



*touch*learn

**TOUCH-LEARN INTERNATIONAL LTD**

**Jo Briley**

# **Baby Signing Theory Handbook**



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# The Origins of Signing

"If we hadn't a voice or a tongue, and wanted to express things to one another, wouldn't we try to make signs by moving our hands, head, and the rest of our body, just as dumb people do at present?" (Socrates in Plato's dialogues 5th century BC)

There is evidence that as far back as the 5th century and probably earlier, Deaf people were using a form of sign language/gestures to communicate with others. Sign language has developed over the centuries to become a fully recognised language within its own right

## **1620 – Juan Pablo Bonet wrote first book on educating Deaf people using sign language**

In 1620, Spanish priest named Juan Pablo De Bonet, a pioneer of education for the Deaf, wrote the first book on educating Deaf people using sign language called "Summary of the letters and the art of teaching speech to the mute". (Wikipedia.org)

## **1700s – Charles Michel set up school in Paris**

In the 18th century the Abbe, a priest called Charles-Michel de l'Épée of Paris, visited a home where two young girls lived. On first impressions he believed the girls to be rude as they did not speak, but he soon realised their silence was because they were indeed Deaf. This inspired him to design a sign language to enable him to teach these children who had no language. This work led him to open the first free school for educating deaf pupils in 1754.

## **1760 – Thomas Braidwood opens school in Edinburgh**

Thomas Braidwood opened a school in Edinburgh called "Braidwood's Academy for the Deaf and Dumb" in 1760. Initially he taught one deaf student of a wealthy man, but numbers soon increased to around 20 by 1780. His success in teaching the students a combined method (using natural gesture and speech) soon spread and his reputation become widespread (bris.ac.ukdepts/deafstudiesteaching)

## **1880 – sign language banned from schools**

A conference held in Milan involved educators of the deaf from around the world, meeting to discuss various things. One item on the agenda was to discuss methods of teaching. It was decided that the oral method was the best way to teach deaf children. This meant all deaf educators lost their jobs and the use of sign language in schools was banned. (bda.org.uk)

## **1970-1980s – schools able to teach BSL**

In the early 1970s William Stokoe proved that sign language (in this case American Sign Language) was a language in its own right, with its own grammar, vocabulary, structure and syntax. (Millan1880.com)

“Attitudes towards sign language started to change in the 1970’s to change due to research in America in the 1950’ and 60’s then in Britain during the 1970’ and 80’s. Sign languages started to be recognised as full, complex visual languages with structure and grammar very different from spoken languages.” (Smith- sign language companion 1996)

### **2003 – BSL finally recognised by British government as a fully independent language**

According to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) there are about 28,000 - 70,000 Deaf people who use British Sign Language (BSL) in the UK (DWP in-house report no.102) This number does not include the thousands who use the language, such as teachers of the deaf, children and interpreters etc.

# What is Baby Signing

Baby signing has been around for the past 30-40 years, and has become increasingly popular in the UK over the last 11 years.

Baby signing is a form of communication with your baby before he/she has the ability to talk, using extended gestures such as BSL, ASL, or Makaton. Babies naturally use a combination of gestures and sounds to help their parents understand them. Baby Signing uses standardised signs based on British Sign Language (BSL). Babies and toddlers will be able to communicate what they want, how they feel.

It is well known amongst hearing parents of deaf children, and deaf parents of hearing children that babies learnt to communicate earlier through sign language than speech.

*“Baby signs are simple gestures that you add to your normal speech when you are talking to your baby. Gestures that allow her to communicate before she has mastered the complexity of spoken language.*

*From the age of about seven months – long before her speech has developed – the muscles in her hands are sufficiently formed to enable her to make gestures. When she “waves goodbye” or shrugs her shoulders, she is demonstrating her ability to do this. Baby signing is just a natural extension of what she already finds very easy to do”*

**Dr Joseph Garcia “Baby Signing”**

## **History of Baby Signing**

Dr Joseph Garcia developed a successful baby signing programme in America in the 1990s. During the 1970s, whilst studying child development and language acquisition, he chose to research for his thesis, the use of American Sign Language (ASL) with hearing babies of hearing parents. His research found that babies, who were regularly exposed to signs from around seven months of age, were able to communicate with signs as early as eight months. (Garcia 2005)

He began to teach his own children ASL and developed books such as “Toddler Talk” and “Sign with your baby”.

