
Signing families: the advantages of bilingualism for deaf children



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Frequently Asked Questions

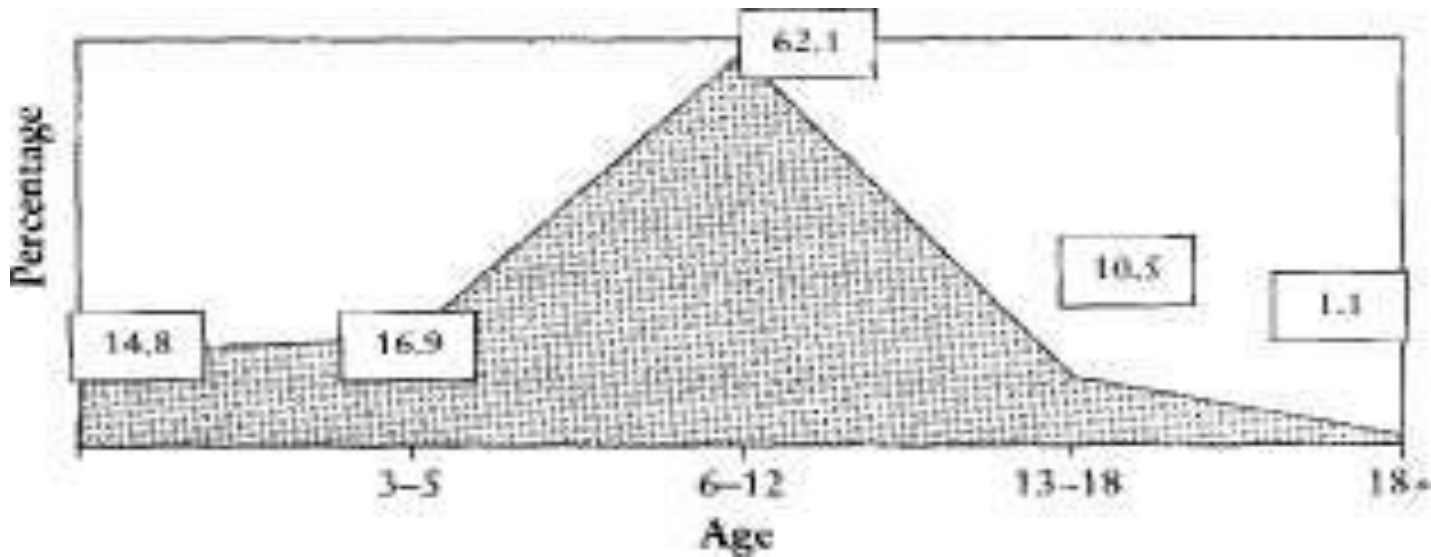
1. What is the incidence of deafness in the UK?
 2. How can I communicate with my deaf child/deaf children?
 3. Is British Sign Language a 'language'?
 4. Will learning a sign language interfere/impede with my child's/deaf children's learning of a spoken/written language?
 5. What are the benefits of learning a sign language for my child/deaf children?
 6. Where can I seek help/advice and information?
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Incidence of deafness

- 840 babies are born each year in UK with significant deafness.
- 1/1,000 children is deaf at 3 years old.
- There are 20,000 children aged 0 -15 years old = moderately to profoundly deaf.

RNID.org.uk, (downloaded 8/4/10)

Average age of SL acquisition



The Oralist Approach

- Lip reading skills poor;
 - Poor spoken & written language skills – average reading age of Deaf child leaving school = 9 years;
 - Limited time on curricula activities;
 - Gregory et al (1995) 1/7 young deaf people did not have adequate language skills in English or BSL to take part in an interview.
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Postponement of sign language acquisition

- Can delay early cognitive & linguistic development & socialisation;
- Mental health problems (Griggs & Kyle, 1996).



Benefits of early exposure to sign language

- Sound linguistic & cultural foundation in SL = academic, emotional & professional success.
 - Leave school with qualifications equivalent to their hearing peers.
 - Support of the Deaf community.
 - Braden (1994) – 171,517 deaf infants born to Deaf parents were superior on numerous scales of non-verbal tests of IQ; >success in learning a second language; >emotionally mature.
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How do I communicate with my deaf child?

In a language which is accessible & natural to them.



Is BSL a 'language'?

- 250,000 Deaf people in the UK whose first or preferred language is BSL
+ 300,000 non-Deaf BSL users
 - Sign languages are **not**:
 - pantomime systems of communication – they are highly structured & distinct from spoken languages;
 - universally understood;
 - predominantly iconic.
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Acquisition of Sign Language

- Deaf infants of Deaf parents acquire sign language at similar stages to infants acquiring a spoken language.
 - They make similar ‘errors’ in their learning of SL.
 - Some differences in early parent-child interaction:
 - establishing attention;
 - reading.
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ORGANISATIONS

British Association of the Deaf (BDA) – largest UK Deaf Organisation run by Deaf people.

www.bda.org.uk

The Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) – registered charity representing 9 million deaf and hard-of-hearing people in the UK.

www.rnid.org.uk

Deaf parenting UK (DPUK) - organization supporting Deaf parents.

www.deafparent.org.uk

National Deaf Children's Society (NCDS) – registered charity supporting parents and deaf children.

www.ncds.org.uk

NHS

Newborn Screening Programme (NHSP) – screening programme for newborn babies.

www.hearing.screening.nhs.uk

MAJOR RESEARCH CENTRES

Deafness Cognition and Language Research Centre, University College London

www.dcal.ucl.ac.uk

Centre for Deaf Studies, University of Bristol

www.bris.ac.uk/deaf/

USEFUL RESOURCES

Signing Family DVD (BDA Northern Ireland) – provides academic and personal accounts of sign language use; milestones in development of sign language; advice for Deaf and hearing parents of deaf and hearing children. This can be purchased from:

northernireland@bda.org.uk

Miles, D. (1999) **British Sign Language: a beginner's guide**. London: BBC Books.
