



Using Gestures and Signs to Support Language

- Start with gestures or signs based on your child's interests and actions that happen throughout the day vs. occasionally.
- Choose gestures or signs for words your child isn't already saying or isn't saying clearly.
- Be sure to discuss with your Chat Clinician what gestures or signs to use with your child.
- Use the gesture or sign AND the spoken word together, model multiple times.
- After modeling the gesture and word several times, check to see if your little one is understanding:
 - If your child seems to understand, then try this out with them. If they need a little help, try guiding their hands to produce the gesture and make the action/item occur. For example, your child loves going outside to play. You use the word and sign for "go" to indicate going outside to play. You use the sign and say "go," and your child heads to the back door. They are demonstrating understanding! Time to see if they can try out the sign. Next time you are ready to go outside, stand by the door, say and sign "go." Pause for a few seconds to see if your child imitates. If they don't, guide their hands to produce the sign for "go" and open the door if they tolerate this. If your child shows resistance, discuss with your Chat Clinician.
- Don't forget to watch for possible nonverbal language or gestures your child may begin producing (or might already be doing) on their own.

You do not need to limit the gestures to American Sign Language {ASL}:

- Deictic or representational gestures help language development.
- It's okay if your child moves their entire hand forward instead of pointing straight ahead to indicate "go."
- Once you have a set of gestures (based on what your child is interested in) and have discussed them with your Chat Clinician, be consistent with using that gesture for the action or item.
- It doesn't need to be a specific ASL or baby sign. But if you and your child are using a certain gesture for an action, activity, or item, use that gesture consistently.
- Be flexible and have fun!



Some early gestures and signs to start with may be:

- Pointing! A simple gesture, but very effective
- General gestures: waving hand towards you for “come”
- Eat
- Drink
- Potty
- Go
- Up
- Down

Have your child use pointing to make a choice

- More — but be careful not to use this for everything! Use “More” only in the context of needing or wanting more of something and not initially requesting for an item
- All done
- Sleep
- Open
- Close
- Help