

Ask the Expert- Best-Selling author, Monta Briant, answers your baby signing questions.

Q- Will signing delay my baby's language development or cause delays in other areas?

A- Occasionally someone tells me they know of someone who signed with their child and that the person's child ended up having a speech delay and the parent thinks that signing caused the delay. As parents we always have a tendency to blame ourselves for anything that happens to our children.

If they fall down, we feel bad that we were not there in time to catch them. If they have a birth defect, we wonder if the ganga we smoked in college really did damage our DNA.

The fact is that out of every 10 children, one will have a speech delay, whether they signed or not.

So with so many parents signing these days, it is no surprise that you occasionally hear of a signing child who is late talker. This would have been the case if whether the child signed or not. Instead of blaming sign language, we should be grateful that these children have a tool that helps them communicate where they would otherwise be incredibly frustrated.

When pediatricians suspect a speech delay, they will refer the parent to a Speech-Language Pathologist who will evaluate the child and prescribe a course of appropriate therapy. Very often, a part of the therapy the SLP will suggest is— you guessed it, sign language!

Now you have to ask yourself, why would an SLP prescribe sign language if it would further delay speech? The answer is, of course, that they wouldn't. Sign Language is a great help to children with speech delays, because it encourages and accelerates verbal language development while simultaneously relieving the frustration caused the inability to communicate.

Will signing cause delays in other areas? Not long ago, a well-meaning pediatrician interviewed on NPR (KPBS Radio) pondered whether children might suffer delays in other areas if their parents spent too much time signing and not enough time interacting with their children in other ways, such as playing, reading, and speaking.

Sometimes I am just amazed how a professional will go on Syndicated National Public Radio and speak on a topic without bothering to find out more about it. As signing parents (and most pediatricians) know, signing with babies is done *right along* with all the other interactions that are important to babies development. In my classes, I teach parents how to incorporate signing while playing, reading, singing, and engaging in daily routines with baby. Sign language is *never* done in a vacuum—it's always done in combination with real-life interactions, and requires parents to have even *more* interaction with baby than they would have otherwise!

In addition, signing require that parents make eye contact with baby, resulting in much more of the "face time" between parent and child that is so critical to babies and young children's development.

About the author:

Monta Briant is the best-selling author of the Baby Sign Language Basics series of books and learning materials. In addition, she teaches classes all over San Diego, does free monthly story-times at many of our city and county libraries, and is mommy to Sirena, age 10 and Aiden , age 6.

For information on classes, books and other learning materials, please visit www.babysignlanguagebasics.com