



# Early Learning Digest

Research-based early childhood development information provided by Lifetrack



Greater Mankato Area United Way

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## Is Baby Sign Language Worthwhile?

Teaching your baby sign language can provide a fun bonding activity for you and your child. Sign language can provide a baby with a way to communicate long before they are able to use vocal communication.

Between the ages of 8 months and 2 years, children are beginning to understand what they want, feel, and need, but don't always have the verbal skills to express their thoughts. Sign language can ease this frustration.

Books and websites can provide the tools to begin teaching your child baby sign language. As you begin to teach your baby, keep these tips in mind:

- **Set realistic expectations.** Most children aren't able to communicate with baby sign language until about age 8 months.
- **Keep signs simple.** Choose signs that are of interest to your child such as more, drink, eat, mother and father.
- **Make it interactive.** Alternate talking and not talking while signing. Try signing while bathing, diapering, feeding or reading to your baby to provide context. Embrace your baby's arms and hands to make signs while holding your baby on your lap, with his or her back to your stomach. Acknowledge your child when they use



- gestures or signs to communicate.
- **Be patient.** Don't get discouraged if your child uses signs incorrectly or doesn't start using them right away. The goal is improved communication and reduced frustration.

Keep in mind that, as you teach baby sign language, it's important to continue talking to your child. Spoken communication is an important part of your child's speech development.

Source: "Is Baby Sign Language Worthwhile" retrieved from <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/infant-and-toddler-health/expert-answers/baby-sign-language/faq-20057980>.

## Helping Kids Learn Self-Control

Teaching self-control skills is one of the most important things that parents can do for their children because it is important for success later in life. By learning self-control, kids will make appropriate decisions and respond to stressful situations in ways that produce positive outcomes. Here are a few suggestions on how to help kids learn to control their behavior:

**Up to Age 2** - Infants and toddlers get frustrated by the things they want to do and what they're actually able to do. This frustration often leads to temper tantrums. Try to prevent outbursts by distracting your child with toys or other activities. For kids close to 2-years of age, try a brief timeout in a designated area such as kitchen chair or bottom stair. A timeout teaches a child that it's better to take some time alone instead of throwing a tantrum.

**Ages 3 to 5** - Continue to use timeouts, but rather than enforcing a specific time limit, end timeouts once your child has calmed down. This helps kids improve their sense of self-control. Praise your child for not losing control in frustrating or difficult situations.

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## Helping Kids Learn Self-Control Continued from page 1

During a child's meltdown, stay calm, and explain that yelling, throwing a tantrum, and slamming doors are unacceptable behaviors that have consequences and clearly state the consequences. Your actions will show that tantrums won't get kids the upper hand.

It is important to model good self-control yourself. If you're in an irritating situation and your kids are present, tell them why you're frustrated and then discuss the potential solutions to the problem. This will model for them the best way to deal with a difficult situation. If you continue to have difficulties consult your health care professional.

Source: [http://kidshealth.org/PageManager.jsp?dn=KidsHealth&lic=1&ps=107&catid=146&article\\_set=21608#cat146](http://kidshealth.org/PageManager.jsp?dn=KidsHealth&lic=1&ps=107&catid=146&article_set=21608#cat146).

## Kids and Chores

Many parents want children to help around the house. They believe helping will build life skills, contribute to the family, increase a child's self-esteem, and reduce the parents' workload. However, getting kids started with chores can seem overwhelming and parents often wonder if the effort is worth it.

The earlier parents get children to take an active role in the household, the easier it will be to keep them involved as teens. Children as young as age 2 can help in some way. Chores teach important life skills.

- **Self-motivation:** to take a task and carry it through regardless of whether it is enjoyable.
- **Prioritizing:** if kids are going to do both what they want to do and complete chores, they must plan ahead.
- **Organizational skills:** define a task, learn the necessary skills, do the job, tidy up after the job.

Most children have the physical ability to do a task before they have the emotional ability to complete the task alone. Think in terms of three stages:

- **Child helps.** The parent does the planning and motivation, and the child does part of the work.
- **Child needs reminding or supervision.** Adult and child share planning and motivation. Child completes the task with supervision.
- **Child works independently.** The child does the planning, motivation, and work.

It may take years, rather than weeks



or months, to progress between stages. Introducing children to chores is a process, not a one-time task. Keep your expectations realistic and be patient as your child gains skills over time.

For suggested age-appropriate chores, visit <http://www.lifebalancesolutions.org/#!/solutions-for-families/cc16>.

Source: "Kids and Chores," created by Elizabeth Crary, Qwik Sheet Parenting Press, 2009, [www.ParentingPress.com](http://www.ParentingPress.com).

## Test Your Knowledge!

### Baby Sign Language...

- 1) T F Most children are able to communicate using baby sign language at 4 months.
- 2) T F The goal of baby sign language is to improve communication and reduce frustration.
- 3) T F Sign language can provide babies with a way to communicate long before they are able to use vocal communication.



If you have concerns about your child's growth and development, please talk to your child's health care provider or go to [www.helpmegrowmn.org](http://www.helpmegrowmn.org) and find out how you can get connected with various resources in Minnesota.