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introduction

WELCOME TO *Baby Sign Language Made Easy!* You hold in your hands the book I wish someone had handed to me when I decided to try signing with my first baby.

When I became a mom back in 2006, I was curious about baby signing and borrowed a book from the library to learn more about it. The book gave me a lot of information about the history and theory of using basic sign language with hearing babies, as well as instructions for a lot of signs, but it didn't tell me *how* to introduce signs to my baby. It also didn't offer much in the way of tips or strategies for success.

Despite the shortcomings of that book, I did go on to have success signing with my first daughter, Clara. I began with hopes that she'd learn a few signs to let me know when she was hungry or if she wanted something, but the experience turned out to be much more than I ever imagined. Signing opened a window into

her mind and allowed me to understand what she was thinking through the signs she used. I was blown away by the ability to see the world through her eyes, and to this day I feel that signing deeply and forever shaped our connection because we were able to communicate so early on. That's not to say we didn't hit a few stumbling blocks along the way. In fact, for days, I didn't notice her first sign because it didn't look like what I expected, and I didn't know what to look for! To make sure this doesn't happen to you, I've included tips on what baby's early signs may look like so you know what to look out for.

I quickly got hooked on signing and learned all I could about it, training with experts and researchers in the field and taking American Sign Language (ASL) classes at a local school for the Deaf. In 2009, I created Tiny Signs®, and since then I've been teaching classes and workshops to parents, educators, and early

childhood professionals. I've had the privilege of working with so many wonderful families over the years, and I continue to learn from them every day as they bring me new and unique questions. I never grow tired of hearing the exciting news that a little one has made her first sign or of helping my students troubleshoot challenges. Signing is such a powerful tool, and its impact on families continues to amaze me, even after all these years.

When my second daughter, Annie, was born, it was a given that I'd sign with her, as well. What I didn't anticipate was how all the skills I had acquired from teaching would impact my experience with baby number two. She started signing back to me on the very day we started! By her first birthday, she knew nearly 100 signs and was also combining signs into two-word sentences (for example, **MORE CRACKERS**).

I wrote this book to share the signs, tips, and tricks that have helped me and so many other families find success with baby sign language. That said, your baby doesn't need to learn 101 signs to make a huge impact on both of your lives. Even just a few key signs can transform your early interactions. I've included illustrated instructions for 101 signs, so you can pick and choose based on your baby's age, ability, and interests.

My wish for you is that you'll find this book to be a quick and simple guide that shows you just how fun and easy it is to integrate sign

language into your everyday routine with your baby. I want you to discover the wonder of early communication and see for yourself just how smart your little one is!

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book is geared toward new parents, expectant parents, grandparents, caregivers, nannies, educators, and child care workers. It's meant for just about anyone who spends time with infants and toddlers and wants to learn how to communicate with them before speech develops.

As a busy (and usually sleep-deprived) mom myself, I know you don't have the time or desire to read hundreds of pages about the history of baby sign language, a summary of all the research ever done on the topic, or 1,001 activities you can do with your baby. I get it. This book gives you the exact information you need to get started, plus tips and realistic strategies for success, delivered in an easy-to-understand format.

Throughout the book, you'll find 101 of the most commonly used, practical signs to teach your baby. There are literally thousands of signs you could learn, but to help you get started, I've focused on the ones that have been most successful with the families I've taught as well as in my personal experience as a mom. The 101 signs in this book should keep you going for quite some time, but if you want to expand your

vocabulary beyond the scope of this book, or learn more about ASL, I've included resources to help you continue in the Resources section.

The beginning of the book covers the basics. Chapter 1 includes a quick overview of baby sign language as well as answers to common questions. Chapter 2 presents the first 10 signs to learn and provides tools and tips to start using them right away. These first signs are indispensable for babies. If you're working with an older child, however, or if your baby is already signing, you can jump right to the subject matter that interests your child.

The remaining chapters are organized by theme in order of usefulness and include mealtime, getting dressed, bath time and bedtime, playtime, animals, family, and feelings. Once your baby has started signing, you'll want to continue to expand her signing vocabulary, and these chapters are chock-full of great options.

You might have purchased this book with the practical goal of teaching your little one a handful of signs to reduce frustration and make your day-to-day life a little easier. This book will definitely help you reach that goal! I do hope you'll keep an open mind to the possibility that signing can offer so much more than just functional communication (which alone is remarkable). If you continue to grow your signing vocabulary beyond the basics, I know you'll be blown away by what your little one understands and observes in the world. You'll have so much fun as your baby uses signs to tell you about the dog he saw outside or how much he loves blowing bubbles with you. You have the opportunity now to get to know your baby's interests and personality a year or more earlier than you would have if you waited until he started talking. Take advantage of this exciting opportunity and be prepared to be amazed!