

# Parents partnering with language researchers to identify best practices for learning ASL

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# Outline for today

1

## Unique parenting challenges

The challenges faced by parents of deaf and hard of hearing children

2

## Linguistic perceptions

Comparison of sign language acquisition as a first language vs a second language

3

## Best practices

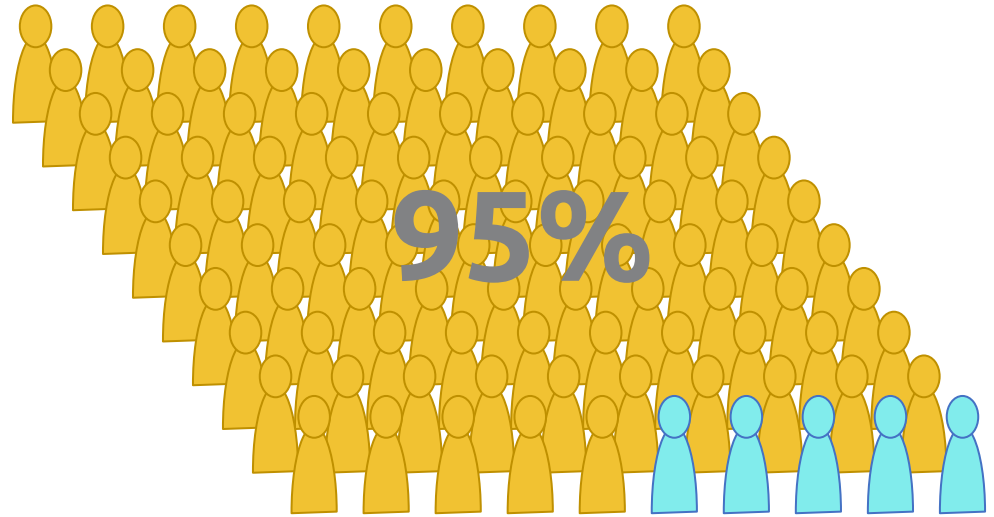
What works and what doesn't work, based on research with parents and children

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# 1. Unique parenting challenges



About 95% of deaf children in the US have hearing parents with **no previous experience** with deafness or sign language.



(Mitchell & Karchmer 2004)



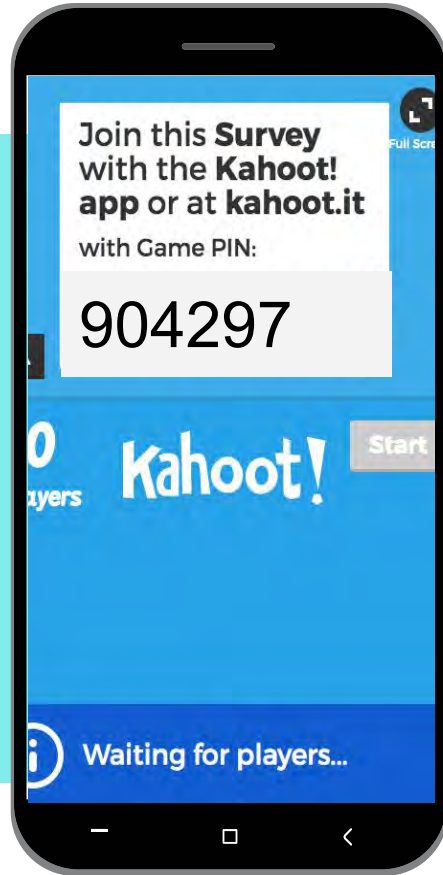
**"Nothing is scarier than not speaking the same language as your baby."**

The challenge for hearing parents of deaf children: Accessible language or familiar, fluent language?

From your smartphone  
or tablet browser, go to  
kahoot.it

**Enter this PIN: 904297**

Create a user name.

