



# Color of Language

Developing Sign Language educational materials to facilitate communication and early intervention

## Parent FAQs

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The answers given here are only meant to assist you in your search for answers. They are not meant to be the “end all” absolute best answer for your situation. There is not a “one size fits all” answer or solution. The approach and method that is best for your child depends upon many factors and can only be decided on a case by case basis.

*Very Important Note:* You may end up changing approaches several times. You are not required to stick with one approach and method for the rest of your child's life. What works now, may not be necessary or effective at a later time. If what you are doing is not working, then find what does work and change the route you are taking. In case you don't read far enough to hear us say it later, please take it to heart now. We are not advocating that EVERYONE, ALWAYS, OR NEVER use any specific approach or use any ONE approach EXCLUSIVELY. We are advocating that you find the best solutions for YOUR child and his particular set of circumstances. We welcome your questions or comments.

### **EARLY INTERVENTION AND FAMILY INVOLVEMENT**

(The answers in this section are aimed specifically for children who are deaf, not hard of hearing.)

***Question: Many parents today are teaching their babies and children to sign and they aren't even deaf. Why?***

ANSWER: Because parents have found their hearing child can communicate with them much earlier through signs than speech. The infant/toddler can make his needs known and the parents do not have to guess why their child is crying or what he is pointing at. It reduces frustration for both parent and child and makes for a much happier and contented child. (and parent!). Speech doesn't usually begin until between one and two years of age. A baby can sign before he is one year old.

The research on these families is showing that these young children's IQ scores and cognitive skills are in the 99 percentile! It seems they are stimulating both sides of the brain and are getting a big jump start on language and communication. Hmmm, are we missing something? Should that tell us something?

***Question: The educational experts are telling me not to sign to my deaf baby because he won't be normal and won't learn to talk if he learns to sign.***

ANSWER: Ok, let's first address the term “normal”. What does that mean? Ask your doctor what he means by the term “normal”. Does it mean your child will look and act like other children who can hear and speak and not draw attention to himself by signing?

I am afraid that a child without language input from birth will certainly not be “normal” in ANY way. He will be unable to make his needs, wants, hurts, or feelings known without language. When he can't get those needs met in the “normal” way, his



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frustration and anger will manifest itself in aggressive, physical actions. Now *\*that\** is normal – you and I would do the same! But with *\*those behaviors\** he will definitely draw attention to himself!

He will be behind all his hearing peers in language development. Unless he catches up somehow, he will never be on “normal” grade level. Like 90% of his deaf peers (the 90 % without language input at home), he will graduate high school with less than a third or fourth grade reading level-hardly “normal” achievement after 12+ years of school. He will struggle all the way through school because the inability to read well will affect every area of study. A strong language and reading base is necessary to learn Science, History, Social Studies, even Math. He will not pass the EXIT exam for high school and will not be able to go to college... He will live on SSI the rest of his life because he cannot get a decent job that will support him without a high school diploma or the necessary reading, language skills.

So, ask your doctor what he means by normal and please let me know his reasoning.

***Question: The doctor told me not to worry about my deaf baby. "She will be fine", he says. Is that true?***

ANSWER: That depends. If you do nothing, and leave it all to “the experts”, she will definitely not be fine. If the school tells you that research shows it is important to start communication that is clear and meaningful as early as possible and helps you begin that process at home, then she will be just fine. You must start as early as possible giving her a form of communication she can use to understand and make sense of her world. The more you give her, the better she will be. Teachers, even the very best teachers, only have her a few hours a week. You have her all day, every day.

YOU are the one that will determine if she will be fine or not. What you do at home will make all the difference in her life. What you don't do at home, will also make a difference.

***Question: I have been trying to make sense of all the information I have been given since finding out my child is deaf. It is so confusing and conflicting. Who is right? Who should I believe? Who can I trust?***

ANSWER: Do your own research, study and get as much information as you possibly can, and do what makes sense to you. You are the mother; you need to make the decisions you feel are best after studying all the options. Believe me, there are many options and philosophies.

