



RESEARCH ON SIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

BOSTON UNIVERSITY

YOUR BABY IS DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING?



While everyone agrees that it is important to make sure deaf and hard of hearing children have complete access to language early, there are lots of different ideas about what the best ways of doing that are. We know figuring out a language plan for the family can be confusing and overwhelming.

Over the past few years, we have been doing research to better understand how deaf and hard of hearing children learn sign language, trying to answer some of the questions you might have.

LOTS OF QUESTIONS

- Can my child successfully learn ASL if our family doesn't yet know ASL?
- Can I become a good enough signer to effectively support my child?
- Will learning ASL affect my child's ability to learn to speak?

CAN MY BABY LEARN ASL?

Yes! In this study, we looked at ASL vocabulary skills in deaf and hard of hearing children between birth and five years old. We compared kids with hearing parents to kids with deaf, fluent signing parents (Caselli, Pyers, & Lieberman, 2021).



EARLY EXPOSURE

Kids who start signing by 6-months old had completely age-expected ASL vocabularies, even when their parents were new signers.



CATCHING UP

Kids who began learning ASL after 6 months old but before 3-years-old had a delay, but made rapid gains!



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IS IT OKAY THAT I DON'T KNOW ASL YET?

Yes! In this study, we looked at the relationship between parent ASL skills and children's early ASL vocabularies. We wanted to see how fluent parents had to become in ASL for their child to have vocabularies comparable to deaf children with deaf, fluent signing parents (Berger, Lieberman, Pyers & Caselli, 2023).



INFANTS

For young infants, there wasn't a strong relationship between parent ASL skills and children's vocabularies.



TODDLERS

As children grow, parent ASL skills became a stronger predictor of children's ASL vocabulary knowledge.



NOT PERFECT? OKAY!

Children had strong ASL vocabularies when their parents had ASL skills equal to a student who has taken four semesters of ASL classes.



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WILL LEARNING ASL AFFECT ENGLISH?

Bilingualism is great! In this study, we looked at the relationship between children's early ASL and spoken English vocabularies. We wanted to know whether bilingualism benefitted deaf children, as it does for hearing children (Pontecorvo, Higgins, Mora, Lieberman, Pyers & Caselli, 2023)

A POSITIVE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASL AND ENGLISH

Kids who knew lots of signs in ASL had bigger spoken English vocabularies than kids who didn't know much ASL.

STRONGER ENGLISH VOCABULARIES

Kids who knew lots of ASL were more likely to have spoken English skills comparable to hearing children.

A BILINGUAL ADVANTAGE

When we consider kids vocabularies in **both** ASL and English, we see a bilingual advantage. They have bigger combined vocabularies than deaf kids who are just learning English.



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WHAT ARE OTHER PARENTS' EXPERIENCES LIKE?

We surveyed hearing parents to see what their experiences were like learning ASL (Lieberman, Mitchiner, & Pontecorvo, 2022). Here is a bit of what they had to say.

My biggest success is being able to **communicate freely** with my daughter.

It was very challenging in the beginning and I was embarrassed to learn and now five years later I am trying to tell others to **start learning and be anything but embarrassed.**