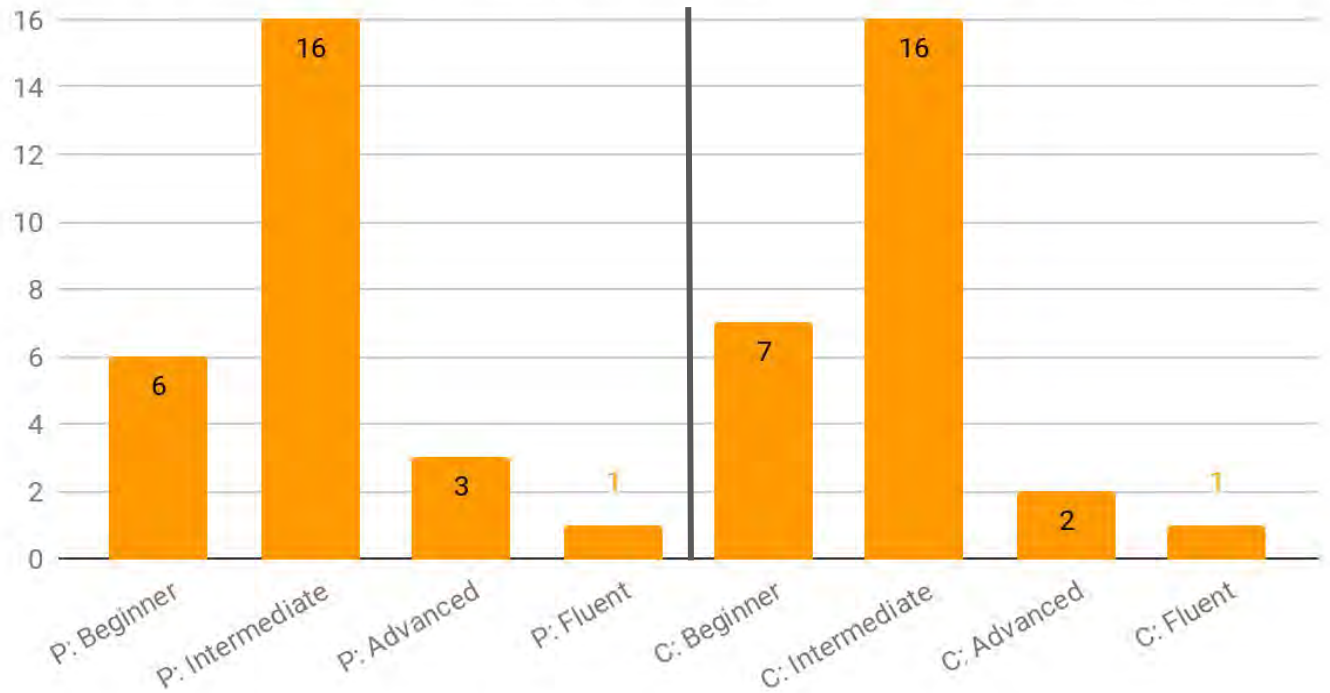


Kahoot questions 1-3:  
Who are we?

Preliminary study:  
Interviews with 27 Hearing parents who have committed to ASL as a home language

(Chen Pichler, to appear, b)

