

A BRIEF GUIDE TO AUSLAN

EARLY CHILDHOOD LANGUAGE PROGRAM

Early childhood services will offer children in the year before school, the opportunity to learn in Auslan as part of the Department of Education and Training's Early Childhood Language Program.

The purpose of this guide is to give teachers and educators in services delivering the Early Childhood Language Program some information about Auslan.

Where more information is available, links are provided.

What is Auslan?

Auslan is Australian Sign Language, the native language of the Australian Deaf community, and is a visual-spatial, natural language with its own grammar and vocabulary.

Auslan has linguistic elements, such as hand shapes (including orientation, location and movement), non-manual features (including eye gaze, facial expressions, arm, head and body postures) and fingerspelling.

Auslan also has its own grammar, which is different from English. Auslan grammar is composed of precise hand shapes, facial expressions and body movements that convey concrete and abstract information.

Key Word Sign is different to Auslan. Key Word Sign is a communication system using single Auslan signs to support spoken language for individuals with communication and language delays.

Benefits of learning Auslan

Incorporating Auslan into the kindergarten program has many benefits for both deaf and hearing children. Sign language can:

- enhance children's educational and personal development
- increase memory retention and motion processing¹
- stimulate brain development and mental flexibility
- increase enjoyment in communicating for both hearing and deaf children.

How the program will work

Kindergarten services will deliver the Early Childhood Language Program in a way that reflects the context of their local community and incorporates children's interests. Children will be encouraged to learn through exploration, problem-solving and play in another language that is aligned with the Victorian Early Years Learning and Development Framework.

The Auslan teacher will deliver the program in collaboration with existing kindergarten teachers and educators. Together, they will embed the program in everyday learning and routines and support the learning through play, art, music and stories in the language being delivered.

¹ Peter C Hauser and G Kartheiser, Advantages of learning a signed language, 2014

Teaching in Auslan requires eye contact and sustained attention – by both the teacher and the child. The Auslan teacher needs to first gain the child’s attention, and the child needs to show the teacher they are watching.

The Auslan teacher will frequently use key signs and phrases during the daily routine, and will encourage the children to imitate, participate and respond.

Auslan will be acquired in the kindergarten program through play, storytelling and other early childhood experiences.

Voice off

A standard practice for sign language users who are deaf or hearing, is to use Auslan without speech, also known as ‘voice off’. Practising voice off:

- creates an enhanced learning environment
- allows for Auslan grammar to be used appropriately
- is culturally respectful to the Deaf community
- allows for full immersion
- helps children to develop better receptive and expressive skills.

For teachers, educators and children who are new to Auslan, learning by asking questions and practising the signs is encouraged. Children will often spontaneously ask questions in speech, particularly in the early stage of the program. Over time, Auslan teachers and other kindergarten teachers and educators will work together to role model voice off practice as much as possible.

Difference between sign and spoken language

Sign language and spoken language use different grammatical features and vocabulary to express language.

Spoken language conveys a message through words and sounds in sequence.

Sign language uses vocabulary, space, movement, facial expressions and body language, and conveys a message through a combination of sign, fingerspelling, physical posture or facial expression.

Parent Engagement

Parent involvement and enthusiasm for Auslan is important to the success of the language program.

Pick-up and drop-off times are a great opportunity for parents to meet the Auslan teacher and learn some of the signs the children are learning, so they can incorporate them in the home.

Your service may wish to host an Auslan session for parents so they can incorporate their child’s learning in the home environment.

Your service may also wish to host a deaf awareness session for parents and staff, so they can learn more about the Deaf community.

Using an Auslan Interpreter

An Auslan interpreter may assist with facilitating discussions between the Auslan teacher and other teachers and educators in a service, and/or with parents of the children at the service.

The Department of Education and Training funds the Victorian Interpreting and Translating Service (VITS) Language Loop, to provide interpreter services, at no cost to services.

Please ensure you book an interpreter in advance.

VITS Language Loop provides on-site interpreting in both spoken and sign languages.

For more information see:

Department of Education and Training – Use an interpreter

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/professionals/families/Pages/interpreter.aspx>

To access interpreting services, contact Language Loop via

E: bookings@languageloop.com.au or T: (03) 9280 1955

If your service already has a login ID, book an interpreter via the Language Loop portal at

<https://www.languageloop.com.au/get-a-quote/interpreting-request>

Useful resources and links

Auslan Signbank

<https://www.auslan.org.au>

Aussie Deaf Kids (Teacher resource, learning through play)

<https://www.aussiedeafkids.org.au/learning-through-play.html>

Deaf Children Australia

<https://deafchildrenaustralia.org.au/>

Department of Education and Training, Early Childhood Language Program, Getting Started Guide

www.education.vic.gov.au/eclanguages

Expression Australia

<https://www.expression.com.au/>

Victorian Deaf Education Institute

<https://www.deafeducation.vic.edu.au/about/the-institute>

Further information

If you require any further information please email ec.languages@edumail.vic.gov.au

or visit www.education.vic.gov.au/eclanguages