Around the same time Drs Linda Acredolo and Susan Goodwyn conducted a study in the late 1980s. This study spanning 2 decades was funded by the National Institute of Health in the USA. The study was devised to look at how signing with hearing babies affected their linguistic and intellectual development. Results showed signing infants (using symbolic gesture) understood language, had larger vocabularies, and learned to talk sooner compared to those who had not signed. The signing infants also engaged in more sophisticated play than non-signing babies. Parents of the signing infants in the study noted reduced frustration, an increase in communication, and enriched parent-infant bonding. Signing infants also displayed an increased interest in books. Drs Acredolo and Goodwyn published their book “Baby Signs” in 1996.

# Benefits of Baby Signing

## **Empowers babies to communicate earlier**

Having the skills to communicate early is important for a child to make choices and make their needs known.

## **Boosts self-esteem**

Feeling valued and understood can greatly improve self-esteem. When a baby uses signs and is rewarded, for example he signs milk and then is given his bottle of milk, he realises that what he has communicated has been understood and using the communication was worthwhile.

## **Reduces frustrations**

Signing can significantly increase the number of words a child can produce, which expands the topics you can talk about, and reduces frustration for both the child and adult. Successful communication can also decrease undesirable behaviours like, tantrums, and aggression.

## **Complements language skills and speech development**

Many people have the misconception that using sign language may delay or interfere with their child’s verbal language. Research has found that the opposite is true, and that signing can actually accelerate language and speech development. Signing reinforces verbal language as it adds a visual and kinaesthetic emphasis to auditory input.

*“Signing adds visual and kinaesthetic dimensions - alternative channels that can help children to internalise language and take pleasure in its use”*

**www.deafbooks.co.uk**

### **Enhances bonding and interaction**

Signing with your baby requires a great deal of eye contact; babies will feel they are receiving the parent’s full attention. As using sign language can aid early communication, it can help adults have a better understanding of what children are thinking at an earlier age. This can lead to better bonding between children and adults in their lives.

### **Parents understand what child wants/needs**

A whole new insight into the baby’s world, as the baby can communicate through signs what he wants, or sees, or feels or needs.

### **Teaches parents songs and rhymes**

Particularly with a first child, many parents do not know which songs or rhymes to sing to their baby. By attending baby signing classes, parents will be able to learn new songs/rhymes, boosting their own confidence and self-esteem.

## **Speech Development**

During a baby’s first year there are a number of stages they go through as their speech and language skills develop.

A baby will cry at birth, introducing them to the world of language. From then on they will absorb sounds, tones, and words that will later form the way they speak. Before they utter their first words, babies are learning about language and understanding speech.

The below list is a rough guide, as all babies are different and will develop at different stages.

### **0-3 months: crying (different types have different meanings), gurgles, sighs, coos, whimpering**

From birth a baby will use a range of noises to express their needs or feelings. They will use different crying sounds to convey hunger, pain/discomfort, insecurity, tiredness, etc. During a feed a baby will make sucking, breathing, burping, or contented sounds. Crying and making noises are important as this is how your baby learns to control the air that comes from his or her lungs and use his or her vocal cords. It lays the foundation for speaking. The cooing stage is important as this is when babies start to develop control of the muscles needed for talking. (gosh.nhs.uk –speech development 2011)

### **3- 6 months: babbling, cooing, blowing raspberries, lip smacking, imitating sounds**

A baby will begin to imitate more facial expressions. They will experiment with high and low pitches, and can be heard squealing at times as they explore these sounds.

