Making ASL/English Bilingualism Work in Your Home
-A Guide for Parents and their EI Providers-

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Section 1. ASL, English, & Bilingualism

1.1. What is ASL?

According to the National Association of the Deaf (2017), American Sign Language (ASL) is a visual language. With signing, the brain processes linguistic information through the eyes. The shape, placement, and movement of the hands, as well as facial expressions and body movements, all play important parts in conveying information. ASL does not have a written form. ASL is an established and recognized language that is used by the deaf community in the United States and Canada.

Deaf and hard of hearing babies are able to learn ASL as newborn infants. The language patterns of ASL are detected by the brain the same way English, and other spoken languages are. There is no current evidence to support claims that using sign language with your child will lead to delays on listening and spoken language skills.

1.2 What is English?

English is the majority language spoken in the United States. English has both spoken and written forms.

1.3 What is ASL/English bilingualism?

According to Maribel Garate (2012), ASL/English bilingualism is the development of social and academic proficiency in both ASL and English. It stresses the importance of ASL and English in the lives of deaf children as well as their need to develop the expressive and receptive language abilities linked to each language. Students’ abilities to fingerspell, read fingerspelling, lipread, and mouth English are also emphasized because these incorporate skills from both languages. When provided with consistent exposure to an accessible language (Visual Language and Visual Learning Research Brief #8 ASL/English Bilingual Education: Models, Methodologies, and Strategies).
Section 2. Educating & Empowering
Making the choice to raise your deaf or hard of hearing (deaf/hh) child in an ASL/English bilingual environment takes the pressure off of having to decide when your child is an infant, how they will best communicate and learn. Rather than having to choose only listening and spoken language or only using ASL, you are giving your child the opportunity to develop communication and language skills in a way that will support them cognitively, socially, and emotionally.

2.1 Read the Research
There is ample research supporting the ASL/English Bilingual approach with deaf/hh children and their families. Take a look for yourself. Search “VL2 Research Briefs” online to find the following:

Research Brief 2: Advantages of Early Visual Language
This VL2 research brief, written by Sharon Baker, Ed.D., discusses the importance of early ASL acquisition shows in deaf children's cognitive development and literacy skills. (January 2011)

Research Brief 7: The Benefits of Bilingualism
This research brief, written by Sarah Fish, PhD Candidate and Jill Morford, PhD, explains the various benefits of bilingualism.

Research Brief 9: Family Involvement in ASL Acquisition
This research brief, written by Charlotte Enns, PhD and Liana Price, M.Ed. Candidate, discusses how parental involvement is a critical factor in deaf children's language acquisition.

Research Brief 11: Raising the Whole Child
This VL2 research brief, by Drs. Linda Lytle and Gina Oliva, reviews the research on social-emotional development in children from birth to 12th grade, particularly focusing on deaf and hard of hearing children. The brief includes recommendations for parents and educators on how to support the deaf child's social and emotional development in order to lay the foundations for future social, academic, and life success.
**Section 3. Family Language Plan**

The “Family Language Plan” developed by Batamula, C., Keith, C., Kite, B., & Mitchiner J. (2015) at Gallaudet University, is a tool that can be used to build your home bilingual plan. Read and discuss it as a family, then work with your early intervention therapists to develop the plan further.

**3.1 Family Discussion**

Now is the time for you to think about your family and how you use language in your home. Are you an English-speaking family? Are you already bilingual? Why do you use the languages you use? For reading, writing, interacting with others? What are your thoughts on using ASL during your daily routines with your deaf/hh child? What is a priority for you and your child in your home? Find the “Family Language Plan” attached, and after reflecting on these questions, complete the top portion.

Now let’s think about your daily routines. What do you do everyday in the morning, afternoon, evening, and at bedtime? What language(s) do you typically use during these routines? Find the chart on the “Family Language Plan” and complete the first column.

**3.2 Putting the Plan in Motion**

1. Designate specific language times with family members
   - Determine how to incorporate family members into a daily routine. This will allow for the whole family to have opportunities to practice using ASL and interacting/bonding with your deaf/hh child.

