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TEACHING BABIES TO COMMUNICATE BEFORE THEY CAN SPEAK

Utilizing American Sign Language (ASL) and literacy, two local early childhood educators are giving hearing babies a head start in developing language skills, thus enabling them to express their wants, needs and desires at an earlier age.

“Babies understand a lot more than we give them credit for,” says Wendy Pozin, president of Baby Sign-A-Long, a Mommy and Me early learning program. “They are like little sponges. Their brains are absorbing and processing all the time. And the sooner we start giving them the tools to communicate with, the more developed their brains will become.”

Twenty years of research has proven that hearing babies who learn ASL have an earlier understanding of language, are more likely to speak sooner, have higher IQ scores, as well as lower levels of frustration.

Results published from a study done by the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development in conjunction with Linda Acredolo, Ph.D. and Susan Goodwyn, Ph.D. showed “that babies who signed, scored higher in intelligence tests, understood more words, had larger vocabularies and engaged in more sophisticated play than babies who did not sign.” According to the book “Baby Signs,” written by the same doctors, the most gratifying of all to the parents of the babies studied, was how the parents described a decrease in their babies’ frustration levels, while at the same time showed an increase in self-confidence levels.

In addition to ASL, the Baby Sign-A-Long program incorporates the use of literacy in each class, underlining the importance of reading to young children. All of the experts agree that babies who sign tend to be more interested in books. “Reading to your baby provides additional exposure to words and language while creating positive interactions and a foundation for the reading experience,” says Pozin.

As former early childhood educators, Pozin and her partner, Dale Schemer, are well versed in the subject of literacy for a young child. Schemer, CEO of Baby Sign-A-Long, has a bachelors degree in special education and a masters degree in hearing impaired and deaf education. She taught special ed for five years in the Duval county public school system, as well as 17 years in early childhood. Pozin has a bachelors degree and has taught in early childhood for 13 years. "What's given us the most experience though, jokes Schemer, is raising all of our sons. Wendy and I have seven between us. That's where our Parenting Tips for each class really come in handy." Each one-hour class includes the introduction of helpful parenting skills, as well as useful techniques which can ease many of the frustrations that parents of young children often go through.

The ten-week program has new classes starting the first week of each month at The Mark Spivak's Dance Studios and Destination Maternity. For more information visit www.babysign-a-long.com or call Wendy Pozin at (904) 553-6700 e-mail wendy@babysign-a-long.com