



Speaking and Signing

We know from looking at bilingual families, that children are readily able to learn to speak two, three or more languages as long as they have good language models in each language. The same can be applied to learning to speak and sign and there is no reason why a child cannot learn to both speak and use sign language fluently if s/he has sufficient access and exposure to both languages. Just because a child is exposed to sign does not mean they will not speak.

Even if speech is the primary goal for a child, an additional communication method, e.g. signing, may be necessary at certain times. For example at night, as children do not wear their hearing aids/cochlear implant processors; if the hearing aid/implant is not working; or in situations when it is not possible to wear aids/processors e.g. in the bath/when swimming (please note some new cochlear implants can now be worn in the bath/swimming).

If a child's hearing difficulty is severe or profound and hearing aids / cochlear implants are not available or appropriate, the child will not have sufficient hearing to hear spoken language and therefore will not be able to learn to speak. These children and their families / those around them will need to choose how they will develop their child's language and sign is recommended as the primary route for communication. Sign language is a complete language in its own right and, for children who learn sign language, there is no reason why they cannot show their learning and intelligence in order to access education and careers albeit through sign as opposed to speech.

There are lots of professionals (including audiologists, speech and language therapists, doctor, teachers etc) who can give you advice and information about communication and the support available for your child. It is very much your choice, which route you wish to go down for your child and the professionals will support you with whatever decision you make.

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