Parent ASL Production (P) and Comprehension (C) Proficiency



Parents of deaf children ages 7 months - 10 years, median 4 years

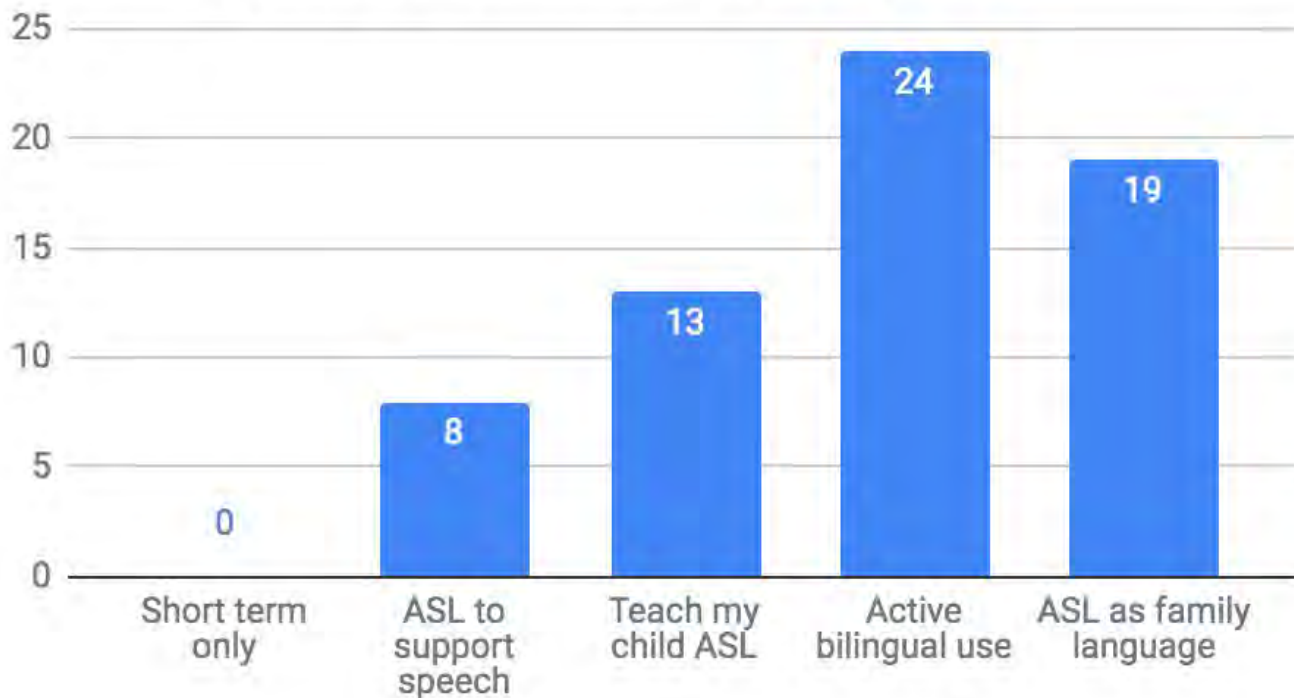


Kahoot questions 4-5:  
Goals

# What are your long-term goals for **YOUR OWN** ASL learning?

(Chen Pichler, to appear, b)

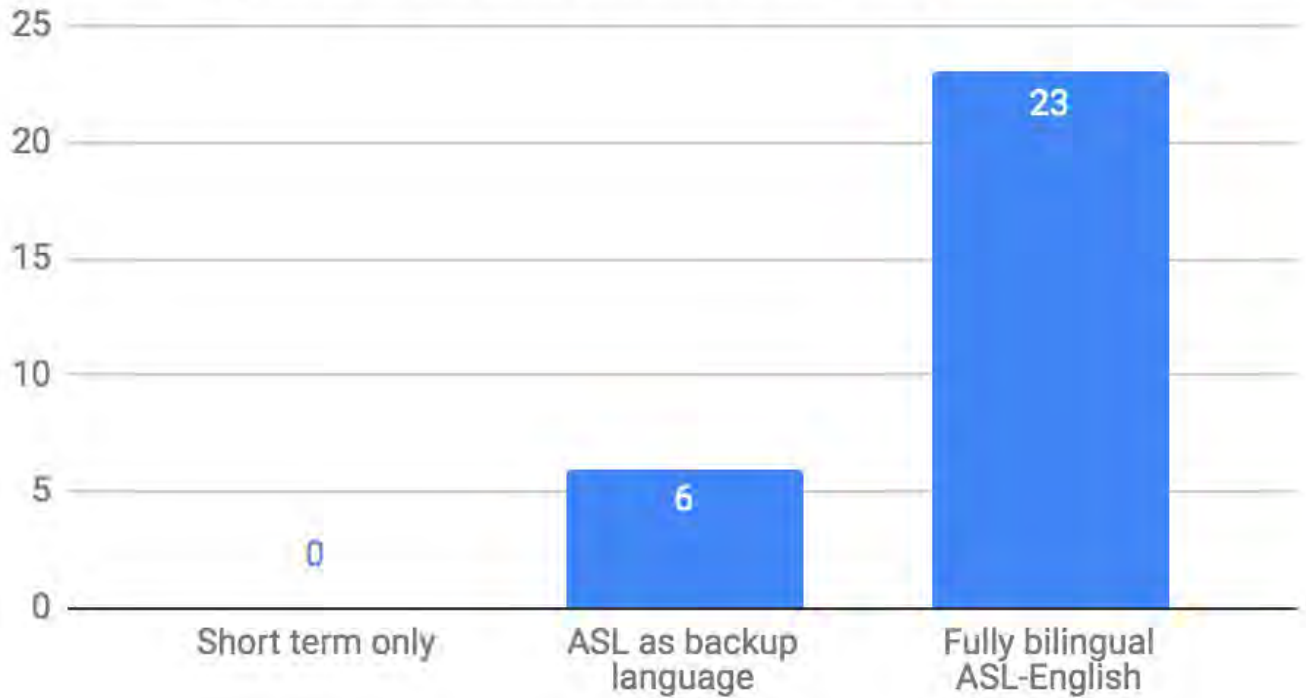
## Parents' goals for own ASL development



# What are your long-term goals for **YOUR CHILD'S** ASL learning?

(Chen Pichler, to appear, b)

## Parents' goals for child's ASL development



"I just wanted to give her the tools and let her decide. I don't know if she going to want to wear hearing aids when she's older ... and she needs a way to communicate with whatever community she wants to be in."

"The one thing you can always count on technology to do is break. I'm not going to suddenly stop talking with my daughter for a week while we're getting her implant fixed."

"I've met people who grew up oral and then learned to sign, and I don't want my daughter to be in that position, to have to learn a new language at 21."