### **6-9 months: babbling improving, using tones and patterns, basic gestures**

Baby's cooing will turn into more established babbling as they explore different speech sounds. They may begin to respond to their name (turning head towards person calling their name). As their motor skills are developing and are able to control their hands more than their voice, they may start to use some basic gestures.

### **9-12 months: uses words such as “dada” “mama”. Demonstrate greater understanding, interaction increases, and starting to use more gestures.**

You may notice that babies start to use their index finger to gesture to what they want or to show you their interests. They will start to recognize some words now, for example when you say bye-bye, they may respond by waving.

### **12-18 months: uses one to two words, such as “ball”, or “where ball?”**

At around 16 months a child's vocal cords are now fully formed, they will start to use one to two words and know what they mean.

### **18-24 months: children are learning 10 or more new words per day. Stringing two to three words together.**

By 24 months most toddlers will know around 50 words. They will be using words for the most familiar things/people in their surrounds.

### **2-3 years old: vocabulary increases to up to 300 words**

Around this age, children are likely to be talking lots and using more complex sentences, and asking lots of questions!

## ***The Need for Music, Singing and Rhyme***

Music forms part of the structure of a society; and nursery rhymes are entrenched in history and form part of a culture's linguistic customs and traditions. It is not surprising to find that music is crucial for a child's social development (Cross, 2005).

*“From birth, babies are capable of engaging in music-like activity”*

**Cross, 2005**

### **Experiencing Sound In Utero**

By the third trimester of pregnancy external sounds can be heard by the foetus (Wilcox, 1999; Kisilevsky et al, 2004) and the foetus actually becomes active when played music (Goddard-Blythe, 2005). Also, sounds experienced in utero affect how a baby responds to sounds after birth (Welsh, 2005).

### **Music For Premature Babies**

Playing music to premature babies (31 weeks gestation and beyond) has a positive effect (whilst the music is being played) on their heart rate, state of arousal, expressions of pain, oxygen saturation

levels (Kisilevsky et al, 2004). The 'Music for Dreaming' CD, which features the Brahms lullaby and other calming tunes, is particularly popular in neonatal units worldwide – the Brahms lullaby is specifically noted to return heart rate and state of arousal to baseline (Kisilevsky et al, 2004).

### **Communicating From Birth**

From birth, a baby is capable of communicating and actually becoming involved in a dialogue with their carer; particularly their mother, whose voice:

Is the right pitch and melody to keep the baby's interest in the 'conversation' (Trevvarthen & Malloch, 2002; Welsh, 2005)

Is familiar to the baby because they become used to the voice whilst in utero and are biased towards sounds they experienced in utero (Welsh, 2005).

### **Singing Versus Only Playing A CD**

Babies need to see and hear the 'singer'/'speaker' who is interacting with them. They become more attentive and calm their bodily movements (Welsh, 2005) when they are able to interact face-to-face with their carer.

Just as musicians playing together have to be closely attuned to each other, i.e. watching, being aware of others, acting in accordance with others, so to perform in a synchronised manner (Sawyer, 2005), so too does a baby and parent. From the parent's point of view, this will greatly enhance their understanding of their baby's cues; and for the baby, they begin to learn from the experiences and interpret their parents' emotions and behaviour towards them. This 'interactional synchrony' facilitates infant-parent interaction (Sawyer, 2005).

### **Dysfunctional Interaction?**

Issues arise if mothers with postnatal illness do not 'chat' in the same way they might without the depression. They tend to have quieter, lower pitched voices and are less inclined to be involved with the turn-taking 'rules' – i.e. generally the pauses between the mother's speech and the baby's is longer than the baby is attuned to and prefers (Welsh, 2005).

Potentially, encouraging the singing of nursery rhymes may help overcome this situation, to some extent. It requires the singer to sing in a higher pitch, in order to manage the rhyme effectively; as well as requiring them to sing at a specific (usually, fairly upbeat) speed and tempo.

