



## Makaton signing with children

### What is Makaton?

- Makaton is a **communication tool** that uses symbols and signs to support children to communicate.
- Makaton is designed to support the **development of spoken language**. This is why we must always speak when we sign.
- Makaton signs are **based on the gestures** used in British Sign Language.
- Makaton is the **UK's leading language programme** used by adults and children with learning or communication difficulties and those who communicate with them.
- Over **100,000 adults and children** use Makaton symbols and signs. Either as their way of communicating or to support their speech (e.g. if their speech is unclear, signing can help other people to understand what they are saying).



### Who uses Makaton signing?

- Children who are young and **learning to communicate** e.g. some babies can sign before they can talk.
- Children who are **struggling to communicate** for any reason e.g. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Verbal Dyspraxia (difficulty producing speech sounds/clear speech), those with Cerebral Palsy/other diagnoses.
- Makaton signing allows children who are **non-verbal** (unable to use spoken language) to communicate with others.
- As understanding usually develops before talking, Makaton signing can be helpful when children understand but cannot yet talk as this can provide children with a way of communicating other than talking and can **ease frustration around communication**.
- Lots of **nurseries and schools** use Makaton signing to **support all children**.
- Makaton can also be helpful for children who are learning **English as an Additional Language**.
- Some children also need to **develop confidence** in order to develop their speech and language.
- Remember that **every child is different**. Many children stop using signs or symbols once they have started to talk more. And some children always use Makaton to communicate and rarely use spoken communication.

## What are the benefits of Makaton signing?

- Signs and gestures are often **easier to use** than spoken language.
- Makaton signs often **look like the word that they represent** e.g. 'banana' is the action of peeling a banana. For this reason, signs can be easier to remember.

It can also help children to:

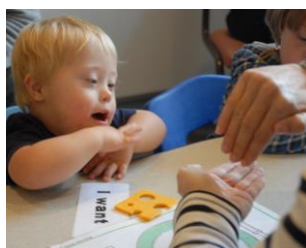
- Communicate their **needs, wants, thoughts and feelings**.
- **Support their speech** so that others can understand them/make themselves understood.
- **Help parents/others** to understand the child's needs.
- Develop their **attention and listening** skills, **understanding of language, use of language** (including spoken language), **social interaction** and **confidence** in communication.
- **Ease frustration** around communication.
- Support their **emotional development** – children who are able to sign (when they are unable to successfully communicate verbally) have less tantrums/aggressive behaviour.
- Remember **sequencing**.
- **Name** items.
- **Participate** in games and songs.
- **Find their way** around.

## I want to start using Makaton signing with my child but I'm not sure how to.

There are lots of **courses** that you can go on in order to learn a range of signs. These courses are available for parents and professionals. Please let us know if you would like us to signpost you to some **local courses**.

You can also go on to the Makaton charity website (<https://www.makaton.org/training/>), type in your postcode and you will see available courses in your area.

**You don't have to go on a course in order to start signing with your child.** You can follow the 'How to start using Makaton signing' section of this leaflet.





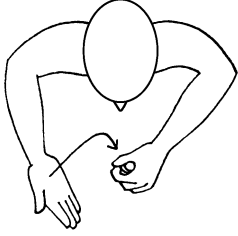
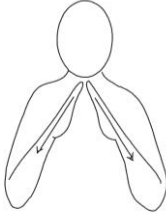


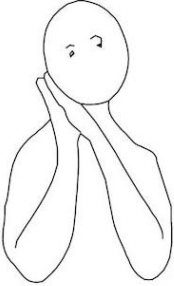
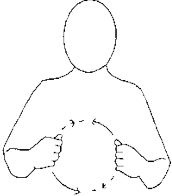
## How to start using Makaton signing.

If you are going to start signing, it's important to introduce just a **few signs** at a time e.g. 5 signs. If you start doing lots of signing too quickly, this can be overwhelming for you and your child.

It's important that you are **confident** with using these 5 signs within your everyday life before you introduce any more signs.

Once you have chosen the 5 signs that you want to start to introduce, make sure that:

- These are signs which you would like your child to understand and use. For example, choose **functional signs** (words which you use a lot when communicating with your child/words that you say lots every day).
- Some of the most common signs to teach first are:

 <p>More</p>	 <p>House / Home</p>
 <p>Tap twice</p> <p><b>to eat</b></p>	 <p><b>to drink</b></p>
 <p><b>Bed</b></p>	 <p>Car</p>

- When you've chosen your 5 signs, make sure that you **always use these signs whenever you talk**. Remember that **signing is to support speech** – not to replace it.
- When using sentences, make sure that you **sign the main word in the sentence** e.g.
  - Would you like **more**?
  - Let's go and get in the **car**
  - It's time to go **home** now.
- **Repetition is really helpful**. This is one of the reasons why it's important that you choose signs for words that you use a lot.
- Make sure that you use your **dominant hand** when signing. This will ensure that your signs are consistent.
- Be **consistent with your signs** e.g. don't use 2 signs for the same word as this will be very confusing. Also make sure that you are using the correct sign before teaching this to your child.
- Try to make sure that your child is **looking in your direction** when you sign.
- Try to make sure that you use **facial expression and tone of voice** when signing as this will give your child more information about the words that you are using.
- You can also make signing fun by signing within **rhymes or songs**.
- Please **do not ask your child to copy your signs**. We want them to understand these signs first. Your child may start to use these signs when they are ready.
- Don't worry if your child's version of the sign isn't as clear as yours – **children can struggle to make accurate signs due to their age/ability**. If they do try and sign, make sure that you **reward** this as they will then be more likely to try again. Make sure that you always **model the correct version of the sign** even when someone else uses the incorrect/an inaccurate version.
- If your child is unable to use their hands to sign, you should still sign in order to support their **understanding of language**.
- Make sure that you speak to your child's nursery/school staff about using Makaton signing. Consistency is beneficial.

## How to integrate Makaton signing into your everyday life.

By using 5 signs whenever you say those words, you will already be using Makaton in your everyday life.

You can also start to integrate Makaton signing into your everyday life in the following ways:

Once you are using more Makaton signs confidently, you could:

- Play a **shopping game** with your child – name and sign each item of food.
- Before you put items in your trolley at the **supermarket** - name and sign each item.
- When you are out and about, name and sign different **vehicles** that you can see.



## Information on how to use Makaton symbols

This leaflet has focused on how to support children to use Makaton signing. If you require support with introducing Makaton symbols, please do not hesitate to contact us.

### References:

<https://singinghands.co.uk/about/what-is-makaton/>

<https://www.henshaws.org.uk/how-you-can-use-makaton-to-support-communication/>

<https://www.earlyyearscentre.org/learning-and-development/8-reasons-start-teaching-child-makaton-today/>

<https://metro.co.uk/2017/03/30/world-autism-awareness-week-what-is-makaton-the-sign-language-that-helps-those-with-autism-talk-6542753/>

<https://www.katemb.com/wp-content/uploads/ford06babies.pdf>