

What is Makaton?

Makaton is a language programme for people of all ages using speech, signs, symbols and written words in a combination that gives everyone a helping hand to 'talk'. It does not replace but enables, supports, develops and encourages spoken language.

The signs used in Makaton are derived from British Sign Language (B.S.L.) which is the natural sign language of the deaf community in Britain. Many are based on natural gesture.

Why are gestures and signs important?

- We all use our hands while we are talking. This an important way of helping communication as well as using words.
- Children learn to make sense of their surroundings by watching what is happening before they can understand words. Using gestures or hand signs will help your child to understand what you are saying
- Encouraging your child to use gestures or hand signs to communicate may help to ease their frustration if they are not able to use the words yet.
- Some people worry that using hand signs or gestures will stop their child from learning to talk. This is not the case. Helping communication (even if it is non-verbal) will help your child to learn to talk when they are ready.



Things to think about:

- Use lots of natural gestures when you are talking to your child.
- Choose a small number of signs to introduce at first. Your Speech and Language Therapist will help you decide which ones to choose.
- Use these signs every time you say the words throughout the day.
- **Always** say the word at the same time as gesturing/ signing. Gestures and hand signs are *not* instead of words. Slow and steady is best.
- Use **key words** – you do not need to sign or symbolise every word in your sentence or phrase (e.g. in the sentence "do you want a drink"; you would only sign or offer a symbol for "want" and "drink"). Be mindful of the language level of the person you are communicating with.



- You may want to gently encourage your child to copy the signs themselves if you think they are able to. Do not worry if this doesn't happen. Your child will use the signs if and when they are ready.
- Use appropriate facial expression and tone of voice (e.g. for the word/sign "sad", you must look and sound sad!).
- Use the correct sign; make sure your sign means what you are translating (e.g. break time = sign for "to play" not "to break").
- Use functional and motivating vocabulary. What does the person want/ need to say? Words like 'sorry', 'please' and 'thank you' are only useful once a child has a wide range of words.
- Sign all the time! Use it or lose it.
- Using additional visual cues (objects, photos etc.) alongside words can help all children.
- They may need additional systems (e.g. objects of reference, musical cues, voice output devices) to support their communication which can be used with Makaton.

Helpful sites:

Makaton have a 'Hub' you can join to access a variety of resources:

www.makaton.org

They also have a Facebook page, You Tube channel and Twitter account. You can use these platforms to access "[sign of the week](#)"; this is a great way to help encourage you to learn new signs.

If you are planning to use Makaton signs, it is important to attend a live signing session, as the signs cannot be learned well from the manuals. Please see the Makaton Hub for details of workshops (online/ local) and our training brochure.

Always ensure that you are using Makaton if you are searching for resources as there are lots of sign systems out there and consistency is important.

'Singing Hands' and 'Something Special' (Mr Tumble) are Makaton supported and have great resources e.g. magazines, websites, social media etc.

<https://singinghands.co.uk/>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/cbeebies/shows/something-special>