

Sign language instruction for babies does not speed, enhance language development, research shows

October 5 2012, by Julie Cooper



Researchers from the University of Hertfordshire have found no evidence to support claims that using baby signing with babies helps to accelerate their language development. In a paper to be published in *Child Development*, researchers conducted a controlled study to evaluate the benefits of symbolic gesture or baby sign.

Baby Signing

Baby sign is used by many parents to communicate with their babies before he or she is able to talk. It is claimed that baby signing helps babies learn to talk, increases their vocabulary as well as improving the bonding between mother and baby.

The Study

The team of researchers led by Dr Liz Kirk, from the University of Hertfordshire's Department of Psychology, recruited forty mother-baby pairs to the study when the babies were eight months old. Every mother-baby pair was randomly allocated to either a gesture or no gesture condition, and each baby's development was systematically tracked over a twelve-month period.

Dr Liz Kirk said: "Although babies learnt the gestures and used them to communicate long before they started talking, they did not learn the associated words any quicker than the non-gesturing babies, nor did they did they show enhanced [language development](#)."

Mothers More Responsive

However, of significant interest, the study's findings did reveal that mothers who gestured with their babies were more responsive to their babies' non-verbal clues and encouraged them to think of their baby as an individual with a mind. This has great potential in clinical situations where early [gestures](#) from [babies](#) or young children may provide timely interventions where there is risk of [language delay](#) or impairment.

The full [research paper](#), "To Sign or Not to Sign? The Impact of Encouraging Infants to gesture on Infant Language and Maternal Mind-Mindedness ", is published online in *Early View* (an online version published before inclusion in an issue) at *Child Development*.

More information: onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2012.01874.x/abstract

Provided by University of Hertfordshire

Citation: Sign language instruction for babies does not speed, enhance language development, research shows (2012, October 5) retrieved 20 March 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2012-10-language-babies.html>

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