

## Module 6: Promoting Communication in the Home

### Section: The Child with Access to Visual Language: Tips for Caregivers



### Activity 6.7: Providing Ideas to Support a Child’s Visual Access to Language and Communication at Home

---

A. Encourage family members and caregivers to:

- sign as much as possible around the child even when they are not communicating to him or her directly. Hearing children learn much of their language from “overhearing” communication all around them. Deaf children need to “oversee” language, too.
- gesture when they may not know a sign. Gestures are a good substitute until a correct sign is learned.
- repeat a sign many times and in many situations to facilitate the connection with a specific object or action.

B. Provide families with a variety of strategies to support the six concepts discussed in the module:

1. Encourage visual exploration of the child’s world:
  - Visually explore the child’s world from the perspective of the deaf child (e.g., get down on the child’s level to experience what he or she may see visually).
  - Consider having hearing family members try earplugs for a short time to experience some level of “not hearing” everything around them to heighten their awareness of the importance of gaining information visually.

2. Take a “visual tour” of the child’s home or neighborhood:
  - Pay attention to how the environment is designed (e.g., lighting, objects that may be visual obstacles, vibrations in the home).
  - Brainstorm ideas about how to create a visually accessible environment (e.g., moving objects to improve sight lines, avoiding communication with the child in front of windows or glare from a light).
3. Encourage sign play and sign babbling:
  - Explain “sign babbling.” Like hearing babies who babble when exposed to sounds, deaf babies babble with their hands when exposed to signs. Discuss the importance of recognizing babble but continuing to model the correct signs. Show families video examples of sign babbling. (For an example video, see the [Handspeak](#) website.)
  - Discuss “baby signs.” Make sure families understand that a child’s early signs may look different than the signs they are using. Each child’s motor development is different. Just like there is “baby talk,” there are also “baby signs.”
  - Encourage opportunities for finger play games (e.g., Eensy Weensy Spider, waving fingers in fun patterns). Encourage the child (as appropriate to his or her motor development) to imitate the hand movements.
  - Encourage families to use facial expression and body language games with the child (e.g., imitate *happy, sad, surprised*) to promote awareness that visual communication is available on the face and body as well as on the hands.
4. Encourage labeling and describe objects in the environment:
  - Encourage families to introduce signs for what the child is doing (e.g., looking at books, actively involved in play). Explain that it is not necessary to overdo it and continuously interrupt a child’s natural play or book viewing. It is okay to wait until the child shifts his or her visual attention to you to demonstrate the signs.

- Demonstrate strategies to bridge American Sign Language (ASL) and English (e.g., sandwich techniques that may include signing, pointing to the English print, and repeating the sign, or based on a child’s goal of signing it, saying it, and signing it again).
5. Encourage imitation and expansion of sign expression:
- Have family members model back the appropriate sign for the “baby sign” attempted by the child.
  - Encourage family members to copy signs they use with their child.
  - Demonstrate how to exaggerate the size of signs and increase facial expression to encourage the child to focus on a sign.
  - Have the family watch (and act out) ASL stories that exaggerate ASL signs and accompanying facial expressions to communicate a specific point (e.g., sign *Papa Bear, Mama Bear, and Baby Bear* to reflect the character’s personality). Even if the family does not yet feel comfortable with the formal signs, have them practice with gestures. (See the ASL version of *Goldilocks and Three Bears.*)
6. Make a sign language book:
- Encourage families to create their own sign language books with photos of family members signing (and the accompanying English print). Add new categories and signs as the child develops. (See Activity 6.5.)

**Additional Resources:**

- [Deaf and Hard of Hearing Role Models](#) (You Tube videos)
  - [EHDI E-Book: Chapter 18: Deaf Community Support for Families: The Best of Partnerships](#)
  - [Deaf/Hard of Hearing Adult Involvement Learning Community \(NCHAM\)](#)
  - [Family Involvement in ASL Acquisition \(VL2 Research Brief\)](#)
- 

Developed with [Stacy Abrams](#)

3