

Signing to support Children's Language Development



Who does signing help and why?

- *To support children's understanding of language*
 - It slows down our talking
 - The sign looks like the item so connection clearer
 - It helps with memory issues
 - Introducing concepts is easier using visual sign (eg action words, position words, size words)
 - Visual processing is generally less impaired than auditory processing
 - It helps with children who have fluctuating conductive hearing loss

Who does signing help?

- *Children with expressive language difficulties:*
 - Non-verbal children
 - Children who are at a single word level
 - Poor speech – children with verbal dyspraxia, cleft palate, hearing issues, or children whose language is delayed or disordered
 - It can help some children with autism

How does signing help?

- If child has no ability to copy words or sounds, it lessens their frustration/pressure on them to talk



Signing movements are bigger and easier to see/copy than speech sounds

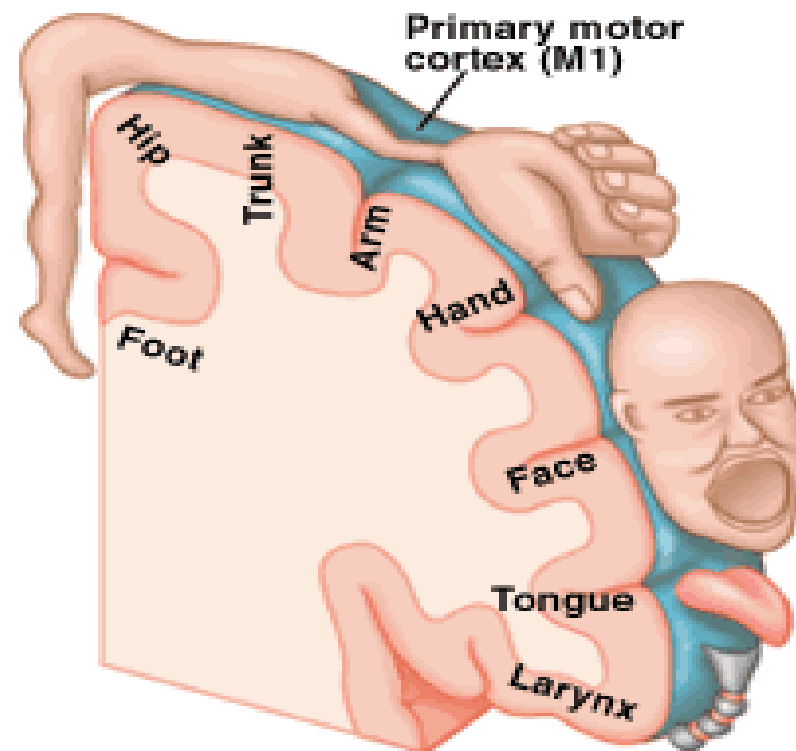


Gesture develops before and alongside speech and in normal development



The motor cortex for hands and mouth are adjacent

- There is some evidence that working on one helps the other



Supports vocabulary development

- Signing helps the child communicate what they want – choose highly motivating words



Helps bridge gap between 1 and 2 word phrases

- Emphasizes key words
- Gives a prompt for each spoken word



Autism spectrum disorder

- Children with autism spectrum disorder are visual learners and signing can help them understand what you are saying
- We often use more pictures with autistic children but some do well with signing

How to support your child

- Agree as a family to learn some signs
- Remember it won't hold back speech
- Talk to your child's setting and work together
- Pick a few signs to start with that will motivate your child – these could be favourite food or toys

Where to start

- **FIND OUT WHAT MOTIVATES CHILD**
- Pick a small number of signs to start with, thinking about child's understanding and expression (and what parents can cope with)
 - what you will sign to child (signs for routine) and
 - what you want child to say (bubbles, music)
- **Avoid** please, thankyou, yes, no,
- **Be cautious** with more or again
- Teach with a variety of materials: real situations, real objects, pictures, toys, songs – it's repetition not magic!
- Celebrate any attempt (and look out for gestural babble)

It doesn't work: problem solving

Check:

- Are you signing enough?
- Have you picked the most motivating signs?
- Are you trying to work on too many?
- Is child unable to copy?
- Are there enough opportunities for practice and use?
- Do you need to work on interactive games first?
- Do you need more help getting started?

Don't hold back child's progress

- Keep signing going as speech emerges, don't stop your child signing to force speech, it can support sentence development and help if intelligibility is poor
- If you don't keep track of child's progress and add new targets, you will hold back their language development
- Make sure families and settings are communicating about the signs they are using and teaching so you all understand your child!

What next?

Resources available:

- Makaton website for books, freebies and downloads,
- My Choice Pad – provides drawings and videos of 4000 Makaton signs
- Sign up for Makaton Sign of the week (free)
- YouTube Singing Hands, Mr Tumble
- **What else could support you?**