

LET'S SIGN WITH YOUNG CHILDREN



Sign language use with babies and young children is an area of growing interest from families and those who work with pre-school youngsters.

The use of signing is now believed to be beneficial to a whole range of children - pre-verbal hearing babies - children who are autistic, dyslexic, have specific communication, speech and/or language difficulties or learning disability, in addition to those with hearing loss.



The visual and kinaesthetic elements involved in signing certainly add new dimensions and alternative channels to help children internalise and take pleasure in language use, and whole group or class involvement is a way of ensuring a rich and inclusive communication environment.



Not only that, but children do seem to love it and there can be little doubt that as a general life skill, it offers all children the potential of improved language and communication skills and to have some confidence and awareness to meet the communication needs of others.



The idea originated in America, and early materials were based on American Sign Language (ASL). British Sign Language (BSL) is a separate language - the indigenous natural language of the British Deaf community and forms the basis of other systems such as Makaton and Signalong which were developed to help communication with people with special needs and support speech with the signs of BSL vocabulary.



People often express surprise to discover that BSL has only been officially recognised by the government since 2003 and that its use in deaf education only re-emerged in the last 20 years. Deaf people have always used and valued their language, and BSL was in use by deaf children in schools despite policies against it that were based on the belief that signing would stop deaf children developing speech.

From profoundly Deaf co-writer of *Let's Sign Early Years*, Sandra Teasdale (translated from BSL).....



".....BSL is my first language, even though my parents and family didn't sign and I had very little access to it when I was small . It is the language that feels natural and comfortable to me and the only way I can express myself properly. Like my Deaf friends and colleagues, English is not easy for me.

.....The important thing is that we all signed - and those who spoke still spoke - signing never stopped them."



Fortunately attitudes and teaching methods have undergone great change. The Baby Signing movement has helped this too - Adele Marshall Baby Signing teacher.....



"In America extensive research has been carried out on the benefits of using some simple signs (derived from genuine sign language, such as BSL) with hearing babies, in order to communicate with them before they are able to express themselves verbally. Recent research suggests that babies are learning about the foundations of language and making important connections long before it was previously believed...."



There is now a healthy interest in and attitude to sign language use with resultant growth in materials and resources to support this.

More details and information can be found on www.signingbabes.co.uk www.talkfirst.net and on our National Grid for Learning website www.deafsign.com with details of our range of BSL materials, including the '**LET'S SIGN Early Years collection**' of books, e-books, posters and flashcards as sampled here.



Children are like linguistic sponges with innate ability for communication and language acquisition that can leave adults standing. The best time to learn is when we are young; things learned in the early years can stay with us for life - old adages, but true. So why not add signs to our everyday communications with young children - it's always going to be an extra string to their bow - and what's more it is wonderful fun!



Cath Smith is the author and illustrator of a number of books for learners of BSL. She has developed the **LET'S SIGN Series** of resources for Early Years to Adult learners. She is a qualified British Sign Language Interpreter with many years experience in the Deaf community and also in deaf education and runs the BSL information and resources website www.deafsign.com



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