

3 Big Reasons to Teach a Child with Autism Sign Language

(and TWO Reasons Don't Involve Improving Language!)

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1

SIGN LANGUAGE OFTEN LEADS TO VOCAL LANGUAGE. Sign language is great for early learners who are not yet speaking because it's portable and we can eventually teach a child (who doesn't acquire speech) to sign across the operants. For example, we can first teach the child to request or mand for ball when he wants it, then to label a picture of a ball and finally to answer questions about a ball (you throw a ___).

Research has shown that, when sign is accompanied by spoken words, it works to improve vocalizations and I have found that most of my clients who I started working with at a young age eventually did acquire some spoken language.



2

CHILDREN WHO ARE TAUGHT SIGNS ARE MORE ACCEPTING OF PHYSICAL PROMPTS, which are often needed for teaching lots of skills. Most of my clients with autism who had no ability to speak when I began working with them, also had no ability to echo, match, touch body parts or imitate either. I have found that teaching 3-5 signs very early on helps children accept physical prompts and can reduce problem behaviors.

3

TO TEACH A CHILD TO IMITATE. One of the biggest misconceptions about sign language is that a child needs to know how to imitate before we can teach him to communicate via sign. Luckily, this is not the case. I have found that one of the best ways to teach a child to imitate is to teach them 3-5 signs because you can often fade your physical prompts to imitation prompts.

TO SUMMARIZE: I believe teaching 3 to 5 signs is an important step in developing language in your child or clients with speech delays. In addition to improving language, two other huge benefits not talked about much are an increase in the child's acceptance of physical prompts and increasing the child's ability to imitate.

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