

What Does it Really Take to Learn Sign Language?

Alaine: [00:00:00] Welcome to Raising Deaf Kids. As a parent of a deaf and hard of hearing kid, you've probably been offered or exposed to sign language. And you might be wondering if it's something that you want to dive into with your child. And I'm going to be straightforward with you and tell you that learning sign language has amazing benefits for your child.

Alaine: And it also does take a certain amount of work and study on your part. So today I'm going to open the curtain on what it actually takes to learn sign language. So sit back, relax, and let's chat.

Alaine: Hey mama, welcome to Raising Deaf Kids. Do you want more ease in your daily life? Do you want to help your child learn language faster but have no idea where to start? Do you find yourself searching for how to learn sign language and best ways to practice speech goals? Hey, I'm Elaine. I'm a mom of three littles, two of whom are deaf.

Alaine: I remember when I received the hearing loss diagnosis for our [00:01:00] child, there were so many decisions and information overload. I lacked clarity and confidence and yearned for ease and balance in our lives. It was then that I discovered strategies to support our kids language development at home and I even helped them learn language faster.

Alaine: I can't wait to share it all with you. So put down that to do list, close out that ASL app for now, and let's get started!

Alaine: Did you know that I have a free community of women just like you, busy moms who want to help their kids learn language faster while still getting all of the things done in the house each day. In the community, we share strategies to help our kids learn language faster and lean on each other for encouragement and support in this up and down journey of hearing loss with your kids.

Alaine: If you haven't found your community yet, then welcome home, mama. Come join us at [facebook.com slash group slash raising deaf kids](https://www.facebook.com/group/raisingdeafkids).

Alaine: And one of the things that I see most [00:02:00] often with parents is that they want to learn to sign for their child, which is fantastic. But then they

get in too far over their heads with it because they didn't manage the expectation of what it really takes to learn sign language from the beginning. And I've had parents even tell me that they didn't realize the mountain of work that they took on when they decided to learn sign language for their child.

Alaine: I do want to be honest with you in that learning sign language is learning a new language and learning a new language takes time. In my house personally, we are currently learning American Sign Language for one of my sons. And when I tell you, it is a slow process. And it's slow based on the fact that I have three young kids, and I am working on integrating ASL learning better into our schedule.

Alaine: But I'm also not concerned about it because I've also learned through having learned a second language [00:03:00] that I already had an expectation that this is not an overnight experience. So, you know, for example, to give you some context, when I learned Spanish which is not my first language, it's my second language to become actually fluent in Spanish, it took me eight years of classroom study, one year of full immersion in the language by living in Spain, and multiple other times traveling to different Spanish speaking countries and being exposed to the language in different situations.

Alaine: And then also, I actually taught it myself to other students and I taught the beginning up to like intermediate level of Spanish. So it took me a lot of time to become, you know, absolutely fluent and I'm still learning, right? Depending on the country that I go to, [00:04:00] some of the words are different. I haven't been every single context, you know, it depends where you are, who you're talking to.

Alaine: I'm still learning. So language learning is always evolving for you and your child, and it's never really complete, right? There's always kind of a different level that you can go to. And I'm not saying this at all to deter you from learning sign language. I just want to set the expectation for you upfront that you do need to have endurance while you're learning it.

Alaine: And it is 100 percent totally possible. So many parents out there have learned sign language for their child, and you can 100 percent do it. So today, I want to talk to you about three things that are a must when learning sign language. And stick around for the end of the episode where I'm going to talk to you about a course that I've been personally using and seeing really good results in for learning American Sign Language with my own family.[00:05:00]

Alaine: So number one thing that actually takes to learn sign language is you have to learn consistently. So you need to consistently be working on learning sign language, ideally every day, but every week is fine too. Because learning a language at the base is about exposure and repetition in the beginning, right?

Alaine: So if you don't use it, you'll lose it. Or if you don't use it, you won't learn it to begin with, right? we need kind of like at the beginning when you're a beginner you need like quantity of language and You know, you really need to just treat it like a class Okay, so set aside a specific time to work on it every week or every day You and this could be going through a course, this could be, you know, meeting with a one on one tutor.

Alaine: This could be just, you know, going and learning different individual signs for yourself, [00:06:00] whatever that looks like, treat it like something that you have to show up to, and it is a great opportunity. must do in your schedule every day to keep that consistency. Cause if you don't keep the consistency, you won't learn it and you won't get into the pattern of learning it.

Alaine: You also to be learning sign language need to be learning new vocabulary every week, so you should be adding new vocabulary to your language knowledge every week because you need to know the words in order to communicate. And at the beginning you need quantity of words. So, you can't communicate in sign language if you don't know the words to do it, right?

Alaine: And that's the thing for any language, you can't communicate in any language if you don't know the words. And so, you just need to know massive amounts of vocabulary, then you can learn on putting the vocabulary together, that's not actually like the hard part it's just like learning. And integrating all of the vocabulary that you need to really like [00:07:00] have a conversation.

Alaine: So, what I want you to do is I want you to pick three to five new signs per week and use them all week long. And this is what I did when I was learning Spanish originally in school because I was very serious about becoming fluent in this language. So what I did was I started learning it in high school.

Alaine: So, in high school, like, we would have vocabulary tests in Spanish classes, and we would get our vocabulary lists at, like, the beginning of a unit, so it wasn't necessarily every week, but it was every, like, couple of weeks, I think and I would take that vocabulary list, and I would find ways to integrate those words throughout my day, even all the way back then.

