

Signs in Tactile Communication

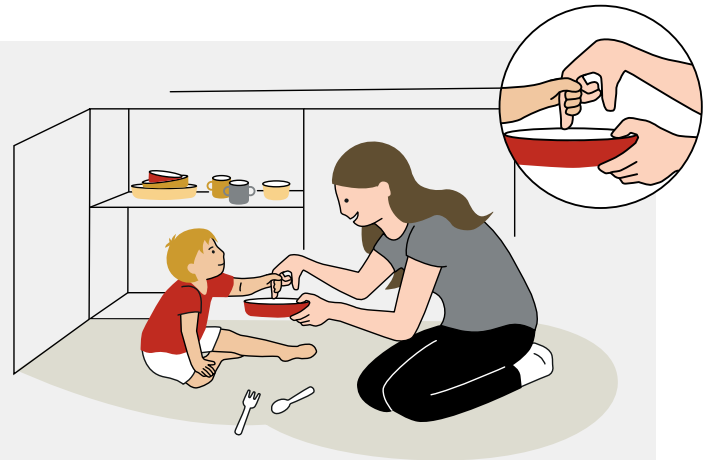
If you are close to a child born with combined vision and hearing impairments, it is important to understand how signs from sign language can be adapted for tactile communication. The more

knowledge you have, the better equipped you will be to support the child's communication development. Use our tips to learn how to adapt signs in various ways for communication!



Consider Positioning

The adult needs to position themselves in a way that makes it easier for the child to perceive and perform the signs. This might involve sitting behind the child, side by side, or face-to-face. Maintaining an even height between both parties helps the child perceive the signs more effectively. Sitting behind the child can also support any motor difficulties the child might have.



Use Speaker and Listener Hands

A common method for using tactile signs is called speaker and listener hands. This means that the listener places their hands over the hands of the signer. In communication with children, their listener position may vary, often due to their smaller hand size. For instance, the child might hold on to a few fingers of the adult instead of the entire hand. Using speaker and listener hands allows for turn-taking in communication.



Signs Can Be Performed on Both the Child's and the Adult's Body

A child can be exposed to signs performed on their own body, and they then perceive information about the sign's placement and how it feels on the body. This is especially helpful when the child's

hands are otherwise occupied, if the child is hesitant to engage with hands, or is not accustomed to using speaker and listener hands. As the child becomes comfortable with using speaker and listener hands, signs can be performed tactilely on the adult's body or as a mix between the child's and the adult's body.



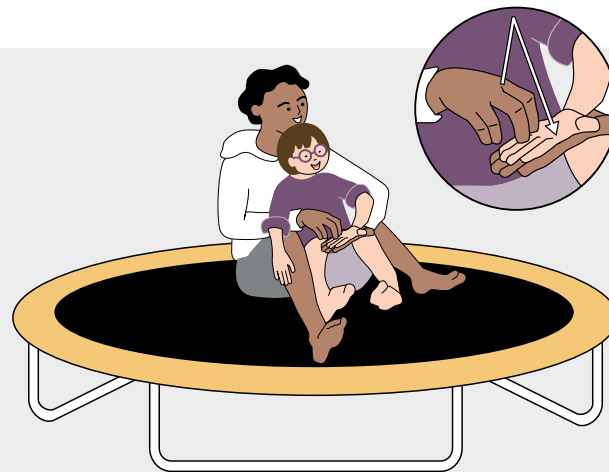
Help the Child Form and Perform Signs

If the child invites the touch, the adult can take the child's hands in their own and assist in forming and performing signs together. This is natural when the child is learning a new sign. The child receives necessary information about hand shapes and movements, enabling them to eventually sign independently.



Help the Child Experience Signs from Their Own Perspective

When the adult and child use speaker and listener hands and the adult signs on their own body, the movement appears mirrored to the child. To help the child perform the sign themselves, they need to experience it from their own perspective. The adult can position themselves behind the child and perform the signs together on the child's body.



Perform Signs with Tactile Contact

Some signs in sign language are performed “in the air,” often in front of the signer. To adapt this for tactile communication, you can make adjustments by performing the signs in contact with the child's hand. Alternatively, you can move the performance sign closer to make contact with the child's body. For example, the sign for “shower” can be performed in contact with the head, “friend” in contact with the child's thumb, and “jump” in contact with the child's hand.



Choose Signs That Match What the Child is Focused On

Exposing someone to language involves matching the language to what the person is thinking of. This means the adult must observe what the child is focusing on and then name it tactilely. When naming, pay attention to whether the child can distinguish between different tactile signs. If two signs feel too similar when performed tactilely, choose an alternative sign with a similar meaning to avoid misunderstandings.



Be Mindful of Pace and the Need for Repetition

Tactile communication with children often requires a calm pace. You may need to repeat tactile signs several times and clearly demonstrate the hand shape and movement of the sign. In all, this gives the child a sound base to process what you communicate about. It also gives the child time to respond.