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## 2. Linguistic perceptions



**What do  
language  
learners  
have to  
learn?**



Kahoot questions 6-8:  
perceptions

# Which aspects of ASL are the most important to learn?

	Not that important	Useful but not required	Critical
Accurate pronunciation	4	10	12
Large vocabulary	0	9	17
Produce and read fingerspelling	1	8	17
Facial expression/nonmanuals	0	2	24
ASL story-telling skills	0	8	18
Word order and grammar	1	16	9
Pick and use classifiers	0	15	11
Using eye gaze correctly	1	5	20
Child-directed ASL	1	7	18



# Which aspects of ASL are the hardest/easiest to learn?

	Very easy	Not difficult	Quite difficult	Near impossible
Accurate form	1	14	7	1
Vocabulary	2	11	10	0
Fingerspelling	1	7	12	3
Nonmanuals	2	12	9	0
Storytelling skills	1	4	14	4
Word order	0	2	20	1
Classifiers	0	5	18	0
Eye gaze	0	16	7	0
Child-directed sign	1	12	10	0

(Chen Pichler to appear, b)

Split opinions on vocabulary;  
Not much conscious attention to phonology

"A lot of [ASL] words ... are very intuitive."

"...signs that really look like what they are."

"In some ways I feel it is easier to express myself in ASL [than in my other second language, English], because I don't have to think about pronunciation, I can just focus on grammar or word order."

# Word order is elusive and difficult to learn

“I can’t get any feedback on my word order [from Deaf adults]. Nobody ever corrects me, they’re just thrilled I’m doing ASL...”

One more word  
order quote

“We are stuck at intermediate level. We’re already in the last ASL class offered in our area, but we still don’t feel fluent.”

What resources do you still need to support your family’s development of ASL?

(Chen Pichler, to appear, b)

“I’m going to reach a point [where] if I don’t keep learning, I’m going to lose my ability to communicate with her in the way that I want to.”



## First Language: *Acquisition*

- Unconscious process
- Based on *exposure*
- No previous language
- Child controls pace
- Process is **predictable**
- Endpoint is **uniform**



## Second Language: *Learning*

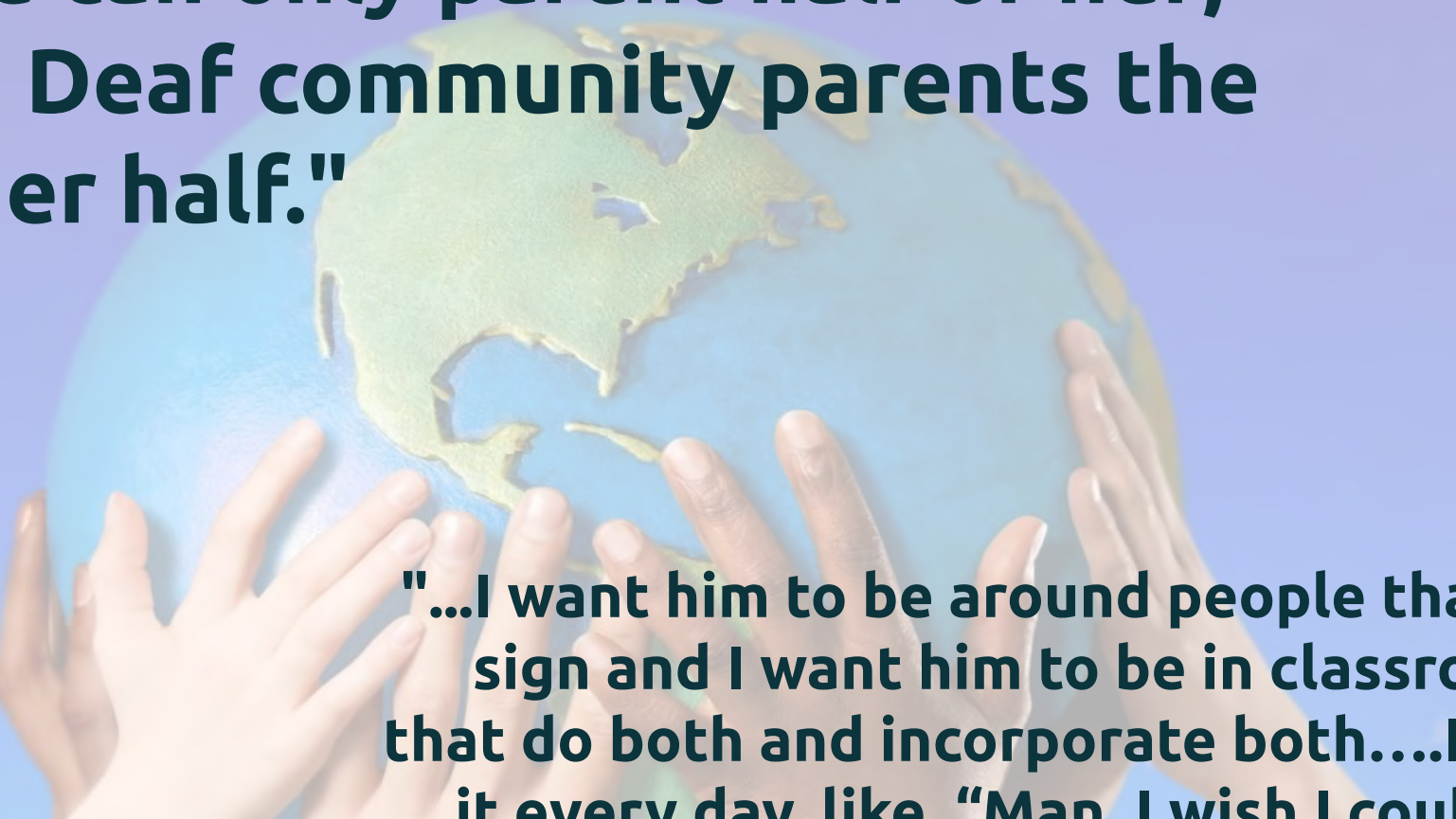
- Intentional process
- Based on *teaching*
- Transfer from first language
- Teacher controls pace
- Process is **less predictable**
- Endpoint is **not uniform**

