

How will families choose to interact with their deaf and hard-of-hearing children tomorrow, based on scientific advancements being made today?

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To support parents in their informed decision-making, our innovative project brings together families, professionals, and researchers to assess children’s language development over time when their family has chosen to learn sign language together. In accordance with FCEI principles, our Family ASL project seeks to document language development with families in the U.S. learning American Sign Language (ASL).

Background

The **Family ASL** project documents the development of ASL and English by DHH children whose hearing parents are learning ASL with them.

Research Question

What does the development of English and ASL look like for DHH children with hearing parents learning to sign?

Participants

Deaf Children

- 29 DHH children
- Age range: 24–64 months
- Most exposed to ASL before age 18 months
- 25 use cochlear implants or hearing aids

Methods

Cognitive and social-emotional development

- DAYC-2

Vocabulary

- ASL CDI, English CDI

Overall language

- VCSL, ASL-RST, English CELF-P3

Results

Overall language

VCSL

[FIT= Comparison to early signers]

	2-year-olds		3-year-olds		4-year-olds	
Measure	Ave score	n	Ave score	n	Ave score	n
VCSL (Rasch)	55.1	14	55.4	10	71.2	5
Fit	High = 7 Fit = 7		High = 2 Fit = 5 Low = 3		High = 2 Fit = 3	

ASL-RST

(Standard scores)

[100= Typical early signers]

	4-year-olds	
Measure	Ave score	Ave standard score
ASL-RST	20	111.6

Overall result: Within average range

English CELF-P3

(Standard scores)

[100= Typical hearing average]

	4-year-olds	
Measure	Ave score	n
Eng-CELF-P3	91.7	10

Overall result: Within average range

Results

Cognitive and social-emotional development

DAYC-2 (Standard scores)
[100 = Typical hearing average; Average range 85-115]

	2-year-olds		3-year-olds		4-year-olds	
Measure	Ave score	n	Ave score	n	Ave score	n
DAYC-Cognitive	106.25	8	107.7	11	106.3	7
DAYC-Social-Emotional	116.6	8	110.6	11	112.2	6

Vocabulary

ASL-CDI

	2-year-olds		3-year-olds	
Measure	Ave score	n	Ave score	n
ASL-CDI - Receptive	.74	9	.53	4
ASL-CDI - Expressive	.53	9	.39	4

2-yrs within typical range for native signers;
3-yrs below

English-CDI

	2-year-olds		3-year-olds	
Measure	Ave score	n	Ave score	n
Eng-CDI - Expressive	39.8	9	75.5	4

2-yrs below typical range for hearing;
3-yrs within

Discussion:

The benefits of bimodal bilingualism

- ✓ Some participants are stronger in ASL, some are stronger in English; some are strong in both languages.
- ✓ Those who need more time for English to develop have the **advantage** of another language: ASL. Children pursuing spoken language alone do not benefit in this way.
- ✓ When a DHH child is born, the parents can’t predict whether they will be able to ‘succeed’ with spoken language only.
- ✓ The parents in the Family ASL study sign with their children and have brought together a community of signers with them. The children and their families are becoming bimodal bilinguals.

These results provide evidence that early exposure to ASL does not hinder development of spoken English, and that DHH children with hearing parents learning to sign can become proficient bimodal bilinguals.

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