

SmallTalk Learning

Helping Babies Communicate Before they Can Talk

Dear Workshop Participant:

Children love sign language. School-age kids think it is a secret code to unlock, preschoolers embrace signing with the same enthusiasm reserved for treasured finger plays, and many babies born today will learn to sign before they can talk.

Sign language has been shown to boost literacy scores in school-aged children (See *Dancing with Words*, Marilyn Daniels). Gestural communication enables children to store and retrieve messages through different neural channels than those used via spoken and written language. And, because sign language engages different senses than verbal and written communication, it is also a useful tool for children who do not respond readily to these forms of communication.

Babies can learn to use sign language to communicate before they are able to verbalize their wants and needs. Current research shows that babies who are regularly exposed to sign language from about six months of age can begin using signs to communicate as early as seven and eight months of age. In order to sign, a baby needs to develop adequate memory, dexterity, and cognition skills for recognizing, retaining, and producing signs. Since all babies develop at their own pace, some may sign very early, while others will sign much later.

If a baby is not yet six months of age, there is no harm in exposing him or her to sign language. Although it will be some time before a younger baby develops the skills to perceive, respond to, and form the signs, starting early allows the caregiver to develop a comfort and familiarity with the vocabulary over a longer period of time.

Children who have developed early verbal skills can also benefit from signing. For example, although a particular child may have an unusually large verbal vocabulary at eighteen months of age, they will likely not say every word clearly. Signing can ease frustration when a caregiver cannot decipher a new word that is said imprecisely.

My workshops and author talks aim to be interactive and fun, and can be fully customized to meet your unique needs. In addition to teaching parent-child sign language workshops, I teach at conferences and in-service meetings for early childhood and literacy professionals, and I visit schools and childcare centers to read my books to children. Please contact me directly if you have any questions or would like additional information about these opportunities.

My web site, www.smalltalklearning.com, is a good source of additional information about the overall benefits of using sign language to communicate with babies and young children. In particular, you may be interested in the 'Research and Resources' link on the site, as well as the 'FAQ' (Frequently Asked Questions) link. You can also follow my blog, www.dawnprochovnic.com, to learn more about early literacy, sign language, and writing for young children. Although there will be plenty of opportunity to ask questions during the workshop, if you would like further information at any time, please don't hesitate to contact me by phone or email at 503-223-5622 or dawnp@smalltalklearning.com or find me on facebook: Dawn Babb Prochovnic and Twitter: [@DawnProchovnic](https://twitter.com/DawnProchovnic).

Sincerely,

Dawn Prochovnic, MA
Workshop Instructor
Author, *Story Time with Signs and Rhymes*