

Ask the Expert-

Best-Selling author, Monta Z. Briant, answers your baby signing questions.

Q. How do I get my baby to "pay attention" to my signs?

A. Parents are often concerned that their baby is not "paying attention" enough to learn the signs they are showing, does not seem that interested, or just laughs when the parent signs.

Your Little Sponge

The good news is, that babies really don't need to "pay attention" the way us dense grown-ups do. They are like little sponges, effortlessly absorbing all that goes on around them. You might take them to the zoo one day, for example, and walk all the way to the giraffe enclosure, looking forward to see the look on your baby's face the first time they see this incredible animal. When you get there, you try to get your baby to look at the giraffe and try signing GIRAFFE to your baby, but guess what? Your baby has spotted a discarded candy wrapper on the ground and seems far more interested in *that!*

So, this is pretty disappointing, and seems like it may have been a total waste of time.

2 months later... You walk into a children's store that has animal pictures on the wall, and your baby's hand shoots up from his neck. You follow his gaze, and he is looking excitedly at the picture of a giraffe, and is clearly signing GIRAFFE, a sign you only attempted to show him that one time at the zoo all those months ago!

Conclusion- Babies absorb things *so* effortlessly, that they may appear not to be interested in what you are showing them. In reality, though, they are just moving on to the next thing, because they've already got it!

There are, however, some things you can do to get your baby to focus on you a little more.

Attention-Getting Strategies

- Make a noise to get your baby's attention, such as shaking a rattle, dragging the wheels of a toy car along the floor, pushing a button on a music toy, or making a sound effect of your own such as animal noises or airplane noises. When baby looks towards the noise, quickly sign about the object.
- Talk about an object baby is holding, and with a very happy fun attitude, gently take the object, bring it towards yourself, quickly make the sign, and then give it back. Baby's eyes will generally track the object long enough to see the object and sign simultaneously.
- Stare your baby down, waiting in complete silence for her to look at you with a look that says, "why are you staring at me like that?" Then, sign and speak about whatever it is your baby happens to be doing, for example, "You are reading your KITTY BOOK!" or "You have a CAR!"
- Tap your baby, or stroke her cheek with a finger. This will often cause your baby to turn and look at you.

- When you and your baby hear a noise or see something interesting and then look at each other at the same time as in, "did you hear/see that?", use the opportunity to sign! For example, "That is a noisy BIRD up there on the power line!" "Do you see that noisy BIRD up there?"

Just remember, your baby sees more signing than you think, and your efforts are never wasted. Just keep signing and before you know it, your baby will start surprising you with things you never even thought he saw you do. (so watch your language!)

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.

Monta is also the owner of Baby Garten Studio in the historic South Park district of San Diego

To open a window into your babies mind and personality, please visit www.babysignlanguagebasics.com for information on class, online lessons, and home learning materials