Some parents do not have depression, but still feel uncomfortable 'chatting' to their baby. This is unfortunate, as it affects the child's overall potential; in particular language development and social ability. Encouraging parents to sing to their baby overcomes their need to 'think about what to say' to them.

### **Linking Music And Speech**

Throughout history, music has been regarded as a form of communication (Thaut, 2005); and is considered to be crucial for a child's social development (Cross, 2005). In fact both music and

language are considered to be ‘communicative mediums’ (Cross, 2005). Generally, communication between infant-parent is musical or ‘proto-musical’ (Cross, 2005) by nature because it includes:

- Pitch contours
- Periodic rhythmic timing
- Turn-taking
- Links between sound and movement

The ‘proto-musicality’ displayed by a baby is deeply entwined with early language development, or ‘proto-linguistics’ (Cross, 2005) for much of the child’s early years. A baby’s babbling has pitch and tone and rhythm, all of which are key elements of music and language. Babies have the ability to imitate simple rhythms long before they develop speech (Goddard-Blythe, 2005).

There is more than a notable connection between music and speech (Sawyer, 2005), particularly as the strong timing and rhythmic elements of music impact on the speech centres in the brain (Thaut, 2005). Furthermore, the musical and rhythmic aspects of language can be developed to assist higher cognitive learning (Goddard-Blythe, 2005).

### **Singing And Speech**

There are distinguishable acoustic features between singing and speech (Welsh, 2005), such as:

- Pitch range
- Temporal proximity
- Timbre
- Harmony

Adults generally tend to distinguish between ‘speech’ and ‘singing’, but babies and young children tend not to make a distinction between the two (Welsh, 2005). When ‘chatting’, babies will imitate the tone and tempo of adult speech long before they can talk. The sound of this ‘chatting’ is usually melodious, as if they are singing a song that they do not know the words to yet (Goddard-Blythe, 2005). Developmentally, this begins the early construction of a vocabulary bank for the child (Welsh, 2005).

In response to a baby’s need to sing when ‘chatting’, it is common for carers to reply accordingly, using infant-directed speech (‘motherese’ or ‘parentese’). Infant-directed speech is, in fact, very similar to infant-directed singing (Welsh, 2005), such as lullabies and nursery rhymes, because the acoustic features of both are:

- Simple
- Repetitive
- A higher pitch
- Expressive
- Ritualised
- Slower tempo

### **Emotions : Music and The Voice**

Research, involving brain imaging, clearly indicates that music affects some subcortical and cortical areas of the brain, which subsequently creates an emotional reaction (Altenmuller, 2002 cited in Juslin, 2005). Even a very young baby is capable of processing the emotions within the pitch and rhythm (prosody) of language; and is able to appreciate the emotional variation in a voice (Welsh, 2005).

There is also evidence to show that there is an association between the sounds experienced in utero and the emotional state of a baby after birth (Welsh, 2005).

## **Music, Singing and Child Development**

**Thurman & Welsh** (2000) believe that music and singing affects the overall functioning of the:

- Nervous system
- Endocrine system
- Immune system

**Thaut** (2005) argues that the critical aspects of timing and sequencing within music and rhyme may positively affect the child's:

- Attention
- Ability to make decisions
- Memory

**Goddard-Blythe** (2005) believes:

### **1. That babies:**

- Respond to rhyme
- Soon become familiar with repeated verse
- Have the potential to become good readers, because the rhyming element of the sounds can help lay the foundation for their reading ability

### **2. That music:**

- Contributes to brain development
- Significantly improves verbal memory
- Acts as a springboard for other skills to be developed
- Is a powerful tool for supporting learning
- Develops left-hemisphere abilities

### **3. That singing:**

- Develops fine muscle coordination
- Involves the training of motor skills
- Improves sound, rhythm and pattern recognition
- Can help the development of the inner ear, in relation to sounds of speech and written language
- Links motor skills, sounds and visual images that are essential for reading and writing skills
- Involves both the right and left sides of the brain

