

**Should everyone learn to sign?
With Sarah Billingham**



[Transcript](#)

00:00:00

In this week's show, we are discussing signing should everyone learn to sign joining me this week is my guest Sarah Billingham.

00:00:09

Sarah has been working with children with speech and language needs for over 16 years in mainstream and specialist settings. She is a specialist teacher who supports children's communication needs and supports parents to navigate.

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Various SEN systems. Welcome to the show Sarah.

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Thanks so much, Dale great to be here.

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You are welcome. Thanks for coming so.

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I have discussed signing schools with other guests and often in schools. Unless it is for the hearing impaired. There are only a handful of people who can sign, which is very isolating for any children who need to use sign language.

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I would really agree with that, because if your main means of communication, if your voice your way of communicating with others and your way of understanding what other people are saying is predominantly through the use of sign or to be fair, any type of alternative and augmentative communication.

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Them if you can only communicate with a handful of people that really socially backs you into a corner in that there are only a couple of people that you can have a conversation with that you can reach out to to have your needs met that you can initiate interaction with, and so it really reduces your opportunities to communicate.

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I think again you don't think about it.

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But I think.

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One school we talked about, which about they often had there was a TA who knew sign language and they would be the with the child. In the lesson they do all of this stuff which is fascinating apart from the fact that child can only communicate via one person, which I can't join anything but.

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What happens at lunchtimes? What happens at those non structured times? What about when you're arriving at school? Anything like that.

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It's almost like right. I've gotta wait to communicate till this person walks up to me.

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Absolutely, and you know what happens when that person is sick or or even you know not to try and dwell on the negative, but from a safeguarding point of view, if something happens with that adult that the child feels uncomfortable about, who do they go to to have a conversation about what's?

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Yeah and yeah. And also there's this this whole trust thing of they're saying one thing and they're going. That's not the reaction I was expecting there. That thing is all those translators and there was a very famous translation incident.

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It was a funeral wasn't it years ago?

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I think it's Nelson Mandela's funeral.

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Now it's Mandela's. I thought it.

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In South Africa, yeah.

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Was yes.

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Yeah, where the the sign language interpreter was saying something completely different to what was being said in the speeches.

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So there's some brilliant images of I think it might be Barack Obama speaking, but somebody's, you know really well known on the international stage she's who's talking. And then the sign language interpreters doing some.

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Which is not what you want. Then I've also seen some amazing ones like an M&M concert who are sign language?

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The lyrics I'm literally and and again they've not they got to say but they've got to express the intonations and the fierceness of the language and stuff which is fascinating to watch.

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But yeah, if there's only one person in the school, that child can communicate with that is completely isolating.

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100% and also it's I mean there is nothing less cool than being the kid on the playground who always has to have the grown up with you.

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You know, it really stifles the natural communication that young people want to have with each other. If they're always having to do it through the person who essentially monitors and polices what they're doing.

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Right, I'm just trying to picture the TA running down the pitch with that child in football. With that was calling his name.

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That that thing is without that person there there is complete exclusion. DALE

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I I feel that way and as I said, I feel like we're painting somebody into a corner. We're giving them a tool with which they can communicate, but then we're totally cutting them off from the people that they most want to communicate with, because let's be honest, children are most motivated to interact with their peers and other children.

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OK.

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Of their age, and I think it's important not only from a social point of view, but also in terms of learning language itself, because we're much more likely to learn language

when we have lots of role models and lots of interaction partners. So lots of people to communicate with.

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The more we're seeing signs, the more we're likely to pick them up, and I think even as an adult in that environment.

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So I you know I'm pretty fluent in the use of makaton signing. I've also learned to do paget Gorman signing, which is, you know, kind of fallen out of favour, but.

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As an adult, if you're in an environment where there are lots of people signing, that naturally means that your signing picks up and you improve your fluency, improves your accuracy, improves the range of vocabulary you can use, improves because you're surrounded by other people who are communicating, you know, supported by the same common language. If you're doing it on your own.

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You tend to stick to a smaller vocabulary. It's not necessarily.

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Wrong, I think it's quite kind of obvious that the more you practise something, the better it's going to get and for that child who's reliant on using signing, the more they see it, and the more opportunities they have to practise, the better their language is going to become.

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Definitely so.

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There's in this country, I believe. There are two main sign languages there is BSL which is a whole language.

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In itself, which goes up to. I don't know what level, but this was a whole thing for me a couple of years and that there's various levels up to at level 8, level 10, and things like that, and it is a.

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Yes, that's right.

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Full on and it has.

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Again, it's interesting when you talk about the the construct is different in things, but generally it is fully up to degree level.

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It's a full on language. Every single kind of word in the English language, which makes sense kind of thing is in British Sign language.

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Yeah, so British Sign language is very much a language in its own right, and for most people who use British Sign language, that is their first language.

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Their main method of communication, and there's a bar. It's roughly 127,000 people in the UK who use BSL as their main means of communication.

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So that is typically.

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Someone who is is hearing impaired their deaf. It's their main means. It is their their language and it is as fully developed as any language. It is everything is there.

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Yeah, absolutely.

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Yes, and you have things like regional dialects and slang, and all of those sorts of things. Which are, you know, parts and parcel of any language.

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Yes, and if you if you want to experience this, there is. It's a bloke from the last leg.

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Who's Australian? Who has the? I can't remember his name. Alan Hill, Adam Adam Hill. So he did a show where he has the sign language interpreter on stage and he would sit there and and it's really good.

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Adam Hill that's us.

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He is a real for me this was years ago, but it was a real eye opener and this when the last leg started it was really inclusive. It was brilliant.

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I had this thing. He goes right. I don't everyone give a clap. It's like.

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And so everyone claps up. But deaf people can't hear this. So so actually I did the hands in the air and do all this.