Adults often need to be taught the patterns of ASL. Children develop those intuitions through exposure.



DARK-BLUE vs. BLUE vs. BLUISH

**"We can only parent half of her;  
the Deaf community parents the  
other half."**



**"...I want him to be around people that do  
sign and I want him to be in classrooms  
that do both and incorporate both....I feel  
it every day, like, "Man, I wish I could do  
this for you, but I can't."**

Kahoot questions 9-11:  
Developmental  
patterns



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### **3. Best practice: What works and doesn't work?**



**1**

Build other sources of ASL models (your "village") into your family life.

**2**

Find opportunities for your child to have regular interaction with signing peers.

**3**

Develop more advanced levels of family-centered ASL curricula for parents who are ready for it.



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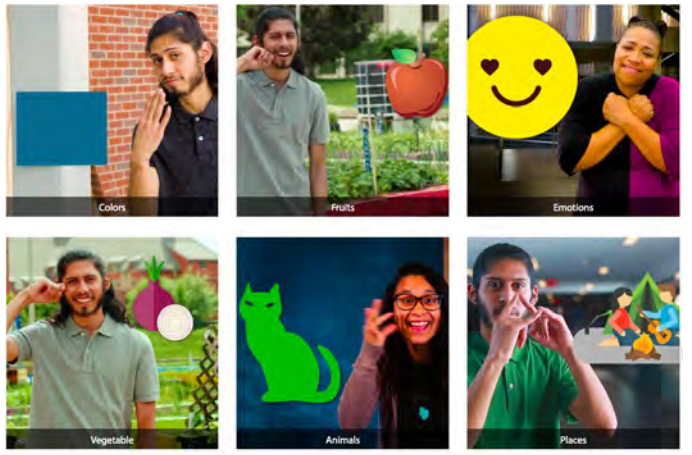
ASL Connect offers a free program to teach basic ASL. Remote lessons with a Deaf Connector also offer 1:1 training to families of deaf children.



<https://www.gallaudet.edu/asl-connect/asl-for-free>

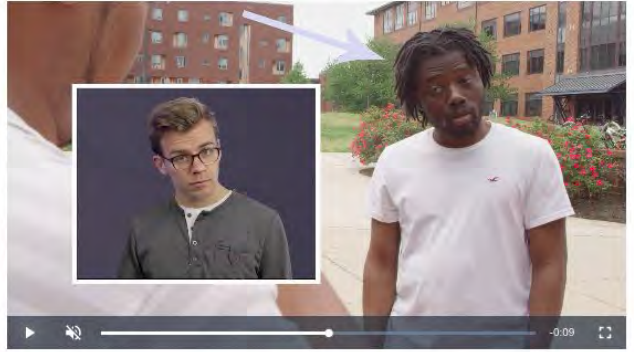
### What is ASL? ↗

Watch the captioned video.

