



Chapter 4

Get a Jump Start on Smart

Signing with toddlers offers many more options for parents, teachers, and caregivers than signing with babies. Some of the same concepts used with babies continue to work, but the reasons for and the range of signing activities for toddlers is very different. If you have been signing with your baby, continue with the signs and methods that you have found effective. If you are just starting to sign with a toddler, you are beginning at a very exciting time. Toddlers have longer attention spans and more muscle control than babies, and their curiosity and interests are expanding rapidly. Signing is extremely beneficial as it provides them with greater language skills and as much as twice the usable

vocabulary of nonsigning children. The result is enhanced communication and the fostering of enthusiasm for learning that can last a lifetime.

Parents of toddlers are faced with children that are highly mobile, full of energy and are exploring their world with enthusiasm. They are demanding, lovable, absorbing information rapidly, building language, and into almost everything. Toddlers are capable of using and understanding lots of words.

In our first book, *Babies Can Talk*, we focused our attention on providing signs that would allow babies to express their wants and needs. Effective signs like EAT, MORE, and ALL DONE (which are found in the glossary of this book) were suggested, and though they are still effective, signing with toddlers takes on new dimensions. In this book *Toddlers at Play*, we are offering your toddler signs that are effective in

- shaping behavior
- fostering self-control
- supporting the learning of feelings and empathy
- enhancing communication
- enriching language growth
- developing an enthusiasm for learning

Start Signing Right Now

This chapter offers you six highly effective signs that have been used successfully with toddlers. These signs will help you with silent behavior control, encourage empathy, enhance communication and reward your toddler's efforts. You will find over 200 possible signs to use with your toddler included in this book. However, we believe the Jump Start on Smart signs of STOP, GENTLE, HELP, CHANGE, HURT, and GOOD are the best to begin with. Incorporate these signs into your daily life and you will soon see just how wonderful signing will be for you and your toddler.

Keep It Simple Signing Rules

Here are a few "Keep It Simple Rules" to help you be successful at signing with your toddler:

1. Focus on a few signs at a time and slowly introduce new ones.
2. Have your toddler's attention and be sure you are looking at each other.
3. Sign correct signs even if your child develops an alternative version.

4. Clearly enunciate each word you sign.
5. Repeat signs often and throughout the day.
6. Create signing opportunities that will help you reinforce the signs you are using.
7. Include signing in your playtime activities. Sign while reading, storytelling, playing games, and singing songs.
8. Keep signing fun and playful. Never be coercive.

STOP

The sign for the word STOP is one of the most used signs for parents and caregivers of toddlers. Toddlers love getting into everything, and this sign will provide you with an effective way to control and shape behavior. STOP will remain effective with a child for years to come. It requires an action and response from your toddler without you having to raise your voice. Use facial expressions to demonstrate how serious you are in your request to STOP something.



Signing Success Story

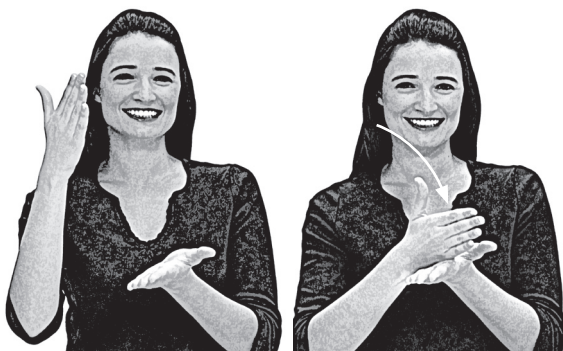
When Ken and Georgia's son John was about 2½ years old, they enrolled him in a swimming class. During the class John kept running along the side of the pool to get from one place to another. He was just an excited young boy, but he needed to learn to walk and not run on a wet pool deck. The other parents, whose children were also running, were constantly screaming to their children, "Walk!" or "Stop running!"

Ken, who was sitting on the side of the pool opposite to John, noticed that John would look at him just before he began to run. So Ken began to sign STOP and WALK every time John looked from across the pool. John would smile and walk to

where he was going. Never once did Ken raise his voice like the other parents.

