

## Module 4: Launching Language and Communication Through Sign

### Section: Sign and Speech Development



### Activity 4.4: Educating Families About How to Plan for Using Both Sign and Speech

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- A. Discuss with the family the following considerations involved in developing both signed and spoken language with a young child:
- how each child has a unique ability to access and develop spoken language related to many interwoven factors (e.g., hearing level, benefit from listening technologies, cognitive abilities, language use in the home);
  - the importance of making a plan that meets the child where he or she is and facilitates moving him or her to the next developmental level of language acquisition in both visual and auditory modalities;
  - the importance of assuring families that using American Sign Language (ASL) with their child will not hurt their development of spoken language (see evidence discussed in Activity 4.3: Educating Families About American Sign Language);
  - the importance of families understanding that while signing in and of itself will not hurt their child's development of spoken language, that listening and spoken language must be actively included in the child's daily routines for it to develop;
  - the importance of families understanding the benefits of addressing language acquisition in ASL and spoken English as languages independent of each other (and at the same time, families should also look at how each language can support the development of the other); and

- the importance of paying attention to the evidence that raises concerns about signing and talking at the same time to support language acquisition:
    - Discuss concerns that a child is not getting a full language through talking or a full language through signing a few words. For example, when a person is attempting to sign and talk at the same time, he or she tends to leave out spoken words and/or signs in the message.
    - Compare attempts to use ASL and spoken English at the same time to trying to use two other languages at the same time (e.g., Spanish and English).
  - The importance of looking at the evidence that documents the benefits of developing and implementing an assessment-driven, systematic language planning process to guide recommendations for choosing and monitoring strategies to develop and use both ASL and spoken English. ([See references on language planning from the Early Intervention Network.](#))
- B. Develop a home plan for how and when to address development and use of ASL and spoken language to meet the needs of a child:
- Work with the family to review their daily routines and the people involved. Identify which language and modality each person will be using for specific activities based on identified goals (e.g., ASL during story time, spoken English during snack time, spoken English with sign supports when extended family is visiting).
  - Keep in mind that some activities may naturally lend themselves to addressing use of one language or modality over the other (e.g., using ASL during bath time when a child may not be using his or her hearing aid or cochlear implant, or using spoken language with an FM system while driving in a car or walking a child in a stroller when the child and parent may not be able to see each other).
  - Look at the various people that the child interacts with and plan for how to facilitate their language interactions:
    - Identify when it is possible to include activities with deaf adults, families with deaf or hard of hearing children, or community members who are fluent in ASL to focus on ASL.
    - Identify times when hearing siblings could be included to play with a child, including games to encourage spoken language.

- Identify structured games, meal times, art activities, etc., in which extended family members could be involved using either ASL or spoken English.
- Keep in mind other considerations impacting decisions about which language and modality to use at a specific time:
  - Does the activity happen in a particularly good or bad listening environment?
  - Does the activity happen in a particularly good or bad visual environment?
  - Is the child demonstrating a preference? For example, a child may be fatigued with listening by the end of the day and prefer signing at bedtime, or a child may be involved in an activity without looking towards an adult so he or she may be more focused on spoken language.
- Develop a plan that:
  - reflects a child's current (not anticipated) abilities and goals. For example, if the family suggests a plan that uses mostly spoken English, but the child has limited access through his or her hearing aid to learn this way, discuss how to modify the plan to include more ASL in the child's routine.
  - reflects the routine interactions and individuals in the family's life. If there are gaps in using one language or modality to meet the needs of the child, investigate avenues to include opportunities outside of the families typical routine to support the child where there are gaps (e.g., connect a hearing family to a deaf family to expand opportunities for ASL use, connect a deaf family of a child with a cochlear implant to a hearing babysitter to encourage exposure to spoken language).
  - takes into consideration possible disabilities that may impact development of sign and spoken language. For example, is it necessary to consider how an alternative communication system (e.g., Picture Exchange Communication System, Alternative/Augmentative Communication) may fit into the plan? Tactile signing or other systems may be appropriate to include.
  - takes into consideration if the family speaks a language other than English. Planning should include looking at where this language fits in. Regardless of which language a child is developing, it is important that he or she has fluent role models in that language. Keep in mind that it is still important to have a discussion with the family about the child's ability to access a spoken language, whether that be English or the language used at home.

C. Develop a chart to guide a child’s plan. Make copies of the chart for the parents. Color coding the activities helps some parents remember which language they plan to use in each environment. A completed chart may look something like this:

Activity	People Involved	Language
Morning routine (breakfast, getting dressed)	mom	spoken English
Dropping off sibling at school	mom, brother	spoken English
Running errands	mom, various community members	English with sign support
Physical therapy	physical therapist	spoken English
Library story time	librarian, various children	spoken English
Neighborhood playgroup	friends	English with sign support
Reading books at home	mom or dad	ASL
Playing outside/going for walk	mom, dad, or whole family	English with sign support
Visiting grandparents and cousins	grandparents, cousins, parents, brother	English with sign support
Lunch	mom	ASL
Playtime at home	mom or dad	ASL
Parent-infant group	families with deaf/hard of hearing children, teacher of the deaf, deaf adults, parents	ASL
Family dinner	parents and brother	English with sign support
Bath	dad	ASL
Bedtime routine	dad	ASL

Review the chart weekly to see how the language plan is working with the family. Did the original language assignments work out? Monitor if the family is learning and including strategies to support the child’s sign and/or spoken language development. Modify the child’s plan as needed.

**Supporting Resources:**

- [Webcast, Maximizing Language Acquisition in ASL and Spoken English and accompanying reference list](#)
- [Making a Plan: IFSP Considerations for Children Who Are Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#)
- [The Why and How of an ASL/English Bimodal Bilingual Program](#)

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