

Is my baby signing- or am I imagining things?!

by Monta Z. Briant, author of *Baby Sign Language Basics*

Your baby is sitting in his highchair working on a lunch of finger foods while you wash dishes nearby. Suddenly, you sense movement in your peripheral vision. You look over and your son is making a clapping-like gesture.



Could this be his first sign?

You have been working on some basic signs with him for several weeks, but he has yet to sign back to you. Maybe it's just wishful thinking -- he's probably just clapping. You often clap together when he finishes his food, as in "Yeah! Were all done!"

First signs can be easy to miss. Babies make random gestures all the time, but at some point, these gestures take on a deliberate meaning.

How can you tell the difference between ordinary clapping, for example, and a clapping-like version of the sign for "MORE"?

Here are some clues to watch for. Look at the expression on your baby's face. Is he wearing his happy clapping face? Or is he looking intently at his hands, expectantly at you, or at a box of Cheerios just out of reach on a nearby countertop. If it's any of the last three, choices, he's almost certainly trying to tell you something!

First signs can be rough or vague approximations of the adult version, but by following your baby's gaze and examining his facial expression you can often gain valuable clues to what he's trying to get across to you. Be patient and try guessing a few things. If you absolutely have no idea what he's signing, respond to your baby in a positive way, by saying something like, "Good job Max! I see you are signing to me with your hands!"

This type of response encourages your baby to keep trying by letting him know he's on the right track and that you are proud of him.

Monta Zelinsky Briant is the author of the best-selling *Baby Sign Language Basics* series of books and learning materials, and she also offers classes for parents and children all over San Diego.

To open a window into *your* babies mind and personality, please visit www.babysignlanguage.net for information on classes, online lessons, and home learning materials.