

**Ask the Expert-  
Best-Selling Author, Monta Briant, Answers your Baby Sign Language Questions**

**Q- What if I plan to raise my baby in a bilingual environment? Will using signs confuse him?**

**A-** This is a great question, and one that concerns so many families.

Our world definitely seems to be shrinking and families who speak more than one language are eager to pass on their “cultural roots” to the next generation. Learning more than once language from birth gives children so many benefits. Benefits that last a lifetime!

In the short-term, however, babies who are learning more than one spoken language do tend to have some delay in their rate of spoken language acquisition. This is not to say that these children are being “held back” in any way. Quite the contrary— they just have twice as much to process so their speech development takes a little time to catch up! They are actually developing a larger and more complex network in the area of the brain that handles spoken language (the left cerebral hemisphere).

Now, you might wonder if adding a 3rd language in the form of American Sign Language, might confuse your child and cause further delay in speech development. I have great news for you! Using sign language will not cause any delay— in fact, bilingual babies who sign have been shown to learn both spoken languages better and faster than children who learn 2 spoken languages alone.

Think of ASL as a “language bridge” that can be used to link the two spoken languages together.

When mommy nurses, for example, she can sign and say “Leche” (Spanish for Milk), and when daddy gives a bottle, he can use the same sign as he says, “Milk”. In this way, baby is given a visual signal showing that “Leche” and “Milk” both mean the same thing. This makes it so much easier for baby to figure things out that there is more than one way to say the same thing.

Many bilingual couples and families who have chosen bring a child into their lives through foreign adoption have found our signing classes to be a wonderful resource.

Another amazing benefit— remember how I said that spoken language is handled by the left cerebral hemisphere of the brain? Well check this out— people who sign from birth develop a language center in the angular gyrus of the right hemisphere of the brain. So, people who learn spoken and signed language from infancy have language centers on both sides! Now that’s using your head!

*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 9 and Aiden , age 5.*

*For information on classes, books, and other learning materials, please visit [www.babysignlanguagebasics.com](http://www.babysignlanguagebasics.com)*