*“Singing is often repetitive and done from memory. As a result, such repetitiveness can enhance short-term memory”*

**Sally Goddard-Blythe, 2001**

# Teaching Baby Signing

## ***Professional Practice***

It is important for all baby signing teachers to practice in a professional manner. Becoming a member of a relevant organisation, which sets high professional standards, is also prudent. The Guild of Sensory Development (GofSD) is the regulatory body for baby signing and positive-touch training organisations in the UK. The GofSD can also offer valuable advice for teachers and you are strongly advised to join as a member [www.gofsd.org.uk](http://www.gofsd.org.uk)

Baby signing teachers should practice safely, ethically and professionally. It is particularly important to appreciate that facilitating baby signing is about supporting, empowering and teaching parents a new skill.

## ***Preparing to Teach***

### **Scheme-of-Work**

A scheme-of-work will help you achieve continuity with your parents and establishes the framework for the delivery of the content. As with all planning, you still need to be flexible and prepared to adjust if needs be. Consider that your scheme-of-work is not cast in stone, but a working document. See Touch-Learn's Scheme-of-Work for weeks 1-4 and 5-8.

### **Lesson Plan**

Once the scheme-of-work has been designed, each individual session requires a lesson plan, which is a more detailed document depicting what will be delivered in that particular session. Each individual lesson plan should ideally include the:

- Aims, objectives and learning outcomes
- Time it will take for each activity
- Resources for the teacher
- Resources for parents

## ***Supporting Parents' Learning Styles***

The Visual, Auditory, Reading/Writing and Kinaesthetic (VARK) learning styles of the parents you teach will all need to be supported so that you successfully engage with them and they have a positive and effective learning experience.

<b>Type of learner</b>	<b>Examples of how you can support the parents you are teaching</b>
Visual	Pictorial handouts may be helpful, picture cards, posters Role-modelling during the songs and activities
Auditory	Clear and concise verbal explanations of the signs, using songs and music
Reading/Writing	Your supporting hand-outs
Kinaesthetic	Parents need to practise the songs and signs with you and their baby

### ***Tips to Enhance Your Teaching of Baby Signing***

The following tips will enhance your teaching experience and the experience for the parent and child.

<b>Tip</b>	<b>Reason</b>
Communicate that Baby Signing is baby-led	Parents are best signing when their baby is alert and not fussy or over-tired so that the experience is a positive one for the child
Always say the word with the sign	It is important to always reinforce a sign with the word. This helps language development by adding visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic input
Stress to parents they need to practise	Use it or lose it! If they do not practise they will lose the ability to sign fluently
Keep good eye contact	a) This ensures that you have engaged with all parents, they feel welcome and supported. You are able to see if parents are signing correctly b) Babies love having their parents' full attention, and good eye contact gives them this
Keep it simple - use no more than 1 or 2 signs per sentence	Too many signs can be confusing and can be difficult to remember. Try not to over load sentences with too many signs. Using just one or two signs per sentence will increase parent's confidence to using the signs themselves
Collective praise for parents!	We do not want to single out any parents as this can make them feel embarrassed and disempowered
Encourage the children's signs even if they get it wrong; it takes practise for tiny hands!	Work with their signs, avoid trying to correct them if the signs are a little wrong, but do keep using the correct signs yourself.
Don't put children on the spot!	It's always lovely when a baby/toddler starts to use signs, but by asking them to perform (e.g. "show Grandma the sign for milk") but this may put them under undue pressure and stress can

