

Interview with Rachel Coleman of Signing Time ASL video series -- Part 2

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This article is a continuation piece. My introduction to sign language as a valuable tool for **all** children, not just the deaf -- as well as Part 1 of my interview with Rachel Coleman of [Signing Time!](#) -- can be found [HERE](#).

ASL is obviously also potentially useful as a communication tool for all children, not just children with special needs. In addition to [allowing them to communicate with sign-users](#) -- and this ties in with the [inspiration](#) behind creating *Singing Time*, I know -- there are benefits for the individual. (I know about many of them, but...) Can you tell us what some of them are?

Sure, babies and toddlers are using sign language for their earliest form of communication and many of them drop it as soon as their speech is clear. Children with special needs, language delays, Autism, etc. often rely on sign language for communication for the rest of their lives, so clearly there is a benefit for them. But typical children who may already be in school, what's the benefit, you ask? It's simple. I don't think there is a person out there who would say that learning a second language is a bad thing. I learned the manual alphabet when I was eight years old. I never forgot it. Now, that says something. How many things did you learn when you were a kid that you can recall with precision? Sign language is an incredible learning tool. It incorporates so many of the different learning styles. It is physical, visual, spatial, three dimensional, rhythmic and kinesthetic. Show me another mode of learning that covers all of those bases! The information is in your hands, it's part of your body and experience. Leah knew her ABCs in ASL before she was two years old. She could see them on her fingers, she memorized the pattern and she could identify the corresponding letter in print. This gave her access to all kind of information! She would fingerspell words that she saw on buildings and ask me what those words meant. A two-year-old without those signs, without the manual alphabet, might see letters and even recognize them, but they can't write them down. Without signs, they have no way of accessing and communicating that information to you.



Photo taken from the website of [Expressive Hands, LLC](#)

Sign language is a great parenting tool and it is great for classroom management. It requires everyone to pay attention with more than their ears. Children learn to look for and respond to silent cues. As a parent, I noticed that when my youngest, Lucy really wanted my full attention, she would sign to me. There was no doubt in her mind that I would give her my undivided attention and was eager to decipher her signs. Which brings me to one of the best things about signing with your children: you have to *look* at each other. It is face-to-face. You are not hollering down the hall, or staring at your computer screen and mumbling to them as they stand behind you. You are connected.

[Signing Time!](#) is not the only ASL-teaching video or video series out there. How did you keep all of the aforementioned issues in mind, when designing it?

When we created **Signing Time!** there was very little "competition" in existence. Due to the fact that I needed to learn sign language when we found out Leah was deaf, I became a consumer of a number of videos that taught ASL. I found that the available products were very boring and hard to sit through, even for a mother whose communication with her daughter was on the line! If my husband Aaron and I could barely sit through the lessons, there was no way a child would be patient enough to learn this way.

When developing **Signing Time!**, my sister Emilie and I brainstormed the things we felt were important to include. We knew that children enjoy watching and imitating other children. Children also respond well to animation, and they equally like to see the real item. Incorporating this into **Signing Time!** resulted in a method that helped our viewers connect a concrete object with an artistic or animated representation. And even though we knew the audience was young, we felt it was important to see the written word so that we would be introducing literacy skills. All of these elements are included in *Signing Time*. At the very last minute I was added to the mix as an adult who could clearly model the signs. Originally, Alex and Leah were meant to teach the signs and it just didn't work. Sure, they communicated in signs, but that is different than teaching a sign to someone. We realized that we needed a clear, concise signer to present each sign. Emilie decided that person was me. (I was really reluctant!)

After releasing **Signing Time!**, a number of copy-cat companies showed up. We never let that worry us. We just looked at it as proof that we really did have a great idea. We felt very confident that no one could touch our story, our production level, our quality, and the amount of music we were producing. I think we have continued to have the upper hand because this isn't "just a job" or "just a great marketing idea." We didn't see someone else do it and think, "Hey! I could rip that off!" This is my family, this is our real life. I am a musician. I am a singer and a songwriter. My oldest daughter is deaf. Her cousins and friends learned to sign with her and they experienced fabulous benefits. My youngest daughter, Lucy was born with Cerebral Palsy and Spina Bifida and her first communication was through her big sister's language, American Sign Language. ASL has been a gift in our lives. I am passionate about sharing that gift with others. It wasn't like we were just jumping on the early-education bandwagon and trying to make a buck – it was an authentic expression of everything that we ARE. I guess our formula was taking the natural talents and abilities that already existed, merged them with the surprises that came along with parenting and we ended up created something wonderful.

When [Baby Einstein](#) released their baby sign language DVD I was really excited. If [Disney](#) was going to put their resources into baby signing, then there was no doubt that we were already doing the right thing. I believe that Disney's marketing dollars, and their messaging that signing is good for babies, has helped bring even more customers to **Signing Time!** We have one of the largest DVD libraries available to families who want to learn American Sign Language vocabulary. Once you've exhausted any other company's line of 1 to 4 DVDs, you are going to find **Signing Time!** It's just a matter of time. I am especially confident that if you've seen other children's signing products first, you are really going to love what we do.

For more info:

Signing Time! can be found at:

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If you want to test out one of the **Signing Time!** videos before [shopping](#), check to see if your local library system has any of them, and consider putting in a request if they don't. Remember that many library systems shared by collections of suburbs or library branches within a larger city, will allow inter-library loans of media such as DVDs, as well as books -- I know that the [Onondaga County Public Library System](#) does, and they also have several videos from the **Signing Time!** series, now.

Interested in other ["Tools of the Trade" features](#)? Check out my archive to see what else has been examined!

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