Everyone Can Learn with American Sign Language (ASL) Practice

In children, American Sign Language (ASL) has been shown to strengthen fine motor skills, boost literacy skills, and stimulate the creative centers of the brain. We also know that young children have a strong capacity to learn more than one language, ASL being no exception.

These are among the many reasons we at ABDO believe ASL is an extremely valuable learning opportunity! If you are ready to incorporate ASL programming at your school or library, don’t miss out on including the many other groups that can glean benefits from this engaging, multisensory language. And keep reading for tips and ideas on using ASL with infants, toddlers, and school-aged children.
**Infants and Toddlers**
Baby Brains: Babies who learn sign language tend to develop stronger verbal skills sooner than babies not exposed to sign language. The University of Oregon Brain Development Lab has produced an informational video summarizing their research on the plasticity of the brain, including the positive impacts associated with early exposure to ASL on developing brains.
[http://bdl.uoregon.edu/dvd.php](http://bdl.uoregon.edu/dvd.php)

**Reluctant Readers**
Reading Reclaimed: The Story Time series and other sign language accompanied reading times can provide a hook for a variety of reluctant readers—children can sign the words along with the story, which gives them a physical action to do with the reading. This level of engagement works to improve attention span, connection with the text, aids comprehension of word recognition, and more.

**TAG Students**
Advanced Activities: For children who are reading above grade level, many parents and teachers find sign language to be an excellent extension activity. ASL also provides advanced readers some exposure to understanding syntax, such as when learning a foreign language.

**Homeschool Families**
Creative Learning: Families that homeschool their children often want to provide creative supplements to their homeschool curriculum. Sign language and Deaf culture provide excellent enrichment opportunities.

**Scout Troops and Other Service Groups**
Service and Enrichment: Service club leaders for groups such as Girl Scouts, Campfire, and Cub Scouts are often looking for learning experiences to fulfill badges related to language exploration and intercultural awareness.

**Special Needs Children**
Therapy Tool: A growing body of research supports that sign language is greatly beneficial to children with speech delays, learning disabilities such as ADHD, autism spectrum disorder, and Down syndrome.

**ESL Families**
Bridging Barriers: Children typically develop receptive communication prior to verbal articulation in their non-native language. Sign language equalizes the learning environment and bridges potential communication gaps in multi-lingual classrooms.

**Senior Citizens**
Learning Never Ends: The frustrations of hearing loss in seniors can be mitigated with sign language. Even without issues associated with hearing loss, sign language can be a new and challenging activity to stimulate the adult brain, which researchers contend is a valuable step in fending off memory disorders.
Signing at Home with Infants and Toddlers

When infants learn to use sign language, they can share what’s on their mind long before they can communicate verbally. Signing empowers babies to initiate conversations with you about things that are important to them, things you may otherwise be unaware of.

Check out this great FAQ offered by Monta Briant for more information.

Once you’ve decided to use ASL to communicate with your child, follow Prochovnic’s simple, three-stage plan for reinforcing signs at home:

**Sign when you sing, read, and play**
Signing when you sing, read, and play can be as simple as incorporating hand gestures into common finger plays such as “The Wheels on the Bus” and “The Itsy Bitsy Spider.” Relax and enjoy the experience of signing with your children, trusting that your kids will learn to form signs by watching and interacting with you.

**Sign with your child when you hear yourself labeling things verbally**
We provide verbal labels for our children all day long without even thinking about it. We also label abstractions we are thinking about or that are going to happen in the future. For example, we might say, “I wonder when Grandma will get here?” when we’re waiting for a visit from Grandma. Whenever you notice yourself verbally labeling something repeatedly throughout the day, that is a great word to also label with a sign. This helps provide a context for the words you are signing.

**Sign key words you want to emphasize each day or week**
Pick a word you want to emphasize and sign that word every time it is used for that day (or week). The signs you emphasize should be a subset of the words you already incorporate when you sing, read, play, and label. Encourage your child to repeat the sign back to you every time it is used.

Signing key words can be as natural as teaching a baby to wave “bye-bye.” When a baby starts showing an interest in waving, parents and caregivers typically take advantage of every opportunity to wave with the baby. We recognize that the wave our baby makes may not be an exact replica of the wave we have been showing them (i.e. some babies flap their entire arm, some babies wave at themselves). But no matter how a baby waves, we notice it as a wave and respond accordingly. This same approach can be applied to signing.
Signing at School with Elementary Children

ABDO’s new Story Time with Signs & Rhymes Event Guide is filled with fun activities to help elementary children learn and retain ASL skills and have fun at the same time! The activities are designed to pair with the Story Time books, however, there are plenty of tips and tricks for integrating additional reading materials on a variety of topics. In addition, many of the activities can be modified to work with any age group.

Download your COMPLIMENTARY copy of the guide today, online on our Event Guides page!
www.abdopub.com/shop/pc/viewcontent.asp?idpage=73

Signing with Younger Kids

Listen & Sign: Sign language engages multiple senses. It also gives busy kids something positive and productive to do with their hands during story time.

Ask children to listen for a key word in a story and sign the word when they hear it. They will be more apt to concentrate on the story this way! As an added benefit, you will be able to more clearly see who is engaged and who recognizes the key word(s) selected for the story.

Signing with Older Kids

Inspiration In the Pages: Older kids take a strong interest in self-guided learning, and they enjoy the opportunity to explore at their own pace. Online signing dictionaries are one great option for ASL learning.

Stock your library with ASL-related fiction, such as Brian Selznick’s Wonderstruck (Scholastic, 2011). Encourage kids to read these titles and also to research well-known deaf people and read about them. In addition, steer kids toward online ASL resources they can explore as part of their reading enrichment.
www.lifeprint.com
http://www.scholastic.com/wonderstruck/

Signing Buddies: Pair older children with younger children. The Signing Activities in the back of the Story Time with Signs & Rhymes books and Event Guide provide a great opportunity for older children to facilitate learning experiences for younger children.

Code Creation: Older children love being able to talk with friends without their parents or teachers “getting in” on the conversation. They also like to be able to express sensitive topics such as “My feelings are hurt,” “I’m sorry,” “I need to use the restroom,” or even, “I love you,” without saying the words out loud.

Embrace this secretive nature by brainstorming various phrases or topics that older kids might want to be able to express in code. Encourage them to find the right signs for the various words they will need to express themselves.

“My middle schooler would be horrified if I hollered “I love you” from the audience after her band performance, but her eyes still twinkle if she spots me signing the same message.”
– Dawn Babb Prochovnic

For more information on the Story Time with Signs & Rhymes series, call us toll-free at 1-800-458-8399 or visit us online at www.abdopublishing.com.