	impede the learning process or they may choose to stop using the signs
Keep Baby Signing fun	We do not want learning to be a chore. Learning is easier when it is light-hearted and fun. Babies and toddlers love music and singing and should respond positively with this input
Involve extended family, if possible	Consistency is the key to successful baby signing, and if other family members use the signs too, baby/toddler will pick the signs up more quickly. If other family members are not keen to use the signs, perhaps encourage them to use just a small number of signs such as milk, more etc
Be patient	Every parent wants to know how long it will be before their baby starts to sign. Unfortunately this is impossible to answer, as this depends on many factors such as, how old the baby is, how long they've been introduced to the signs for, how often they see the sign being used by their parents etc. Every baby will develop at their own pace, for some the signs will come very soon (sometimes after a matter of days), whilst for others it may be months
Repetition is the key!	Good for brain development for the children and helps parents to consolidate. Encourage parents to use the signs daily. The more frequently the infant is shown the sign, the quicker they are likely to start using the signs themselves. It is better to use a sign every time you say the word (e.g. sign milk every time you say the word milk) rather than try and teach them the signs for a period of time each day/week

### ***Non-Directive Teaching***

The baby signing teacher works with the parents to support and empower them. S/he teaches in a non-directive and non-judgmental way, assuming always that all the parent learners are doing their best and want to improve their skills. Parents of young children may be tired and stressed and in need of affirmation and encouragement. Research tells us that adult learners, as well as children learners, respond to praise. We all learn best with an appropriate balance of challenge and support, the baby signing teacher's challenge comes from teaching the signs, movements and songs, and the support comes from respectful ethos established in the group. To single out an individual is to potentially make them feel small and as if everyone else is doing it right. From this position it is harder to ask for guidance or to put things right. Talking to the group as a whole reminds every one of best practice and gives the person who is not doing quite the right thing an implicit invitation to ask for further help or to pay more attention to the teacher, the other parents and her own child. They do not feel judged and found wanting; just supported and encouraged. It is important to remember that the baby signing classes are about helping parents to make their own decisions and to trust their own

judgment with their child, singling out an individual and, in effect, telling them what to do, is to disempower them.