Find other parents that are further down the road in all of this who can tell you what they did right and what they wish they had done or had not done. You have started a long journey that will take a lot of work and a lot of patience. But it really is all worth it. The end product is that he will be fine. Check out the other FAQs and hopefully they can be of some help. The worst thing you can do is – do nothing.



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***Question: I just found out my child is deaf. Some people are telling me to learn signs and sign to him. Others are telling me don't sign to him. What do you suggest?***

ANSWER: My 40+ years of experience has been that the most important factor in a deaf child's education and success is parental involvement. I have seen every method work. I have seen children whose parents signed ASL or SEE signs, or didn't sign, or used only oral methods, or used oral, aural methods or used all of the above and their child succeeded! Why? The parents were willing to do whatever it took to ensure their child's success. Any method will work, if you work at it.

Now, that being said, I highly recommend that you talk to those parents. I am sure they would tell you what they wished they had done/ not done that would have made the process easier, quicker, or more pleasant.

My advice is to do it all. Signing, speech, hearing aids, auditory training, lip-reading classes – give him everything. Which to start first? All of the above. There is no research that says that learning one language interferes with learning a second language simultaneously. The child will choose what he prefers to use at different times, but it is all being processed and internalized. Give him as much as possible as early as possible. Then if something did not work well for your child, you have not wasted valuable time and have to start all over again with a new approach.

***Question: The doctor says my two year old doesn't have a hearing loss. He says he is just slow in responding and developing, but will be ok. He says, just give him time.***

ANSWER: Hopefully your doctor is right, but don't count on it! Do your own testing. When your two year old has his back turned, clap, whistle, bang something behind his back. That won't work if he sees you. Be sure he is responding to the sound, not catching a glimpse of you. Watch him to see if he responds to loud sounds, then softer sounds. Speak his name at different volumes and pitches.

Keep in mind that hearing loss is often overlooked because the child hears just enough to fool us and he might have perfected the art of lip-reading just enough to escape detection.

In addition to the loudness or softness of sounds (or decibels), there is also the factor of high and low frequencies. Your child might just hear low frequencies fine, but has a loss in the high frequencies. Test a high frequency voice (females) and a low frequency (male) voice at different levels of volume (or decibels). If after all this you are still convinced or still suspect he has a hearing loss, insist that your doctor do sufficient testing to prove he hears all frequencies at all volumes.

***Question: We are from Mexico. My son is deaf and there were no schools for him there. He is in school here now, but he is so far behind.***

ANSWER: You are not alone. We see and hear about people in your situation all the time. I am so glad you are concerned and seeking help. Please read all of the FAQ and answers and get all the information you can and if you need to, give us a call. We would



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love to help you. Please read LAY A FOUNDATION, especially. All of our materials are in Spanish, as well as English, if you need them spoken or written in Spanish. See our products page for the Videos/DVDs/Book in Spanish as well as English. Above all, don't be discouraged. You can make a real difference in your child's life. You can make ALL the difference for him. Thank you for your desire and determination to get involved. You will be so glad you did. It is never too late.

***Question: Where do I go to learn to sign to my deaf child? We don't have much money.***

ANSWER: The major thing to remember is that you cannot learn to sign from a book. Sign Language is not two-dimensional as a book is. Drawing the positioning and movement of two hands is very difficult to do and even more difficult to decipher. Plus, you miss the other essential elements, such as facial expressions and body movement that are just as important as hand movement. Books are very helpful and useful to remember and practice after having seen it in person or on video/DVD, but never to learn from originally.