One of the moms commented to Ken a few weeks later, “You’re really a nice dad. You never yell!” Another mom then added, “You’re so lucky to have such a well-behaved child.” What these parents did not realize was that Ken was actively communicating, shaping, and controlling John’s behavior during the class. He was not screaming; rather he was effectively interacting with John by using sign language.

STOP is a useful sign for stopping an unwanted behavior, and as you saw from the story, it can be done silently. You could sign to your toddler to STOP climbing on something, or stop throwing food on the floor, or stop pulling the dog’s tail, and so on.

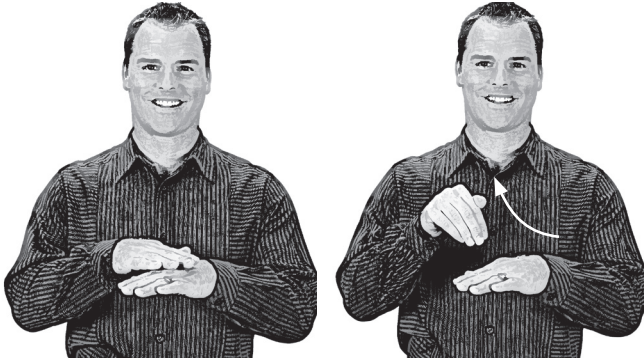


STOP—Hold your left hand, palm up and extended. Hold your right flat hand facing in and chop it down quickly, laying it on top of your left hand. Use your facial expression to reinforce how strongly you mean STOP.

GENTLE

Chapter 1 explained the importance of developing empathy. Toddlers can get carried away and get a bit rough with others, including family pets. Parents are always looking for ways to help their children see that they need to control their own behavior and that they need to be kind and considerate of others. The key word and sign for parents to use to help develop empathy is GENTLE.

GENTLE is effective when you sign it and then demonstrate what it means. You can demonstrate GENTLE by softly touching a child or softly petting an animal as you say the word and then by following up that action with signing and saying the word. In this case, you are connecting the sign to the spoken word and to the meaning of the word through an activity.



GENTLE—Hold one hand flat, palm down. Then gently stroke the back of that hand.

Signing Success Story

Sarah had two boys who were just a little over one year apart in age, and her oldest was having difficulty being gentle with his brother. Sarah worked repeatedly for a few weeks signing GENTLE, saying the word, and physically demonstrating what it meant. When Richie was being too rough with his younger brother, Matthew, she would say and sign “GENTLE Richie, be GENTLE.” After a few weeks of this, the result was that Richie would almost always stop being rough and look at Sarah signing and saying GENTLE. She knows this sign has helped her reduce the roughhousing that almost always ends with one of the boys getting hurt.

HELP

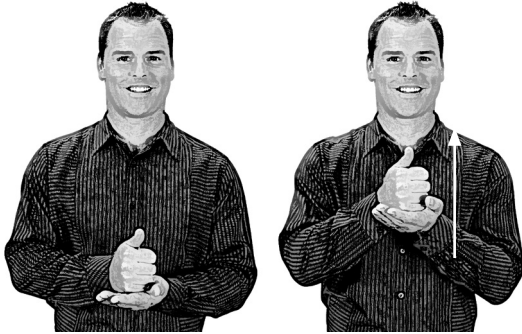
Meaningful interactions and connected moments with children do not need to be accidents. You can arrange for these special times to happen. You can empower your toddlers to be involved with you beyond playtimes or activity times by involving them in signing throughout the day. One of the better toddler words for achieving this is the word HELP.



Signing Success Story

Georgia started working at the School for the Deaf at 6:00 a.m. On her first day, the other counselor took Georgia to the dorm and explained that her job was to wake up the boys, help them get dressed and ready for breakfast, and then get them off to school. Georgia knew no signs. She had taught herself finger spelling, thinking that this would come in handy, not considering that 5- and 6-year-olds don't know how to spell well. The counselor showed her the sign for WAKE UP, and then Georgia was supposed to work on her own. The first little boy jumped out of bed and started signing. Fortunately, the other counselor was still there and told her that Kevin needed HELP with his shirt. Georgia woke up the next boy, who needed HELP making his bed. Later, she was asked to HELP with tying shoes, buckling belt buckles, combing hair, opening toothpaste tubes, buttoning shirts, sprinkling salt on eggs, and buttering toast. After two hours she knew over 30 words, but the one that was used most often and got her attention the fastest was when the children needed HELP.