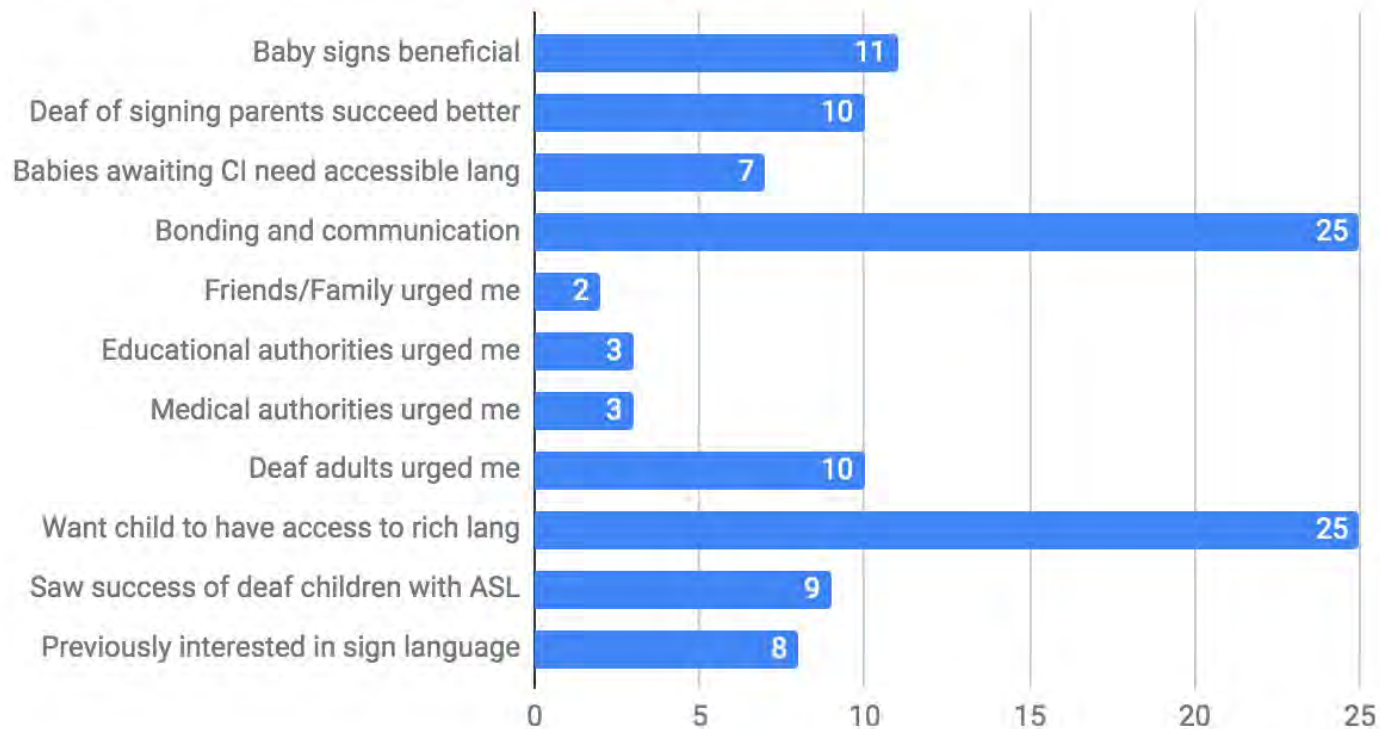


### Watch the Demonstration ↗

Observe the use of active listening to provide feedback to the speaker.