Check out the resources in your community:

- Check out the local library.
- ASL Access is a non-profit org. that places a large collection of over 200 Sign Language books, videos and DVDs in public libraries. Call your library and see what they have. If they do not have much, ask to speak to the person in charge of purchasing and ask them to order the collection. You can check out more information as [www.ASLAccess.com](http://www.ASLAccess.com). Some libraries charge a small fee for videos and DVDs and have strict rules about borrowing and returning them.
- Check out the Internet.
- Google "Sign Language" or "Learning Sign Language", "ASL instruction", "ASL books, videos, DVDs" or any number of other things to discover an abundance of resources. The problem is knowing which ones are good, better and best. If you know someone to ask who would know, ask their opinion of the resources that look good to you. If not, try to find critiques of them. [www.ASLAccess.com](http://www.ASLAccess.com) has valuable critiques also.
- Helpful links for free resources on the internet:
  1. [www.lifeprint.com](http://www.lifeprint.com)
  2. [www.aslpro.com](http://www.aslpro.com)
  3. [www.learnsignlanguagefast.com](http://www.learnsignlanguagefast.com)

You can find many more by using Google or other search engines by typing in Free Sign Language, etc.

Call your local community colleges and ask if they have an ASL program and get a schedule of classes.

Talk to the teachers of the classes about your family learning to sign and the best options in your community.



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Call the local Deaf Advocacy agency. They usually offer inexpensive classes the whole family can attend, without the expense and academic demands of a college course.

Check local churches, Parks and Recreation, Adult Schools for classes. They are usually inexpensive or free.

Check out the resources on our site. There are very few resources for Spanish speaking parents available. We include Spanish in ALL of our products. We also give a 10% discount on books and DVDs to families with a Deaf person(s).

***Question: My granddaughter is four years old and cannot communicate. I am worried about someone abusing or molesting her and her not being able to tell us.***

**ANSWER:** Sadly, predators prey on the weak. They choose victims who will not or cannot expose them. A child who cannot communicate is a prime target for the unscrupulous. The percentage of victims of abuse is much higher among non-verbal children.

It is imperative for so many reasons that all the family members be able to communicate with your granddaughter. Not only for the reasons above, and for so many other reasons. Please read the answers to the other FAQ for all the reasons to and results of communicating or not communicating fluently with her.

But, basically to answer your question, NO, you cannot leave it to the school to teach her. You cannot take that chance, plus, don't you want her to be able to tell YOU, not someone else? A perpetrator can be anyone in her environment and she needs to be able to communicate with everyone. So, how do you do that? See below, "LAY THE FOUNDATION".

#### **LAY THE FOUNDATION**

There are, unfortunately, no easy fixes. The only way to really communicate these concepts is by LAYING A FOUNDATION of language concepts with her. She has to be able to communicate with more than just one person, so everyone needs to be involved. It is not a matter of just learning to sign, it is teaching her concepts by attaching language to everyday experiences, emotions and events.

When your child cries – sign "CRY" to him.

When your child hurts – sign "HURT" to him.

When your child is afraid – sign "AFRAID" to him.

As your child experiences emotions, attach language to those emotions, while she is experiencing them. Then you can talk about those emotions when she is not feeling them.

When anything happens, attach language to the experience, so you can talk about it later, when it is not happening.

Show pictures of people, places, and objects, then attach language to them, so you can talk about them when you don't have pictures of them handy.



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Whatever your child is seeing, feeling, doing, or touching, attach language to it. They won't remember it the first time, or maybe the second time or even the third time, but do it enough times and they will remember it.

While you are giving her the language you need to explain to her good touching and bad touching and that she needs to tell someone if she is hurt or abused, you are also building the relationship of trust and closeness that will give her the courage to confide in you if she needs to.

You are not only building a language base to protect her from predators who would take advantage of her, but you are setting the stage for academic success including the ability to read and comprehend what she reads. You are building a rich foundation of concepts and language that will make the world of difference in her life.

We commend you for your concern and determination to touch and change her life forever.