2. Start with one “voice off” routine, either for the whole family, or per person
   - Brainstorm a list of words/phrases used during the activity. Remember to include action, descriptive, and question words. (Page 10)
   - Work with your therapist/teacher to learn how to sign each word/phrase in ASL. Practice using the words and phrases with your therapist/teacher during your session so you can receive feedback and ideas on how to use the language during the routine. (Hint: ask your therapist/teacher if you can video record them using each sign for reference if needed)
   - Determine opportunities to incorporate fingerspelling into routine
3. Create an “experience book”
   – Take pictures of your child and family completing steps of routine or activity
   – Print pictures and put into blank book or photo album
   – Write the “story” for what is happening in the pictures and read this story together throughout the week.

4. Use literacy strategies to support English
   – Point to a written word, fingerspell it, do the sign, then point back to it
   – Look through books together and sign what you see, pointing to words and pictures as you sign them
   – Ask questions about what you see in the book so your child can answer or point to a response

5. Criteria
   – When your family can complete the routine “voice off” at least 4-5 days/week, select a new routine on which to focus
   – Repeat steps 1-4 weekly until Morning, Afternoon, Evening, and Bedtime routines are practiced
   – Incorporate experience books into daily activities to introduce a transition to new activity or to review/recall an activity that was completed

3.3 Reflect & Adjust
At weekly sessions, reflect with on how you and your family are doing with:
   – learning and using ASL
   – using literacy strategies
   – providing visual access to language at all times
   – providing opportunities for your child to watch and/or interact with native users of ASL

Your therapist/teacher will observe you and your child to make sure you are not overwhelmed by going too fast, or bored by going too slow. Are you feeling frustrated or defeated? Tell your therapist/teacher! Adjustments can be made to best meet your needs. Remember: you cannot learn a new language overnight! Work on these small chunks until you feel you have mastered them before moving on. Whether it takes 1 week or 4!
Section 4. Assessment
The best way to know how well you and your family are doing is by assessing your skills periodically.

4.1 Initial and Quarterly Assessments
This checklist and vocabulary list will be completed by you and your therapist/teacher at the beginning of the plan, and again at each quarterly review meeting with your IFSP team.

- VL2: Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children’s Visual Communication & Sign Language Milestones
- MacArthur Communicative Developmental Inventory for American Sign Language

4.2 Final Assessment
This will be completed by you and your therapist/teacher before your child transitions from the Birth-three program to the 3-5 program.

- The Clerc Center’s “Student Language and Communication Profile Summary”
Family Resources

“Knowing what it was like to grow up as the only Deaf person in her hearing family and raising two young signers, Sheena felt something was missing from the internet. A place where everyone is welcome to learn ASL. Finding her inspiration from the Food Network Channel, ASL Nook came alive in 2013. Since that day everything changed! Little did the ASL Nook family know that it would have such a profound impact on people, especially on hearing families raising Deaf children.” http://aslnook.com/

VI 2 Storybook Apps: Bilingual Apps for Deaf Readers! http://vl2storybookapps.com/

SIGN IT!

AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE MADE EASY

“SignIt ASL is ideal for anyone with an interest in learning beginning sign language. Learn ASL vocabulary, phrases, sentences, grammar, Deaf culture, and much more! Includes:

• fun chapter videos with voice on/off feature
• fingerspelling, vocabulary and sentence practice
• chapter quizzes with scoring and progress tracking
• receptive conversation practice and tests
• comprehensive ASL dictionary

http://signitasl.com/
Family Resources

Everything You Always Wanted to Know About An ASL/English Bimodal Bilingual Approach
https://www.tlcdeaf.org/uploaded/About_Us_Section/Handout_for_ASL-English_Bimodal_Bilingual_Presentation_2.pdf

Setting Language in Motion: Family Supports and Early Intervention for Babies Who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Search “ASL Storytelling”
Putting the Plan in Motion - Vocabulary Brainstorm Worksheet!

Routine: ____________________________________________________________

Family member (s): _______________________________________________________

Date Begin: ___________________________________________________________

### WORDS

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<th>Action</th>
<th>Descriptive</th>
<th>Questions</th>
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### PHRASES

- __________________________________________________________
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- __________________________________________________________
- __________________________________________________________
- __________________________________________________________
References


Family Language Plan

Family beliefs about languages used at home:

Purposes of using these languages:

Language goals for your child:

Language goals for your family:

Your child’s abilities and interests:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Current Language</th>
<th>New Language Plan</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Spoken English</td>
<td>ASL</td>
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<td>Breakfast</td>
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Afternoon

Evening

Bedtime