

# EARLY INTERVENTION: TIPS AND RESOURCES

## *From the Arc of Warren County, NJ*

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### SELF CARE/FAMILY CARE

#### Useful Links:

- [The Family Matters](#)
- [5 Tips for Staying Productive and Mentally Healthy While You're Working From Home](#)
- [Ways to Practice Mindfulness While Working From Home](#)



### WIC UPDATE

New Jersey WIC is allowing more substitutions in addition to previously approved items in anticipation of limited food selections related to recent events. Families who rely on WIC can now substitute certain items of food like cheese, cereal and whole grains. Click [here](#) to learn more.



### COMMUNITY FOOD BANK OF NJ

Need to restock your pantry? [Community Food Bank](#) is the state's largest anti-hunger and anti-poverty organization. Working together with volunteers, donors and our many partners, we fill the emptiness caused by hunger with food, help and hope. If you, or anyone you know, needs food: Community Food Bank has no eligibility requirements for their local food pantries. [Browse food resources here.](#)

Here is another resource for food help: [Hunger Free NJ: Center for Food Action](#)

# WHY SIGN LANGUAGE WITH BABIES AND TODDLERS?

Why use sign language? Does using sign language delay or stop my child from talking? Isn't learning sign language difficult and doesn't it take a lot of time? Who will understand my child's sign language? Are special hand/arm skills needed? These are the questions/concerns we hear frequently in early intervention. So let's dispel the myths!

Babies are typically already using sign language! Think of your baby putting her arms up, this is the "sign" for up. When your child is shaking his head, this is the sign for "no". When he is extending a toy, he is demonstrating "give". And of course "waving bye". And "giving high fives". Technically these are all gestures.

Sign language is a formal, consistent and predictable way of using gestures to communicate. It also uses facial expressions and generalized body movements to communicate. All of these things we use when communicating with babies and toddlers!

There are many advantages to communicating with sign language as a method to enhance communication. It provides a visual language along with the auditory. We encourage adults to sign and speak, thus providing a visual and auditory cue.

It helps with learning language and making associations with objects, activities and wants. It helps with attention and focus. Siblings usually enjoy learning/utilizing the signs with the family. Also there are no other tools needed, no pictures to have available. It helps alleviate frustration for the baby/tot and family. Sign language is a bridge to the spoken language.



# SIGN LANGUAGE CONT.

In addition, in early intervention, we have heard parents ask if using sign language will “delay speaking”. A research review by Millar and Light states current research indicates use of alternative communication (which sign is considered to be) does not prevent children with delays from talking and may support speech. Other research has shown sign language speeds up speech development!

As I have been a practicing speech-language pathologist for more than thirty-five years, I have utilized sign language as an alternative method for communication. I have likened the process to crawling before walking. Most babies will crawl before walking (physical and occupational therapists of course work on this!), however after a baby is walking well independently, crawling is performed infrequently (occupational therapists usually want kiddos to crawl more to get weight bearing into the arms and hands for better hand function but that’s another article).

Typically, the process of using sign language to facilitate communication goes this way:

- 1) Adult models the sign along with the spoken word.
- 2) Baby/tot imitates and/or adult helps facilitate the sign with modeling and hand over hand assistance.
- 3) Baby/tot begins to spontaneously produce sign.
- 4) After spontaneous use of sign, vocalizations will begin to occur simultaneously with sign.
- 5) Typically the specific sign will be extinguished when the baby/tot has the spoken word. If the family continues with sign language, then the toddler continues to use both. (This assumes the use of sign language is a bridge or assist to verbal language and not the primary means of communication).

# SIGN LANGUAGE RESOURCES

Here are some resources for utilizing sign language as a bridge for communication. Most practitioners in early intervention, including special educators, occupational therapists, physical therapists as well as the speech-language pathologist, have experience and practice with sign language, although not all are fluent. Please do not worry about being fluent. The more you use sign language the easier it will be and babies and toddlers are not big critics!

If you have any question about utilizing sign language as a bridge for communication, please do not hesitate to ask your practitioner!

Here are some free resources for sign language to get you started:

- 1) [Beginning Sign Language Chart](https://www.babysignlanguage.com/chart/)
- 2) [Baby Einstein Sign Language Videos](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLzvHWHOrOvgvvBhF6pMHn0A1X6yPI9Fdk)
- 3) [How to Teach Your Baby ASL](https://www.startasl.com/baby-sign-language/)
- 4) [Top 10 Free Sign Language Resources](https://therestfulhome.com/free-resources-learning-baby-sign-language/)
- 5) [40 Free Baby Signs](https://speechandlanguageathome.com/blog/reduce-toddler-frustration-by-teaching-sign-language-in-daily-routines-part-5-descriptions-and-locations)
- 6) [Free Youtube Class](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkD7bldn_j8)
- 7) [4 Resources to Learn Baby Sign Language](#)



## TIPS FOR TOOTH BRUSHING

By 18 months it is recommended that a child's teeth should be brushed at least twice a day for two minutes (ideally after breakfast and before bed). We should start teeth/gum brushing early. For babies just use a wet washcloth to rub over gums and/or erupting teeth. Children up to the age of 7 or 8 years old continue to need supervision and adult assistance to thoroughly clean teeth. Starting early will expose your child to the feeling of stimulation in their mouth, setting up for more comfort and success later. If tooth brushing is a challenge, here are some tips and strategies:

1. Make it part of your daily routine - after breakfast and before bed. Your child will learn to anticipate it as a regular part of their day. They may benefit from watching you brush first. They can brush "by themselves" while you do your teeth and then you can finish up. For some kids, this can help them to tolerate the sensation in their mouth before accepting you getting in there. Some children benefit from the use of a battery powered toothbrush - at first let them experience the sensation on their hands, arms, and face before sticking it in their mouth.
2. Positioning - have your child stand on a stool, facing a mirror in the bathroom with the adult standing behind the child to provide support. The mirror will help them to anticipate where the brush is going in their mouth.
3. Use a song that is about 2 minutes in length to sing as you brush - Super Simple Songs, Brush Your Teeth is just over 2 minutes. They will learn that when the song is done, so is the activity.
4. Sensory input for calming and organizing their behavior - provide some deep pressure to the child's shoulders or to their chin or give them a toy to squeeze. Keep the toy specifically for tooth brushing.
5. A visual schedule may help some kids to be ready for brushing and to participate in the process.