Alaine: So, for example, if I knew the word for shoe, every time I went to put on my shoes, I would I would say the word zapato in Spanish, which means shoe, right? And it went that way for me. So [00:08:00] every time I did something in my regular routine, if I knew that I knew or had learned the word for that in Spanish, then I use that word instead of the English word.

Alaine: I want you to do that with signs. So I want you to pick three to five new signs to learn per week. I want them to, I want you to use them all week long. And you know, while you're putting on your shoe, I want you to sign shoe, you know, while you're cooking, I want you to sign like to cook or cooking. If that's something that you're doing.

Alaine: You know, if you're saying goodbye, I want you to sign goodbye. I want you to be signing everything that you're learning. So you get that repetition and also when you use the words in, like, context throughout your day, it, like, helps you learn the language faster. Like, it's, we're basically using the same strategies that we just talked about on Tuesday to help your child boost their language skills.

Alaine: Now we're boosting your sign language skills in the same [00:09:00] way, because learning a language is so much easier. It's more or less the same, right, for everyone. And you have to go through these steps no matter who you are or like what age you are or what language that you're learning, which is really interesting.

Alaine: And the third point, what it takes to really learn sign language, you need to practice with someone better than you. So you need to get the foundation of sign language first, but at some point in your journey, you do need to swallow the humble pie and practice with a native signer or a fluent signer, because they will teach you how to really talk in conversation, okay?

Alaine: It's always different. When you are. Signing at your own speed or you're signing just yourself or you are You know, reading like signs of the book or signing along with a course. It is very different when you start signing [00:10:00] with someone who is a native signer, okay? And I really experienced that when I had my immersion experience for a year in Spain.

Alaine: I was well advanced in my Spanish classes by this point. I went my junior year of college, so it was a stay abroad. I was well advanced. I knew a, a lot of Spanish. I knew like all the grammar tenses and I knew it really well. I was good at it when I got in Spain. I felt like I knew nothing. Everything was different.

Alaine: It is so different when you get in front of people who speak the language as their first language, they are speaking faster, they are leaving out words, they're leaving off the ends of words, they are using words that you don't know because you don't learn those words in the classroom, you learn the correct word but not the word that people actually use, and it's the same thing in signing.

Alaine: So to become, if you want to become 100 percent fluent. You do [00:11:00] eventually need to sign and practice with a native signer or a fluent signer. And, you know, you can do this through, you know, deaf chats or meetups in your area, you can also get an online tutor. I know I've, I have heard of getting a sign language tutor through Take lessons online.

Alaine: I have not tried them, but that was recommended to me. As a good resource, you can, and you can also get like another private tutor, but, you know, once you get the basics down, you need someone to sign to and practice that back and forth communication too. So, learning sign language is 100 percent possible and it's even fun, but it's also important to be prepared with the correct expectations of how long it can take depending on the type of fluency that you want to achieve.

Alaine: You might not need to have 100 percent fluency in, you know, what [00:12:00] you're doing. And in that case, you know, if you just want to learn a few ASL signs to like, support your child, but your child is mostly, you know, talking language, great. It may not take you as long to do that. If your goal is to become 100 percent like, immersed and fluent, it's going to take you longer to do that.

Alaine: You know, and then there's everywhere in between. And that is a personal choice that you can make with your family and for your child. But when you're out on social media and the creators are making it seem like just go learn sign language for your child And you're seeing here like this is really hard.

Alaine: I just want to validate for you that the process is hard It actually is a little more involved than just learn sign language There's a lot more nuance and steps, especially when you talk about, you know, having kids involved and And that's where I see a lot of parents fall off the wagon with sign language where they start and then they [00:13:00] don't continue because they aren't prepared with the right mindset and expectations from the beginning of it.

Alaine: And I also want to say that one way I have been personally learning more American Sign Language for my son is through using the American Sign

Language program with Rocket Languages. And Anne, as a foreign language teacher, I am really impressed with how Rocket Languages teaches. I love that they focus on essential vocabulary that you need to know right now in everyday conversations.

Alaine: And I love that they also focus on fluency and getting you to fluent faster. And, I love that the course teaches about the deaf community. So you have a lot of context for what you are learning and you you know, get an understanding of deaf culture as well. And I already feel more prepared to communicate with my son.

Alaine: I'm definitely already seeing the ripple effect of being [00:14:00] able to communicate better with our, with him, within our home and him just be more calm, less frustrated because, you know, you know, were able to communicate better because of this course. If you are interested in going through this course, I am happy to support you through this course as well.

Alaine: My link is in the show notes and I do earn a small commission, which goes to support my family. And I will be happy, you know, ask me questions about the course. I, you know, be happy to answer any questions and I would be happy to. Walk you through and support you through the course in learning American Sign Language as well.

Alaine: I hope this episode helped you today. Maybe it kind of calms you down if you felt like learning sign language is a really big project. Maybe hopefully it validated for you that it is, but also is 100 percent possible for you. And you know, as parents, we want the absolute best for our kids. And unfortunately, kids, especially kids with [00:15:00] hearing loss, do not come with a handbook.

Alaine: And I want you to know that simply by being here and listening, you are doing a great job as a parent because you are learning and trying to find better ways to support your kid. I am so proud of your efforts. I'm so glad you're here and I will see you next week. Bye!

Alaine: Hey mama, I hope you enjoyed today's episode. If so, would you take 30 seconds and subscribe to this podcast? I never want you to miss an episode and to be without valuable information to help you and your family. Also, please leave a quick written review for the show on Apple Podcasts. It lights me up to know this podcast is helping you.

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