Raising Deaf Kids

A world of information about children with hearing loss

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Learning to Read Using Sign Language

Sign language uses hand movement and facial expressions. Sometimes this is a good way to show your child ideas and words. This can be a helpful way for your child to learn to read. This is especially true if your child cannot lipread very well or has no residual hearing.

When you use sign language to read:

- Point to the pictures and words as you sign.
- Use signs in different places - on the book, by your face, on her arm.
- You don't have to know every sign to read with your child.
- Everyone makes mistakes when they first sign. Just do your best!
- Sit facing your child when you read. Then, your child can see you sign.
- Put your child in your lap when you read. Wrap your arms around him. Then he can see what you sign.

There are different types of sign language.
Each of them helps your child learn to read in a different way:

American Sign Language (ASL)
The word order and grammer of sentences in ASL is different from English. Some parents choose to teach their children sign language because it uses the eyes, instead of the ears to learn. This can help a deaf child understand the language better.

- If you can, it's great to tell the story to your child in sign language first. Then read the story in English.
- You can Fingerspell some words to your child as you read. This will help him learn the letters for the alphabet.
- Remember that ASL signs will not match what is spoken word for word.
- Help your child see the connection between the ASL sign and the English word.

Bilingual-Bicultural (BiBi)
The BiBi approach (http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/communicating/choices/bibi.jsp) teaches children in ASL. BiBi treats spoken English and written English as two separate ways of communicating. English is considered a second language. Children are taught in ASL how to read English.

- Use flash cards to teach words. On one side of the card put the picture of the sign. On the other side of the flash card put a picture of the word and write the word in English. This will help your child learn to spell.

Manually Coded English (MCE).
MCE uses English grammer and word order. It also adds signs to help your child understand. Some examples of MCE are Pidgin Sign English (PSE), Signed English (SE) and Signed Exact English (SEE). Some parents choose to teach their children MCE to make it easier for them to learn to read English.

- You can match MCE to English sentences in a book.
- MCE can be matched to spoken English on a TV program or video.
- MCE helps your child learn English grammer and word order.
- Read a children's book by yourself. Write down the words that you think your child won't know. Teach the child these words and signs. Then, read the book with your child.

Learn more about Sign Language:

- The Fairview Learning Network Web (http://www.fairviewlearning.net/index.php). This site talks about using ASL to learn to read.
- This article is from Perspectives in Education and Deafness (http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/Literacy/srp/magazines/perspectives/articleinpers.html). It talks about using ASL to read books to your children.
- Read a brief description of the bi-bi approach to learning (http://www.bradingrao.com/bibi1.htm).
- Read more about educating your child using the bi-bi approach (http://ericec.org/digests/e553.html).
- A mother tells her story about Reading and SEE (http://deafness.about.com/cs/signfeats2/a/signedenglish_2.htm).
- Learn more about the different types of sign language at Listen-up.org and Learn.motion.com.
- The Shared Reading Project (http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/Literacy/). You and your child may be able to take part in the Shared Reading Project. Ask at your child's school for more information.

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You can find this page online at:
http://www.raisingdeafkids.org/learning/reading/sign.jsp