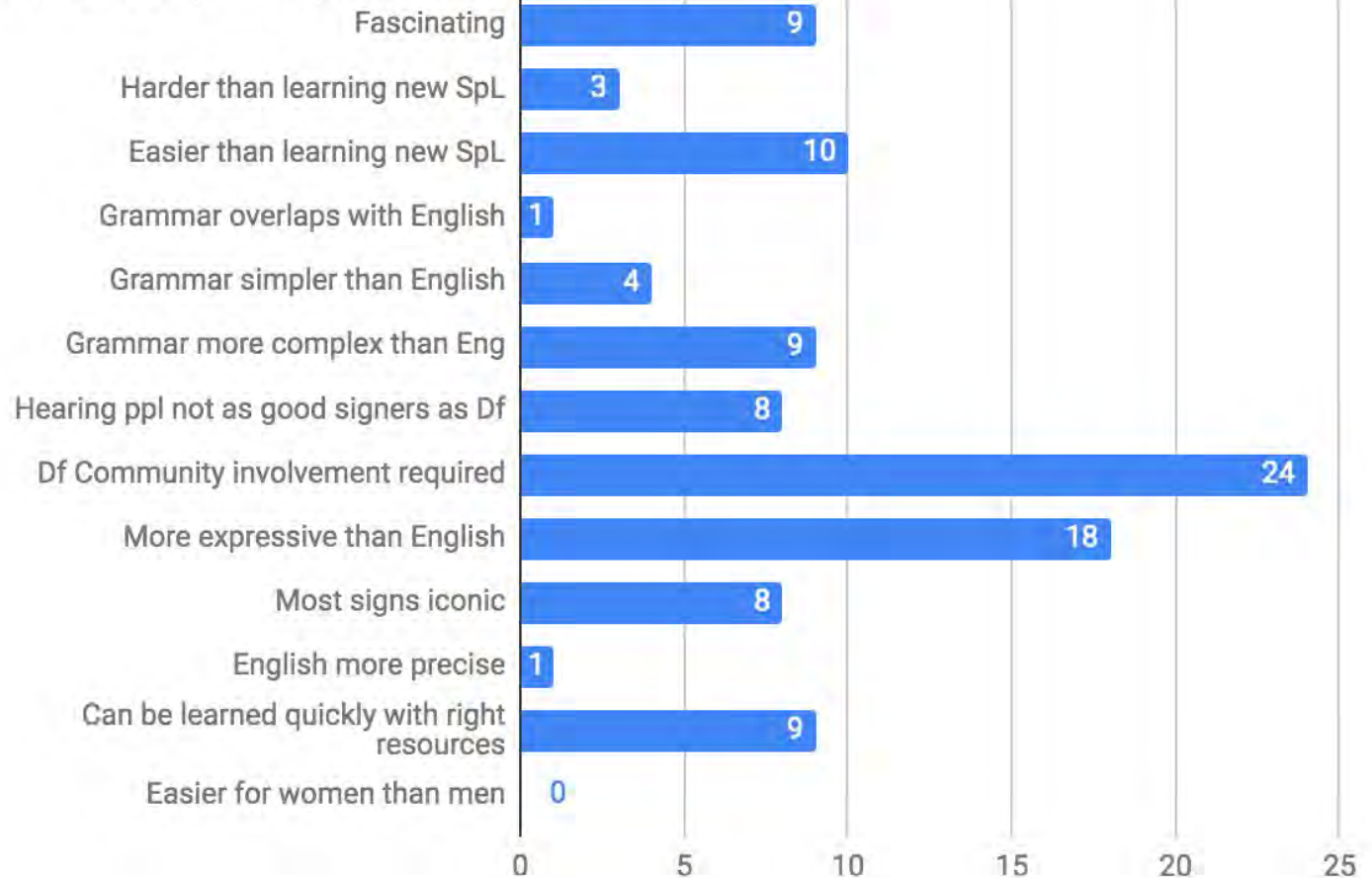
## Parental motivation for learning ASL



What motivated you to choose ASL, despite pressure against signing?

(Chen Pichler, to appear, b)

