

Unique Needs of the DHH Child: Supporting Every Step

Launching LEAD-K Michigan

Michigan Department of Education Resource for Deaf/Hard of Hearing



DHH by the Numbers

- About **2 to 3 out of every 1,000 children** in the United States are born with a detectable hearing difference in one or both ears.
- About **90% of children** who are deaf or hard of hearing are born into hearing families.

Critical Period of Language Development

The language input a child receives and processes during the early years of life is extremely important in their development of communication and later academic skills.

Communication and language development must be at the heart of early intervention for DHH children—it is their critical period of language development.

Language Development for DHH

Babies' brains are wired for language; they are born ready to learn.

- Language develops through interactions and exposure.
- Accessible language is key.
- Early intervention supports families in accessible communication and language.
- Tracking and monitoring language milestones helps parents know what to expect and/or focus on.

Parents' Wish List for Early Interventionists

- Unbiased information about communication opportunities.
- Information to make well informed decisions.
- Respect for decisions made.
- ANYTHING that will be helpful in understanding hearing differences and where to find help.
- Resources when you don't know the answer to questions.
- Your professional opinion...when asked.

Some Terminology

Language opportunities

Communication approaches

Modes of communication

Language Opportunities

English

ASL

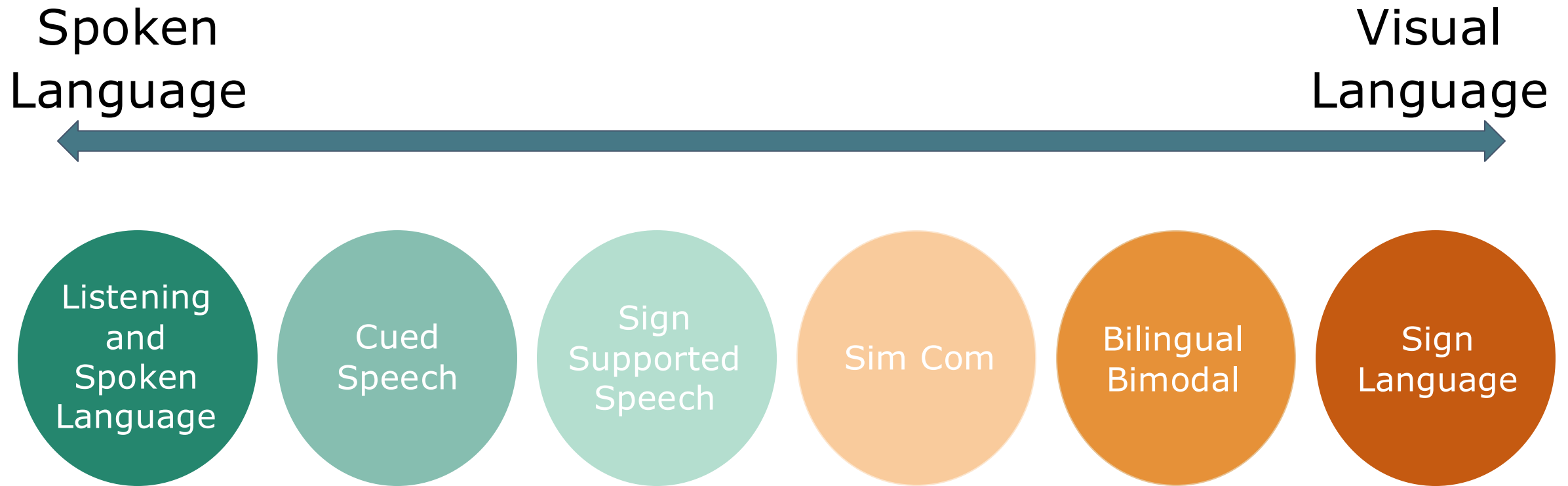
both

other spoken or signed language

All language is valuable!

Families don't have to choose; the DHH child can be bilingual.

Communication Approaches



Modes of Communication

- Augmentative Alternative Communication (AAC)
- Cueing
- Gesturing
- Listening and speaking
- Print
- Signing
- Speechreading
- Tactile

[*Michigan Communication Plan for Students Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing \(DHH\)](#)

LEAD-K MI

A strong foundation of language leads to kindergarten readiness.

- Accessible interactions
- Language exposure
- Meaningful use

The MI Language Milestones for DHH were developed for families to track and monitor language development.

MI Language Milestones for DHH

The Michigan Language Milestones for Deaf/Hard of Hearing are written to highlight typical language development.

0-3 mos.

3-6 mos.

6-9 mos.

9-12 mos.

12-18 mos.

18-24 mos.

2-3 yrs

3-4 yrs

4-5 yrs

More about MI Language Milestones for DHH

The Michigan Language Milestones for Deaf/Hard of Hearing are written to highlight milestones in receptive language, expressive language, and pre-literacy skills.

Receptive
Language

Expressive
Language

Pre-Literacy

0-3 Months

Receptive

- Looks at faces.
- Recognizes loved ones.
- Responds to face-to-face interactions by calming or smiling.
- Notices sounds, voices, movements, and/or lights in their environment (e.g., toys with sounds or lights, moves head in the direction of people).

Expressive

- Makes sounds or noises (e.g. , gurgles, sucking sounds, or cooing—ooh, ahh, and mmm).
- Expresses basic feelings and needs with sounds and/or facial expressions.
- Smiles and makes happy noises.