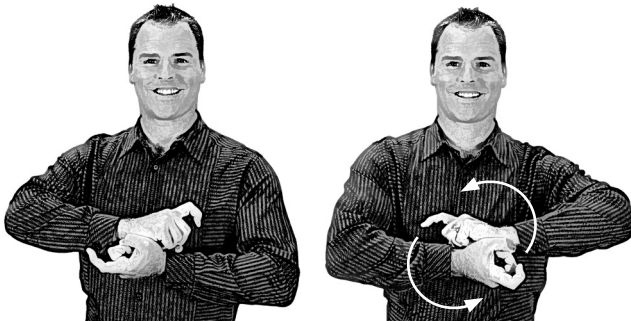
HELP is a wonderful word to encourage your child to be involved in daily activities. For example, you can say “HELP Mommy put the toys away” or “HELP me put the clothes away” or HELP with other activities around the house. It is good to learn a few signs for things that your toddler may be helping with around the house like TOYS (BALL and TRAIN) or CLOTHES (SHOES and SOCKS). All of these words and more can be found in the glossary.



HELP—Hold one hand in a fist, thumb up, and the other hand flat, palm up. Lay your fist on top of your palm. Then lift both hands as if one hand is helping the other. Use your fist hand in the event that you cannot do a two-handed sign.

CHANGE

Toddlers will soon be transitioning from diapers to being toilet trained. While they are still in diapers, a wonderful word that enhances communication by allowing them to express a specific need is the word CHANGE. We have suggested for years that the word CHANGE be used instead of diaper as it is an easy sign for toddlers to do, and once they are out of diapers, they can continue to use it. For example, your toddler can ask to CHANGE her shirt or CHANGE her toy or even to CHANGE the DVD that you put on for her to watch.



CHANGE—Make the letter X with both hands, one on top of the other, with your palms facing each other. Twist your hands so that they switch position. The opposite hand is now on top.

HURT

Toddlers are very active. They are constantly running, walking, and falling. HURT is a useful sign to help your toddler, sometimes through his tears, to tell you what is wrong. This sign is a directional sign that is signed where you are hurting. For example, if you had a headache, you would sign it near your head. If you hurt your knee, you would sign it near your knee and so on. You can also teach this sign effectively by demonstrating the sign for HURT on yourself when you bump your leg, hurt your arm, or stub a toe.



HURT—With both hands in fists, point index fingers toward each other and tap the fingertips together. Remember that this sign is directional. Sign it near the place where you hurt.

GOOD

Toddlers respond well to parental praise. It seems to be in their nature to want to please others and strive to do more and learn more to receive acclaim. The sign for GOOD provides you with a word that rewards actions in a positive and physically expressive way. It is also visually engaging since signing GOOD requires you and your toddler to be looking at each other.



GOOD—Hold your right hand flat, near your mouth, then move it down to your left hand, which is held with the palm up in front of you. Both palms will be facing up, with the back of your right hand on the palm of your left hand.

Conclusion

You can get started signing right away with just a few signs. In this chapter we focused on six very effective signs to use with a toddler: STOP, GENTLE, HELP, CHANGE, HURT, and GOOD. These signs will assist you in shaping a toddler's behavior in positive ways. These words help them to be actively involved in daily activities and in praising and rewarding their efforts. To establish these signs, just as with other signs in the future, you will need to incorporate them into your life, sign them every time you say them, and invent ways to create signing situations. For example, you can sign "HELP Mommy around the house," "It's time to STOP what we are doing," or "Let's GENTLY put away all the toys." Whenever you choose to reinforce your communication by signing with your toddler, be sure that you sign with a playful and attentive attitude.