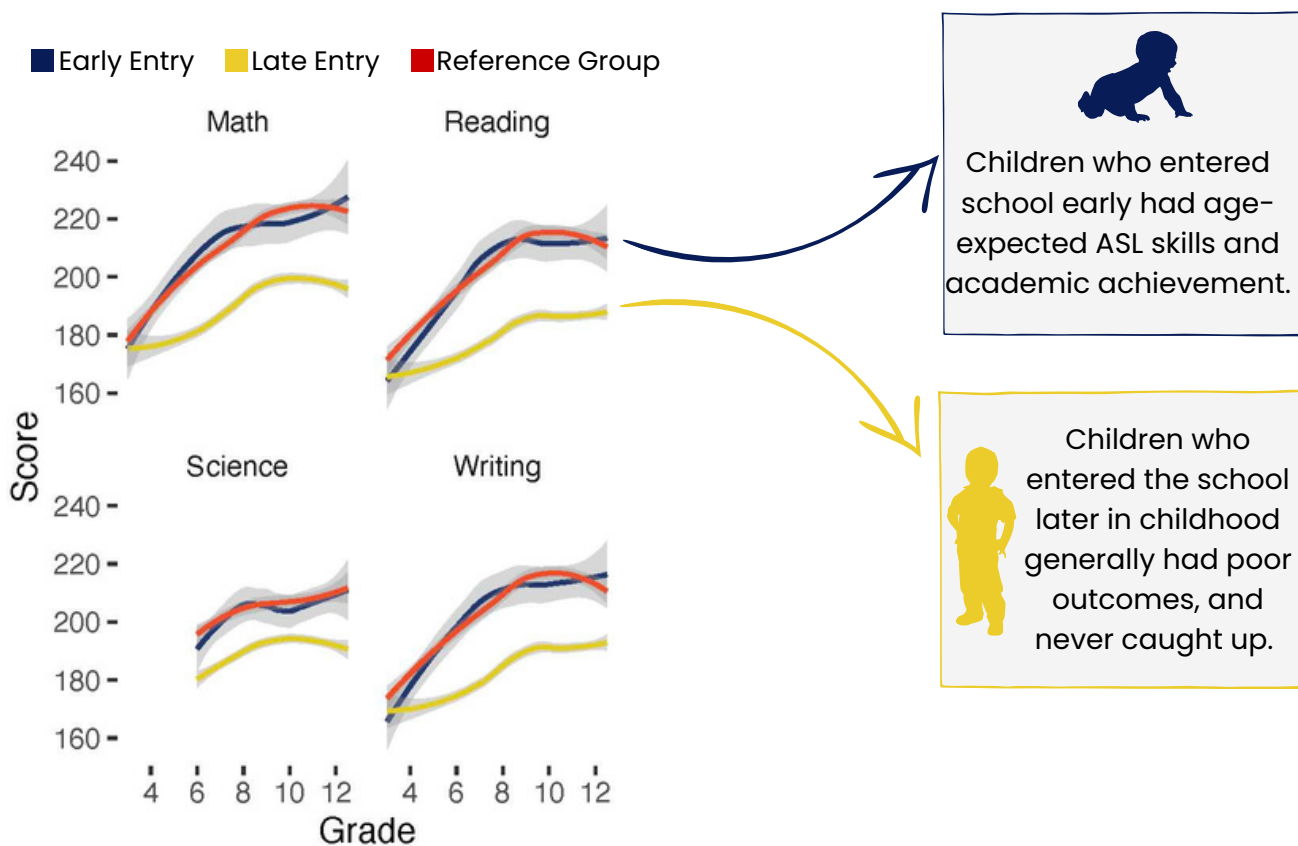
I want my child to **feel fully included** in our family life. I want him to know what is going on, what we are discussing, where we are headed, and who we are as a family. I want him to come home from school and to be able to tell me about his day, and for me to understand. I do not want him to look back on his childhood and feel that we did not love him enough to try and **learn something new for him.**



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DOES ASL SUPPORT ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT?

Deaf children who entered a bilingual school before three-years-old reliably had age-expected language skills and academic outcomes (Finton et al., 2022). Unfortunately, most children entered the bilingual program late, often not until middle school. The early entry advantage was partially due to improvement in ASL skills.



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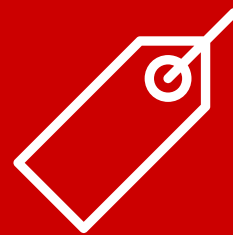
ASL ASSESSMENT

Do you want to evaluate your child's ASL? The ASL-CDI 2.0 is an online assessment for kids 0-5 years old that you can complete for free (Caselli, Pyers, & Lieberman, 2020).



NORMED AND VALIDATED

The ASL-CDI 2.0 has been normed and validated and peer reviewed.



FREE

It is available for free right now



LONG & SHORT FORM

The long form gives a detailed picture of all the signs the child knows. The short form is a quick snapshot of the child's vocabulary.



IMMEDIATE RESULTS

When you complete the assessment, you get results immediately.



[CLICK TO CHECK OUT THE TEST](#)



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MORE INFO?

This research was done as part of a large collaborative team of deaf and hearing researchers from Boston University, Wellesley College, and the University of Rochester.

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