

# VISUAL ATTENTION SKILLS AND SIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: What We can Learn from Deaf Parents

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Disclaimer: This information is based on OUR experience and should be viewed as such.

# WHO ARE WE

NEW MEXICO SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF  
EIID DEPARTMENT

PARENT INFANT CHILD PROGRAM (PIC) & DEAF MENTOR PROGRAM (DM)

## Bettie

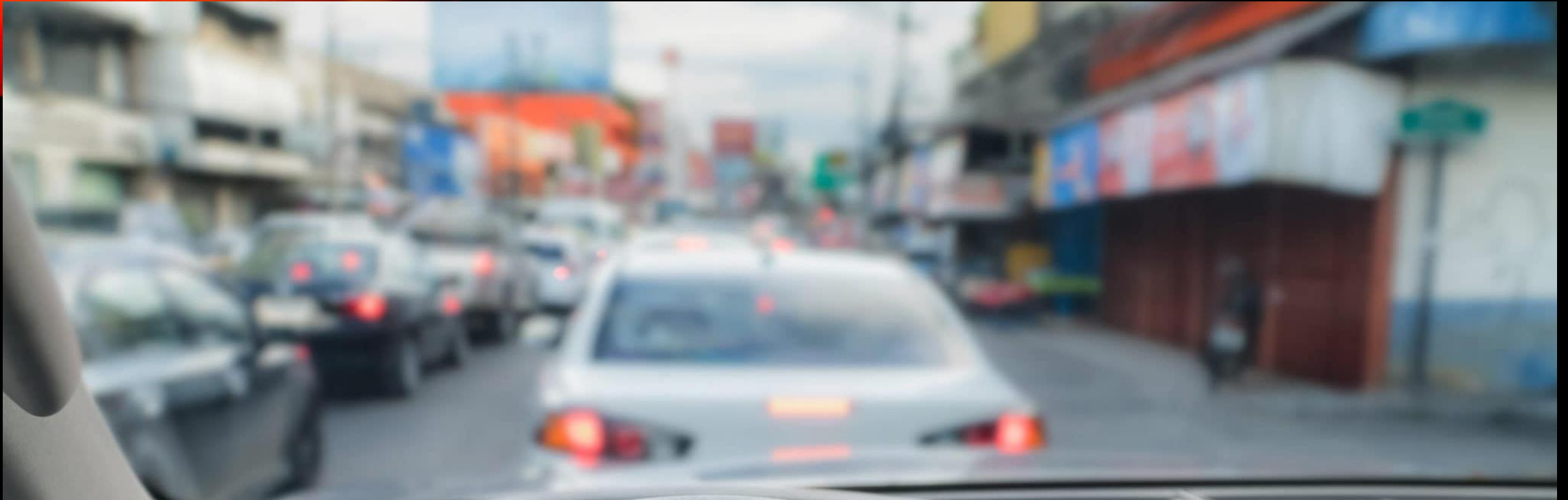
- Learning ASL
- Motherhood
- Schooling
- Career Journey
- My Passion

## Emilie

- My Early Years
- Schooling
- Career Journey
- Motherhood Journey
- My Passion

# OBJECTIVES

1. Understand what visual attention means
2. Understand the importance/impact of visual attention on sign language acquisition
3. Have some new strategies for fostering visual attention in young children
4. Feel motivated to collaborate with Deaf adults



# WHAT IS VISUAL ATTENTION?

Why are we addressing this?  
(What I thought it was. What we noticed.)  
We can tell... We can identify...

# SHARING EXPERIENCES

Why are we motivated,  
dedicated, or inspired  
to share this topic?

Main Goal: How we are  
working together and  
supporting the child/  
and our families.



# DISCOVERING WHAT VISUAL ATTENTION REALLY MEANS

## Family # 1

Multiply involved child

Already 1 year of PIC (can sign)

Family finally asking for DM

Feeling like the child was as far as I could take him

Visual attention "ah-hah" moment

Number of signs

Meaningful use of signs

## Family #2

No DM because of hearing level

PIC invited DM

Frustration and tantrums

Clingy

Signing what they will do next

Level of visual details – trying to get out of the car

Dad startling DM

## Families #3 & 4

Early collaboration

Early visual attention training

Using signs with meaning

Looking to adults for information

Can track the child's progress efficiently

# KEY POINTS ON VISUAL ATTENTION



Impact of visual attention on sign language acquisition



Literacy



Feeling secure/safe/comfortable  
(know what is going on)



Frustration/tantrums

# WHAT TO ATTEND TO?

## Attending to Sounds

- Environmental sounds: cars, animals, people moving around
- Voice, facial expression, body language
- Communication
- ANYTHING that provides information
- Learn to filter out unnecessary sounds

## Attending to Visual Cues

- Environmental cues: shadows, lights, people moving around
- Hands, facial expression, body language
- Communication
- ANYTHING that provides information
- Learn to filter out unnecessary sights

**BRAINSTORM:** What information do you get from sound? From vision?



## Language Acquisition

- Acquire first language
- Happens naturally (with access)
- Adult to baby (or child identified late)
- Teach what to attend to
- Provide wait time
- Check for responses/ understanding
- Extra effort
- Confirmation

## Language Learning

- Build on first language
- Explicit grammar
- Adult to child, child to child, adult to adult
- Incidental learning with visual attention
- Literacy

IT'S NOT **ABOUT** THE NUMBER OF WORDS BUT  
THE METALINGUISTIC ABILITY WITH VA SKILLS

# CHILD-DIRECTED LANGUAGE AKA MOTHERESE, PARENTESE, CAREGIVERESE, ETC.



## WHAT WE KNOW:

- Exaggerated tone
- Eye contact
- Gestures
- Emphasis on key words
- Adult to baby/child interaction

# CHILD-DIRECTED LANGUAGE AKA MOTHERESE, PARENTESE, CAREGIVERESE, ETC.

- Exaggerated tone: (over-exaggeration is exhausting to watch; we exaggerate to get a response not to "give a show")
- Eye contact: (not because we need to "see/watch" the signer, but to have the ability to attend, read, get or seek information, and make connection to the world)
- Gestures: Everyone does this naturally! (grocery stores, on the streets, internationally, and this is part of our grammar syntax.)
- Emphasis on key words for language acquisition and learning
- Adult to baby/child interaction

# EVALUATING ATTENDING SKILLS

## "Not Yet"

- Rote memorizing
- Labeler
- Imitating
- "Blank" or often shocked
- Isolated or a follower
- Requires physical guidance/support
- Unable to make connections or follow directions
- Disjointed eye-gazing skills
- Often thinks that things are "magical"

## "Mastery"

- Can converse with adults and peers
- Can connect with world knowledge skills
- Can "eavesdrop" naturally
- Can follow multi-step directions
- Many metalinguistic skills
- Smooth eye-gazing skills
- Notices changes in the environment happen naturally
- Can give directions (ie: rules of a game)
- Can attend to lipreading or speech

# STRATEGIES

- Add IFSP or IEP goals focusing on visual attending skills (examples)
  - Sign on book, lead the child's gaze, gesture, point
  - Develop a language plan with the team
- Collaborate with Deaf adults/parents - see how they teach attending skills
- Adult to baby/child language
- Use a communication/language milestone checklist or assessment that looks at attending skills
- Explore current resources on joint attention, attending skills, (ADD MORE) (Clerc Center/VL2)
- Think about the "100 languages" you can offer to the child and encourage families to \_\_\_\_\_ instead of asking "What's that\_\_\_\_\_"

MOTIVATED? CHALLENGES? NEW IDEAS?

