

ASL Think Tank

FACT SHEET



When a hand moves, a voice is spoken,
When a vision is seen, a dream is open,
When a thought is understood, a mind is flowing.

Does ASL interfere with spoken English?

Alternating between ASL and English will not interfere with normal acquisition of both languages. A child can be exposed to both languages during the same period and learn to switch between ASL and English as separate languages. This is called code switching and it is common in bilingual households.

The visual cortex in the brain develops rapidly during the first few months after birth and research has

shown that infants respond to visual stimuli well and can acquire ASL with ease. The speech production cortex, however, is complex and develops later. Without a visual language in place, it is difficult to predict how well the deaf infant or toddler will be able to acquire spoken English skills, even through intensive training and use of hearing devices. However, when the deaf child acquires ASL early, the language building blocks are formed and this can facilitate acquisition of another language such as English.

Questions and Answers

Knowledge of ASL and English permits the child to freely interact with both signing and non-signing peers, which can promote healthy socioemotional and intellectual development.

Does ASL make it difficult for a deaf child to learn another language?

ASL is a natural language. If taught and acquired, a child will be able to learn another language, just like English speaking children will be able to learn another foreign



Mission Statement

American Sign Language [ASL], like English and all other languages, was developed within several communities centuries ago in this country. Today, ASL is widely used by Deaf and Hearing individuals alike. Any human being, especially a deaf infant who relies on visual input for communication, should be afforded the right to acquire and use a signed language for full access to meaningful communication.

As contributors of the ASL Think Tank, our mission is to bring a better understanding to parents, advocates, policymakers and educators on promoting dual language use (ASL and English) in the deaf person's everyday life at home, school, and community. Bridging research findings along with life experiences as Deaf and Hard of Hearing professionals, we consider how ASL as a visual language facilitates early communication between the infant and caregivers, enhances the child's cognitive and literacy skills through bilingual education, and promotes healthy socioemotional development through rich interactions with family and peers.

language. Bilingual research shows that switching between two languages provides the child with lifelong cognitive flexibility and better memory capacity. These bilingual children are better at shifting attention between two things and ignoring distracters than children who speak only one language. This benefit continues throughout adulthood and even old age as well.

It is normal for a bilingual toddler to show some delays in both native and second languages. Ongoing bilingual research in United States and abroad found that children using more than one language do reach proficiency in each language, just as monolingual speaking children reach proficiency in their own language.

Is it too difficult for my deaf child to learn our home language?

Deaf children are capable of learning languages like their hearing peers. In fact, your deaf child should be encouraged to learn your home language and culture so that the child can participate in family conversations and cultural functions. The sense of family inclusion and cultural pride will have a positive effect on the child's self-esteem and confidence. Even if the child does not become proficient in the language used at home, it is ok for the child to have stronger receptive understanding of the language than expressive language skills.

Where do I go to learn ASL?

The best avenue is to contact your state's commission on Deafness and Hard of Hearing. The state should be able to direct you to a local business or organization that will help provide you with information on ASL and the Deaf community events.

Check out our website:

<http://www.aslthinktank.com>

Thanks to PBS, you can check their website for resources at:

<http://www.pbs.org/rightthere/assets/pages/deafcommissions.html>

ASL classes are typically available at universities and community colleges. In some states, Deaf and Hard of Hearing support organizations can help locate Deaf adult mentors or ASL facilitators who provide weekly lessons in your home. In an effort to maximize ASL experience at home, some families choose to have young ASL signers live with them with added benefit from assistance with babysitting and errands. Just like with any other language, learning ASL is best learned when immersed in a signing environment. Viewing signs on a DVD or in a book is a great way to get familiarized with the signs per se; using them with another encourages retention and comfort. Sign language DVDs can be checked out for free through Described and Captioned Media Program at Described and Captioned Media Program.

<http://www.dcmp.org/Catalog/Default.aspx>

Is it easy for a hearing parent to learn ASL?

Learning a foreign language, including ASL, depends on one's aptitude, motivation, and readiness for language input. For hearing parents who are learning ASL as a foreign language, the primary goal is to communicate effectively with the deaf child and maintain the language(s) of choice. With this in mind, hearing parents and family members should not feel totally burdened with the expectancy that they must become highly fluent in ASL. Consistent use of communication modality with a deaf child throughout childhood has been shown to result in better mental health during adolescence.

Whether done privately at home or in ASL classes, experienced ASL teachers typically begin with an

introduction of basic vocabulary signs and move on to basic sentence structures such as questions that enable interactive language use with the deaf child. Soon, anyone can move on to acquire facial and signed expressions used for praising and disciplining the child.

Families may wish to include Deaf mentors who can provide ASL/English dual language model for their child and everyone. An example would be through the Shared Reading Program. Contact your early intervention program for information and assistance. If your child is in school, the IEP team can help develop individualized plans to maximize the child's ASL language acquisition and communication access both in school and at home.

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Url to the article:

<http://www.aslthinktank.com/questions-and-answers>