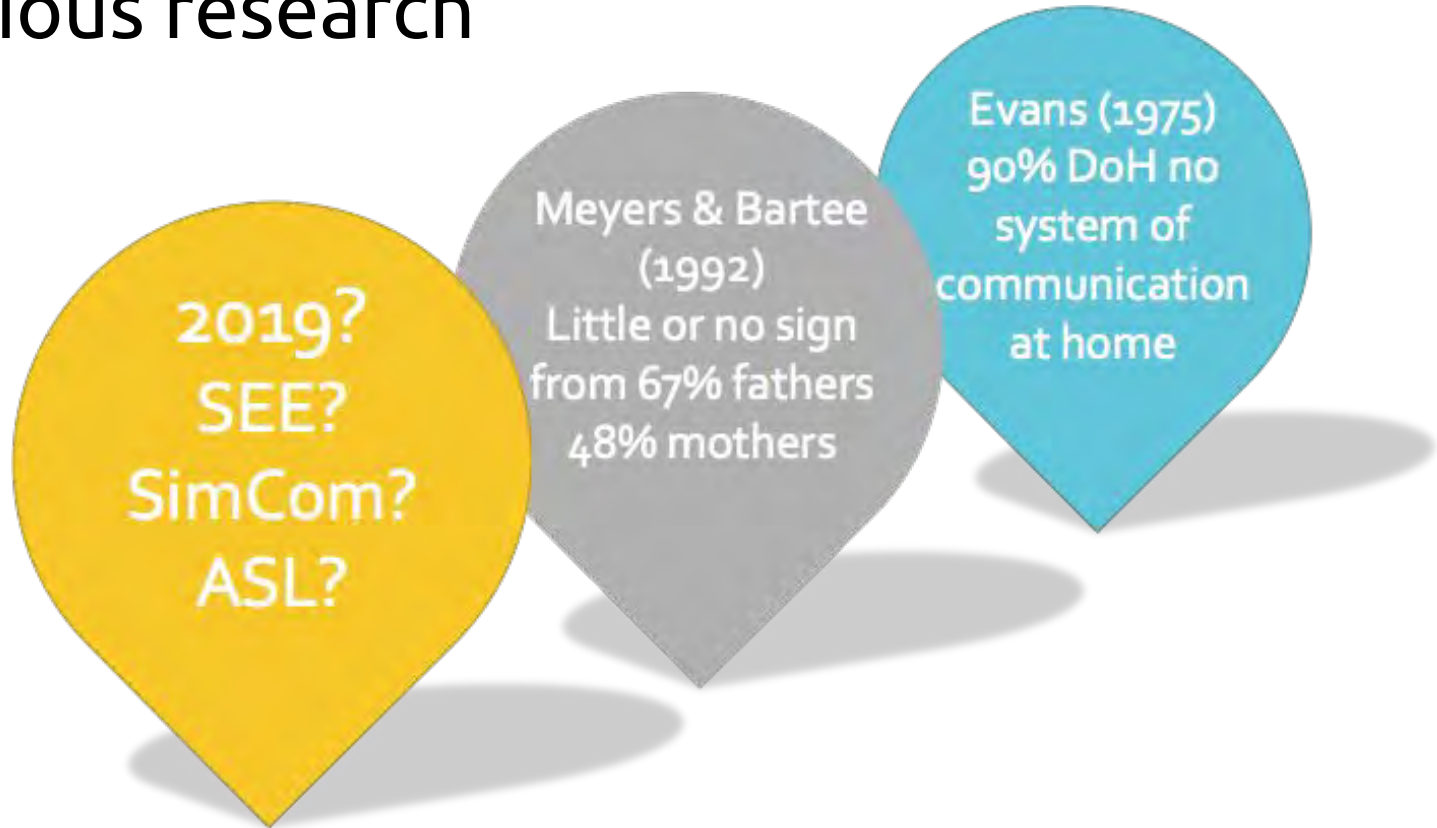
## Parental perceptions of ASL



Please select all the following statements that you feel are true.

(Chen Pichler, to appear, b)

# Sign language use by hearing parents in previous research



## Main interview questions for hearing parents who have committed to ASL

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Chen Pichler (in press)

1. What are your goals for learning ASL for yourself? for your deaf child?
2. What motivated you to choose ASL, despite pressure against signing with deaf children?
3. What methods are the most effective for learning ASL?
4. What aspects of ASL have been the hardest to learn? the most intuitive to learn?
5. What resources do you still need to support your family's development of ASL?



# What do language learners have to learn?

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## Phonological system

- how to combine elements into words  
(rules for mouth or hand movements and positioning)

## Morphological system

- how to combine word parts into bigger words  
(making compounds, plurals, indicating person)

## Syntactic system

- how to combine words into sentences

## Lexicon

- Vocabulary

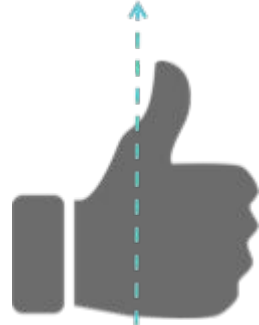
## Semantic system

- how meaning is expressed

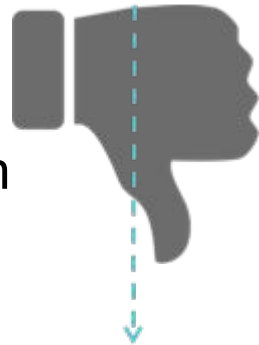
## Pragmatic system

- how the language is used with other people

Successful bilingual development of both ASL and English for Koda and DDCI children with deaf signing parents (Davidson et al. 2014)



Smaller BSL vocabulary and handshape inventory for deaf children with M2L2 hearing parents compared to those with deaf parents (Lu et al. 2016)



How proficiently do hearing parents have to sign to benefit their deaf children, especially those with CI?

Most parents of children with hearing loss do not know sign language and the process of learning sign language... is a long and arduous process meaning that **they will not be exposing their children to good language models during the early years.**

<https://hearinghealthmatters.org/hearingandkids/2017/debate-never-ends/>

When today's parents are told that their deaf children should or must learn ASL as part of a Deaf culture, they increasingly respond that their children actually are part of a hearing culture -- that of their friends, family and the world at large."