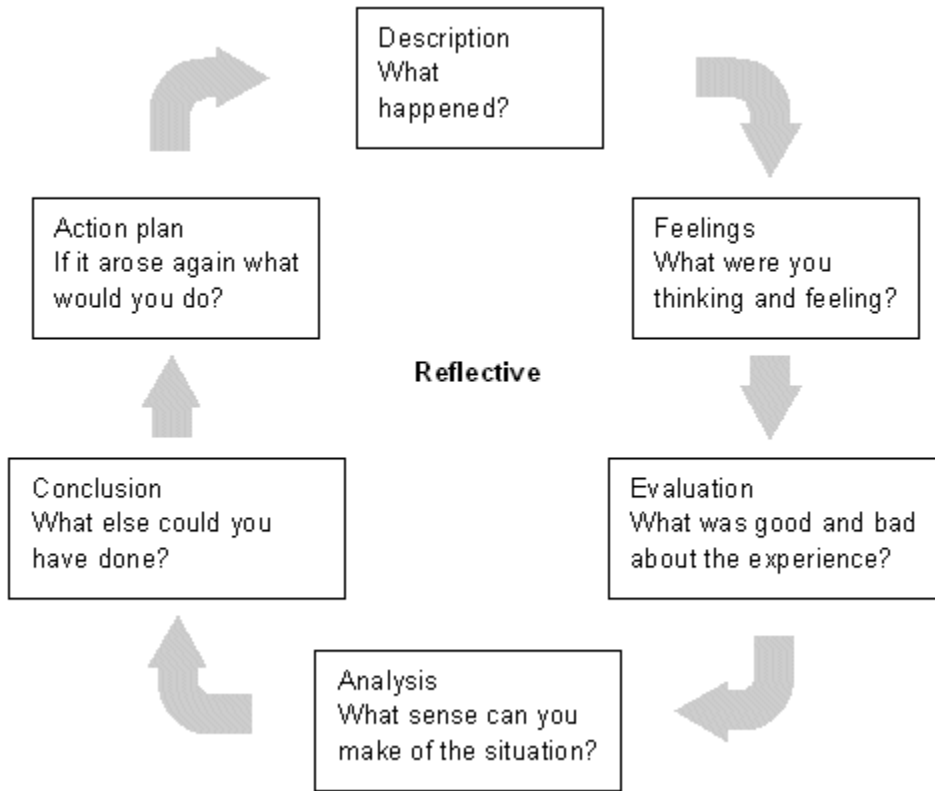
## **Teaching Strategies**

<b>Considerations:</b>	<b>Suggested strategies:</b>
Managing Expectations	Parents may not know what to expect from the classes. Produce a leaflet or speak to them before the classes start to ensure they know what to expect from each of the session.
Size of Group	Keep groups small as lots of toddlers running around can be hard to manage.
Teaching Parents	Be confident in your ability and sing songs with enthusiasm to role-model and help parents feel comfortable.
What resources will you use?	Ensure that you have music, props, picture cards and bubbles to ensure that the classes are stimulating and fun!
How will you ensure parents feel confident to carry on signing at home?	By observing that they are signing correctly and confidently before they leave the session. If you have any concerns, reflect on how you are demonstrating the signs and consider re-phrasing what you say, or repeating the visual demonstration. Produce simple, clear hand-outs for parents to use as a reminder at home.

## **Reflection and Evaluation of Your Teaching Practice**

It is important to maintain a reflective journal and garner the views of your parents in the form of parental evaluations. Your own reflections on your teaching and the evaluations from the parents will inform your future practice, helping you make adaptations and subtle changes to your lesson plans where necessary. You may find Gibbs's model help to improve your practice.

## Gibbs's Reflective Practice Model



# Cath Smith Graphics

## Copyright

All the BSL images that are used in the suggested hand-outs for parents are courtesy of Cath Smith and are copyright. Touch-Learn International Ltd and Jo Briley, teacher and trainer, have independently purchased the license to use Cath Smith's signs for the purposes of this programme. Touch-Learn's Baby Signing Teachers are required to use the resources we have supplied for their teaching.

## Supplemental Teaching Materials

During the course your trainer will have demonstrated a number of supplemental resources that may enhance your teaching. These can be obtained from Deaf Books and have also been produced by Cath Smith.

[www.deafbooks.co.uk](http://www.deafbooks.co.uk)

# Carousel Nursery Rhyme CD

The co-producer of the The Nursery Rhyme CD. Linda Caroe provided by Touch-Learn for teaching Baby Signing has expressly given her permission for the CD to be used in the Baby Signing classes. See message below:

**Linda Caroe and Mike Newbon, the producers of the CD: Carousel Nursery Rhymes and Children's Songs, give Touch-Learn Baby Signing Teachers their express permission to use this CD with parents when teaching Baby Signing.**

**Please note that any unauthorised copying, public performance, broadcasting, hiring or rental of the Carousel Music CDs is prohibited.**

**If teachers would like to purchase further copies of the CD for parents who attend their courses, please call direct on 01323 734418.**

**There is a discount on orders of 5 CDs or more. Alternatively, please refer parents directly to the website to buy their own copies. A Carousel CD of Christmas Songs and Carols is also available.**

**01323 734418**

We strongly advise that you purchase these for parents or direct parents to purchase themselves direct from Carousel Music. The CDs cost £5 (discounts available for bulk purchases).

# Getting Started

## ***Materials Needed for Running Classes***

### **You will need:**

CD player and Carousel Music CD  
Baby Signing Teaching Handbook  
Lesson plans  
Room risk assessment  
Class register  
Props  
Bubbles  
Flash cards  
Instruments  
Signing Hand-outs  
Top Tips for Baby Signing  
Refreshments  
Posters  
Parental certificates  
Parental evaluations

## ***The Course Sequence:***

Week 1 – The Basics  
Week 2 – Nappy/Bath Time  
Week 3 – Getting Dressed  
Week 4 – Bed Time  
Week 5 – Vehicles and going out  
Week 6 – Health and emotions  
Week 7 - Weather  
Week 8 – Family