, MD





subtracted (whether on paper or physical objects). Sabrina has done so well that she can count orally and sign up to the number 30. Another thing we do is incorporate a “voices off” time in the house that allows her to practice and apply the sign language she has learned.

We are so grateful to Two Little Hands Productions for all the excellent Signing Time products and how much they have benefited our family. Thank you!

Bridget E., Elkton, MD

Benefits of Using Signing Time in Preschool

Having a very little experience with sign language in the past, I was used to teaching kids through verbal repetition rather than talking with my hands. Until I met Ben, who changed my use of language in order to reach his needs as an individual. Ben ran into situations where he thought faster than he could speak, which resulted in high levels of frustration and negative behavior. After truly seeing what Ben needed, I was able to incorporate simple signs such as no, help, please, and sorry into daily activities in our classroom. Our work progressed from me sitting within arms reach of him during center play to being able to sign from

across the classroom to help him navigate social situations. Once he had an outlet for words through the basic signs, he was able to grasp the verbal communication needed.

Julia Boldrin, Bailey, CO

“Once he had an outlet for words through the basic signs, he was able to grasp the verbal communication needed.”

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Robin L. Williams, MA holds a Masters Degree in Teaching with a Reading Specialization from National University, and has a Clear Multiple Subject

California Teaching Credential. After interpreting in Utah for a year, she taught in public elementary schools for eight years. She has been using American Sign Language for the past 13 years after studying ASL at Brigham Young University and earning her Bachelors of Science in Elementary Education. Robin is a Thinking Maps Trainer of Trainers, and is a UCI Fellow with the Writing Project. Robin is a Master Signing Time Instructor certified through the Signing Time Academy and co-author of the guide “Enhancing Literacy Instruction Using Signing Time” and “Sign Language in the Classroom Using Signing Time.” She currently is a stay-at-home mom with an infant and toddler who love to sign.

Kyle L Stielow holds an Associates Degree from Colorado Mountain College and an Early Childhood Directors Qualification for the state of Colorado. She is an Intermediate Level Trainer for the Colorado Office of Professional Development. She has been using American Sign Language in her Early Childhood classrooms for 15+ years. Kyle is a Master Signing Time Instructor and the International Associate Director for the Midwest Region as well as a mom to a kindergartener and toddler who love to share their sign language knowledge with everyone.