

# The Power of “AND” in Deaf Education

## LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Early accessible language drives development. Deaf and hard of hearing children thrive when they have access to sign language acquisition and learning in rich, accessible environments. It's not one or the other; both language acquisition AND language learning are needed.

### What this means:

- **Language access must happen early and consistently.**
- **Sign language does not hinder spoken language development.**
- **Early access = decreased risk of language deprivation.**
- **Children need language as a living, interactive experience.**

## Checklist for Families

Use this checklist as a starting point for supporting your child's language development. Each item reflects a research-informed action you can take at home and in your daily life. Check off steps as you explore and implement them; there is no single right order.

- ☐ **Start accessible language as early as possible.**  
Early language access is critical for brain development. Prioritize giving your child consistent, rich language input from birth.
- ☐ **Use sign language AND printed language.**  
Incorporate ASL and print into everyday moments (e.g., labeling objects, reading together, signing during routines). Using multiple modes strengthens your child's overall language foundation.
- ☐ **Focus on communication and connection.**  
Prioritize meaningful interaction over perfecting any one modality. When your child feels understood and connected, language development flourishes naturally.



*These resources were developed through a collaborative partnership between the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center and the Deaf Center at Boston University. The content reflects a shared commitment to advancing language access, Deaf education, and language-rich learning environments for deaf and hard of hearing children.*