### ***Question: How will I decide on the educational approach and method for my child?***

ANSWER: Three of the most important factors that will influence your decisions are:

1. Age of onset (how old when he became deaf. Not when you discovered it, but when it actually occurred).
2. Degree of Loss – is he hard of hearing or deaf. The degree of hearing loss is of utmost importance.
3. Family involvement – how willing are you and other family members to be proactive and involved?

These factors make so much difference in your approach and methods. If he heard before he became deaf, he will have some memory of language. That is a tremendous advantage. If he has some hearing and hears within the speech range, he will benefit so much from an oral-auditory emphasis.

Whichever method you choose, you will want to establish effective communication for the following reasons:

1. He/She will want to communicate the following things with you:
2. You will want to communicate the following things with him:
  - a. Your child will need to communicate these things to you:
    - ❖ He has a pain: how severe it is; where it is, exactly; when it started; if it is on-going or stops and starts; if it is a dull pain or a sharp pain.
    - ❖ He has exciting news to tell you
    - ❖ He has sad or bad news to tell you
    - ❖ He wants to go somewhere: where, when, with whom.
    - ❖ He doesn't want to go somewhere and why.
    - ❖ He is experiencing a negative emotion and why: sadness, disappointment, frustration, anger, fright, anxiety, etc.



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- ❖ He is experiencing a positive emotion and why: happiness, excitement, pride, anticipation.
- ❖ Someone has hurt him – was it physically or emotionally, who was it, when, is it still happening?
- ❖ Someone touched him inappropriately: Who? When? Where? Is it still happening? See FAQ
- ❖ He loves and appreciates you and why.
- b. If you wanted to communicate these things to your child:
  - ❖ You love him and are proud of him and why.
  - ❖ What you are laughing or crying about and why.
  - ❖ Someone in the family is ill or dying.
  - ❖ What dying means.
  - ❖ What appropriate and inappropriate touching is and what to do about it.
  - ❖ Not to talk to strangers or go anywhere with strangers.
  - ❖ There is an emergency: fire, earthquake, flood, hurricane, air raid.
  - ❖ What to do in case of the above emergencies.
  - ❖ Why you are disciplining him and that you re disciplining him because you love him.
  - ❖ The importance of telling the truth and what truth means.

We hope these sign sheets are of help to you in those times when important concepts need to be communicated but we realize they are not sufficient in really communicating with your child.

***Question: I have been signing to my son who is deaf for several months and I don't see much response from him in signing back to me. Is signing just not working for him?***

ANSWER: Do not be discouraged if your child does not sign back to you for a long time. If you have other children or have experienced the language learning process, you realize that it takes a hearing child 1-2 years to voice language he has heard since birth! Be encouraged, signing is much easier and faster for infants and toddlers than voicing.

They will communicate with you in signs much earlier than they will talk...IF THEY ARE EXPOSED TO SIGNS consistently.

So don't be discouraged if it takes a while before you see your child sign. Just know that he is taking it all in, internalizing it and will someday use it when he is ready. The more he is exposed to signing, the less time that will be.

Also, if you are the only one who is signing to him, it will take much longer. He has to figure out that this is communication that works for everyone, not just a game you are playing with him. If everyone is signing, he figures that out much quicker and is motivated to use it to get his needs met, with everyone. If others are not using signs or responding to his, it discourages and delays his use of signs.

That means don't just sign TO your child. Sign anytime he is around. If you are only signing to him and not others around you, it takes him longer to figure out that this is not just a game mom or dad plays with him. For him to realize that this is



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communication and can get him things he wants, he must see it used with others, not just with him. If he sees dad, brother or sister signing cookie and getting one, he is more likely to use his signs and must faster.

The added benefit is that everyone is learning to sign and communicate with him. You are not only teaching your deaf child language, you are teaching everyone in the room the signs they will need to communicate when you are not around.