3-6 Months

Receptive

- Responds to changes in facial expressions and/or tone of voice.
- Responds to their name.
- Focuses on face-to-face interactions (e.g., looks at you and follows eye gaze and movements).

Expressive

- Blows “raspberries.”
- Shows excitement or displeasure with coos, giggles, laughs, and cries.
- Babbles a variety of hand movements and sounds (e.g., open/close hand, twist wrist, wiggle fingers, daaa, aaahgoo, umm).
- Imitates movement of arms, head, hands, and face.

6-9 Months

Receptive

- Looks attentively at people and their surroundings.
- Stops for a moment when told “no”.
- Understands words for some common objects and people (e.g., mama, cup, shoe, juice).
- Looks at an object with another person.

Expressive

- Uses gestures and expressions to communicate emotions (e.g., shakes head no, pushes away unwanted objects, reaches to request, yells).
- Imitates handshapes and sounds and body language (e.g., nod, wave, clap).
- Initiates interaction (e.g., calls out, waves, raises arms to be picked up).
- Enjoys social games (e.g., peek-a-boo, pat-a-cake, tickle).

6-9 Months cont.

Pre-Literacy

- Looks at a book with an adult and pats pictures.
- Reaches for books.
- Puts books in their mouth.

9-12 Months

Receptive

- Understands about 50 words (e.g., common objects, greetings, family names).
- Follows a simple command (e.g., give me the ____, put that down, come, etc.).
- Turns and looks in response to attention-getting behaviors (e.g., waving, using their name, turning lights on and off, toys, foot stomping, changes in vocalizations).

Expressive

- Waves hi and goodbye. Blows kisses, plays peek-a-boo.
- Points to self and points, shows or give objects.
- Uses first words (e.g., more, milk, dada, mama).
- Uses jargon (e.g., **strings of hand babbling with facial expressions** and/or *strings of sound babbling with inflections*).
- Imitates facial expressions (e.g., frown, surprise).

9-12 Months cont.

Pre-Literacy

- Looks at books on their own.
- Shows interest in re-reading a familiar story or book.
- Attends to songs and rhymes.
- Uses a crayon to make marks on paper.

3-4 Years Receptive Language

- Names an object when given the function (e.g., what do you see with).
- Understands quality, texture, and more words of quantity (e.g., nice, rough, smooth, some, full, empty, shortest).
- Understands opposites (e.g., hot/cold, wet/dry, day/night, same/different).
- Responds to what do you do when you are ____ (cold/hungry/sleepy) questions.
- Answers how and why questions.
- Understands most of what is communicated to them (approximately 1,500-2,000 words).
- Understands part/whole relationships (e.g., arm/body).
- Follows two-to-four-step unrelated commands (e.g., sit down and eat your lunch).
- Recognizes when language doesn't make sense (e.g., "There's an elephant on your head.")
- Answers final word analogies (e.g., ice is cold and fire is ____).
- Understands more prepositions (e.g., inside, on top, bottom, up, under, down).
- Understands -er and -est.
- Shows understanding of others' feelings and needs.

3-4 Years Expressive Language

- Describes actions in pictures (e.g., dog running, boy eating).
- Identifies items that do not belong in a group.
- Asks when, how much, and how many questions.
- Uses four-to-six-word sentences.
- Uses simple verbs to connect the subject and object (e.g., he likes ice cream).
- **Uses number incorporation pronouns (e.g., TWO-OF-US, THREE-OF-US).**
- **Uses verb modification (e.g., STROLLING, WALKING QUICKLY).**
- **Uses classifiers to describe objects (size, shape, manner, place, direction, size, shape, degree, and intensity).**
- **Uses topicalization (e.g., POPCORN, ME LIKE).**
- **Fingerspells their name on request.**
- **Uses more complex handshapes: W, D, P, 3, V, H, X, R, M, N, T, 8.**
- **Uses movement correctly for noun-verb pairs (e.g., FLY/AIRPLANE, SIT/CHAIR).**
- Combines sentences with “and,” “but,” or “because.”
- Uses modals (e.g., could, would, should, must, won’t, might).

3-4 Years cont.

Pre-Literacy

- Identifies some uppercase and lowercase letters.
- Attends to a story.
- Responds to and interacts with stories read aloud to a group.
- Retells familiar stories.
- Holds books right-side-up and turns pages left to right.
- Draws or copies two lines that cross (+).
- Draws pictures you can recognize.
- Draws pictures of people that have at least three parts (e.g., head, eyes, nose, arms, legs).
- Prints a few letters or numbers.
- Recognizes logos and signs (e.g., McDonald's, Walmart, stop sign).
- Tells a story for an adult to write.

Language Resources

American Society for Deaf Children

<https://deafchildren.org>

Hearing First

<https://www.hearingfirst.org/families>

Hear to Learn

<http://www.heartolearn.org>

Language First

<https://language1st.org/parent-resources>



Language Tools / Assessments

The LEAD-K Michigan recommended assessments

- Implement to track development
- Administer to assess development

Coming September 1

Annual Report

The LEAD-K Michigan annual report on language outcomes

- Collection of data from across the state
- Language and literacy development as compared to peers

Coming July 1, 2026

Questions?



Thank You for Joining Us!

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