



Chapter 5

Get a Jump Start on Smart

This chapter is designed to get you started signing with your baby right now. You don't need to know a single sign to begin; all you need is the desire and a few effective signs and tips to help you. Because of our signing experience, you can be sure that the information and signs we are providing will allow you to be successful at incorporating sign into your and your baby's lives.

This chapter will get you started signing right now! You will learn three of the most popular and successfully used signs with babies. Once you become comfortable with these Jump Start signs, move on to chapter 7, where you will find additional signs that are effective with babies. You can also, at any time,

begin to add the activities we have provided in part 3 of the book. The games, songs, rhymes, and more will increase your usable sign vocabulary in a fun, interactive way. Keep in mind that we are giving you an outline for signing. Choose our plan or adapt it to fit your needs and desires.

Start Signing Right Now!

If you are like most people who want to begin using sign, you probably don't know many, if any, American Sign Language words. The three signs we are offering here have proven over the years to be highly effective because they go to the heart of communicating a baby's basic wants and needs. By learning these and then following a few simple rules, you'll be on your way.

We know that babies understand words. We know that a manual language, in our case ASL, facilitates communication for them. As we discussed in part 1, this is because babies develop the ability to control their hands far sooner than the muscles of their vocal apparatus (mouth, tongue, and throat) needed to speak. When we use sign language with babies and children, we offer them the gift of language.

The First Three Signs

One of Ken and Georgia's daughters believes that it takes only the three Jump Start on Smart signs to be successful with early communication. She had grown up around signing, and when she had her first child she began to use signs with him when he was about 3 months old. When her son was about 18 months old, she went to Ken and said, "Dad, how do people raise children without signing EAT, MORE, and ALL DONE? These signs have made my life so much easier." These three signs have made thousands of parents' lives easier.

EAT, ALL DONE, and MORE are the first three signs we suggest parents use with babies. For many parents, keeping it simple and signing a few words, then adding more when you see that your baby is ready, is an effective approach to signing. Let's get started with our Jump Start on Smart signs, which really go to communicating a baby's basic wants and needs.

EAT

For many years, the number-one word parents and caregivers have asked us to teach them is EAT. This word goes right to the core of communication.

It is especially effective when taught and used consistently at meal time. You can ask your baby and sign the word, “Would you like to EAT cereal? Do you want to EAT some banana?”



EAT—Hold the fingertips of one hand together and bring your hand up to your mouth repeatedly (as if you are eating something).

ALL DONE

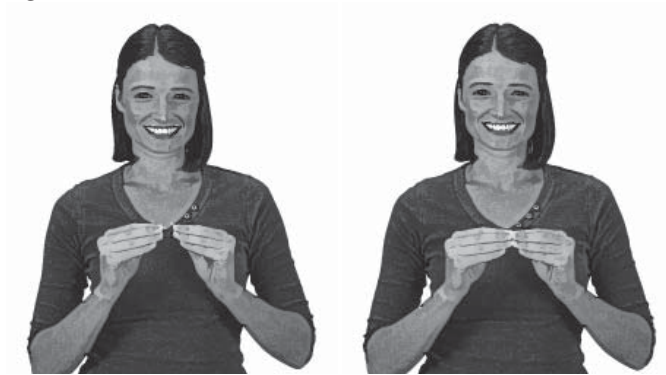
For many parents, the sign for ALL DONE, which is also used for the word finished, is another effective sign. You can use ALL DONE in so many ways: for example, “Are you ALL DONE eating?” or “Are we ALL DONE walking?” Babies often come to embrace this word and use it for anything they want to stop doing.



ALL DONE / FINISHED—Hold up both hands with palms in, fingers at chest level, with palms flat and fingers loose. Then, in a quick motion, turn your palms so that they are facing down, fingers are forward. Repeat.

MORE

Next is the sign for MORE. MORE is a wonderful sign that you can teach your child in so many different and creative ways. You can ask, “Would you like MORE to EAT?” and sign both MORE and EAT in a combination. “MORE milk? MORE swinging? Do you want MORE, or are you ALL DONE?” Anytime you get the chance to use the word and have your baby’s attention, sign and say the word MORE.



MORE—Hold the fingertips of both hands together (as you do with one hand for EAT) and then tap them together. Repeat.

“Keep It Simple” Rules for Signing with Babies

Here are “Keep It Simple” rules to keep in mind. By following these rules, you will find that signing is not complicated. It will fit easily into your everyday life and give your child the gift of early language.

- **Get your baby’s attention.** One of the best ways to do this is to sign at meaningful times, such as meal time, bath time, story time, playtime, or song time.
- **Be consistent.** Use the correct ASL sign every time you say the word.
- **Enunciate words and sign clearly.** Speak and sign together.
- **Repeat spoken and signed words often.** Providing multiple opportunities each day for your baby to hear and see signed words.
- **Keep signing simple.** Begin with only a few signs. Add more signs as you become more comfortable with the signs you know and when you begin to see your baby signing back.

- **Be patient.** Generally the younger the baby, the longer it will be until you see your baby signing back. Babies vary, but most will begin to sign words sometime between 9 and 14 months.
- **Be creative.** Create signing opportunities each day so that you use your signs as often as you can. For repetition, you can use the signs in playful activities such as reading or singing.
- **Reinforce the learning of signs.** Connect signs and their meaning to yourself or others, as in “Mommy’s ALL DONE!” or “Daddy wants MORE, too!”

Signing Success Story

Jimmy’s mom started signing with him when he was about 6 months old. By the time he was 12 months old, she had a collection of about 12 signs that she was consistently using with him, but he had not yet begun to sign back to her. One afternoon, she had to go to the store and took Jimmy with her. He hated to go for rides in the car. When she put him in his car seat and began to buckle him in, she was excited to see Jimmy frantically signing ALL DONE, ALL DONE, ALL DONE! He wasn’t crying or screaming, but he was certainly signing with enthusiasm. His signing didn’t get him out of the car ride, but from that day on, signing just seemed to blossom. By 16 months old he had a vocabulary of about 20 signs in addition to his spoken words.

Conclusion

Keep on signing. We have offered you three signs for getting started: EAT, ALL DONE, and MORE. In later chapters we will be offering you many more signs to use. Start out at your own pace, adding signs when you are ready.

Activities with signing help both you and your baby learn to use signs. Whatever signs you add, make it a routine to sign the word every time you say it. Be sure you have your baby's attention. Enjoy the excitement you feel when your baby begins to sign words to you.