You are also teaching something much more important. You are teaching everyone, including your child, that he is important enough to communicate with. That may be the most important thing you accomplish – to teach the whole family, friends and everyone in his environment, that he is worth the time and effort it takes to learn to communicate with him. You are helping them realize that it is disrespectful, rude and hurtful to leave anyone out of the interactions of the family.

No one likes to be left out, ignored and disregarded. Not even a small child, who you think is not aware.

His concept of who he is and how important he is is being formed from birth on. His self-esteem and self-worth is being carved daily by how he is treated and regarded by others. You are teaching him and everyone else, he is an EQUAL member of this family and he is worth it.

***Question: My family says it is too hard to learn a new language and takes too much time and effort.***

**ANSWER:** Yes it is hard to learn a new language. Yes, it does take time and effort. It is not going to be easy, quick or convenient. We all have to decide in life what is important enough to spend our time and energy on. Many things are hard, but we do them because of the pay off. So let's talk about the PAY OFF of learning to sign to communicate with a family member. Is it worth the hard work and time?

**PAYBACK- If you do:**

- Your child will build a healthy self-esteem and feel respected, loved and valued.
- He is going to be able to read and do well in school because he has a strong language foundation.
- Your child can tell you where it hurts when you are at the doctors and he is asking important questions affecting your child's health and life.
- He can tell you if someone is hurting or abusing him.
- It will prevent others hurting and abusing him, because he can communicate and expose them.
- He will have values and principles to live life well because you have taught him what respect means, the difference in right and wrong, truth and lies.
- He can share the family's value system and faith because someone can interpret for him in Sunday school church, the Temple or the Mosque as well as at home.
- He can get and keep a job because he is educated and has work ethics he learned from you.



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- He can choose his friends, girlfriends, and wife well because he is not desperate to belong, and to be treated with respect and acceptance.
- He can teach and discipline his children in love because someone showed him how to discipline in love and be a real man, husband and father.
- He will tell you repeatedly how much your efforts have benefited him and how he appreciates and loves you for all your sacrifice.

### **PAYBACK- If you do not:**

You will not be alone, as 90% of families do not. After teaching for over 30 years in Deaf education and seeing the results in families that do not, I can tell you there is also a PAY BACK if you do not:

- He will have difficulty in school all of his life, because he doesn't have enough language or understanding of basic concepts to learn to read well. That foundation was not laid.
- He will probably graduate High School with less than a third-fourth grade reading level (as do 90 % of deaf HS graduates).
- He will hate school, reading and anything academic because it makes him feel stupid and inadequate.
- He will act out angrily and physically from toddler age on, due to his frustration in not understanding or being understood.
- He will act out angrily and physically because he feels left out, ignored, and insignificant in the family and society.
- He will act out angrily and physically because he cannot communicate his needs or wants in little and very important things.
- He will not understand why he is being disciplined and that it is for his own good and you love him. He will react in confusion and anger.
- He will become a victim to anyone who would take advantage of his inability to communicate.
- He will make choices based upon the opinions and values of his peer group because they can communicate with him.
- His peer group will become his "family", because they are closer than his own family.
- He will learn the facts of life from his peers, and it probably will not what you would have taught him.
- He will marry someone who makes him feel valued, loved and not because she has character qualities he wants.
- You and the family will live with the regret of not learning to effectively communicate with him, or possibly his deaf wife or your deaf grandchildren.

***Question: How do I convince my family that it is important and necessary for them to learn to communicate with their deaf son, brother, grandson? They are so busy and say they don't have the time. They think it is sufficient if I do all the signing.***

**ANSWER:** Read, copy and print the answers to the questions above and ask them to



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read them. If that doesn't work--call Ms. Heflin at Color of Language (661) 393-4658, (661) 703-4130 (direct line) or email: [coloroflanguage@bak.rr.com](mailto:coloroflanguage@bak.rr.com) or [customercare@coloroflanguage.com](mailto:customercare@coloroflanguage.com).

We welcome your questions and will do our best to answer them and if we can't, we'll find someone who can.