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Let's do it that way and he also did a really good and you'll find this on YouTube where he said there and he would say Sir train words.

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And he says this can be really funny cause I'm gonna say some rude words now says rude words and then was gonna look suddenly.

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At her to see how she's gonna sign.

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Those rude words, and then she went and he went. So if I talk with a French accent.

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And then she showed that her whole body language completely changed and he went. I can even just do those typical French noises and she then had to.

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Sign that noise.

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And it was.

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And it looked, and it looked watching her she suddenly.

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Looked French.

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It was really fascinating.

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And that's part of what in the makaton language programme they call signing techniques. So the way in which you deliver the science is not only what you're doing with your hands, but these are the elements that you add into it. How large.

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You make the sign.

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The amount of movement that you put into it, whether you repeat the sign or not for emphasis, the facial expression that goes with it. There's so much more to that visual.

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Communication than the sign itself.

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And normally that's just carried in the volume you're speaking. The directness kind of the face, so that has to be expressed, and it is.

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Yeah, it's fascinating, and yeah, that he's talked about different dialects and and that was really fascinating. But makaton, my understanding is it's.

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Often used as it's AAC typical, so my understanding. Correct me if I'm wrong, is it's kind of often used for somebody who's using it.

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They might be on the way to fully. I said it's a temporary thing.

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Yeah, so it's supporting spoken language, so the makaton language programme has three elements to it. It has signs, symbols and the use of spoken language.

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And if we as the adults or you know, communication partners are using makaton to support somebody who has communication difficulties, we always speak and sign at the same time, or speak and use the symbols at the same time, so it's augmentative.

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It's intended to support the use of the English language, or, if you're in another country, using the version of makaton in there, it would be supporting that.

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Language, but it's not intended to replace speech. It's intended to support that. Yes, there are going to be makaton users who are preverbal who are not yet talking, but our model is always alongside spoken language.

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Yeah, the idea is hopefully that person is on that way to speaking maybe later on. But this is the.

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Conveying the same meaning but in a different way, whereas if you can so I don't know how you know someone's not verbally visited for everything or not. That's a some.

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Well, no, that's when you're deciding what are we doing. The sign language BSL? Or are we doing makaton? There's probably a decision at some point.

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Which way?

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You're gonna.

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Go and would I be right? So my personal experience is of Makaton is gonna be Mr Tumble and something special.

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Absolutely a really popular kind of gateway into makaton is something special and you know the kids love Mr. Tumble and love. Justin and.

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As a show, it's a brilliant example of how makaton can be used, and I think what's great about the show is that it's always supported by a makaton, a senior makaton tutor on the day.

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So Justin always has access to somebody who can support his signing to make sure that it's as accurate as possible, and some considerations given.

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To camera angles and all of that stuff.

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But it's a great entryway into seeing how signing can be used to support communication. But we're seeing more and more stuff out in the media now that includes signing both makaton in the form of something special. There's a wonderful. There's some wonderful videos on YouTube by two mekton shooters.

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Called Singing Hands, where they sign songs, but they also have some vocabulary videos. We all have a group of words like fruit for example and they'll show you how those are signed.

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So that's Tracy and Suzanne. They are both parents of now young adults who have communication difficulties. But they started to sign and run singing hands groups when their children were.

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But we're seeing more and more use of makaton arts in public, including things like. There's a lovely example of a BBC bedtime story that's been signed by Rob Delaney. I think it was.

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And also, we're seeing more BSL on TV as well. You know, great example of that with the young lady, whose name has just fallen out of my head, Rose, I think it was. She was on Strictly Come Dancing in the last series.

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And just getting signing out in the public domain. And actually there are lots of signing users who watch strictly and so over the last couple of years we've seen a couple of examples of people doing things like signing.

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Thank you when they've been, you know, thanking the public and things like that. So we are seeing more signing out there in the public domain.

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That is great, and for those a little tidbit of information that that, uh, something special and B Squared both started in the same school in Croydon.

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That sounds like a massive quite a progressive school.

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Many years ago.

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It yeah it was. It's interesting this one my mum used to teach at so I used to go there and help out.

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It's it's all lots. My early experience with special needs came from being in that school and it was fascinating being in there in comparison to my school and.

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Yeah, it was really interesting. And then I remember watching it going. Oh, that just looks like my mum's school.

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And I think I watched it without my mum and I.

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Yeah and she went yeah yes.

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I sort of looked familiar and it was it was the same school that the B Squared that my mum created and started the whole of the B Squared.

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It was in the same school, but yeah no, the whole Mr. I think I.

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Think I watched it with my children.

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So we picked up various ones that I still remember. Thank you and I remember I.

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Think I'm doing the simple.

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I think that's pig or something pig, so a few of them. I still remember. And what I liked about makaton is really quite simple. It's it's.

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It was what says first things are happy and things like that. You can generally sit there and it's almost like.

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You're thinking of the main feature of the animal, or you're thinking of smiling and things like that.

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Yeah, and because all of the signs are intended to be as iconic as possible, so they look like the thing that you're signing as much as possible, that's obviously more difficult with conceptual vocabulary, but wherever possible signs are intended to look like the thing that they're that you're talking about and that is to make sure that the message is easily understood. So anything visual is going to help us to remember.

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Something give us a little bit of a clue in terms of what something means, and that's part of how it supports communication.

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Yeah, but yeah, yeah I liked makaton but I also loved about the whole something special is.

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My generation.

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He wasn't as inclusive.

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There were.

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Mainstream schools there were special schools and they did not mix.

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Yeah, and then inclusion came along, but I do think with that inclusion you gotta start really young.

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And I think something special came along. It was great because my children were really young and they were seeing different children the whole CBeebies around disability was brilliant for that and it taught them makaton so my children could learn makaton. I remember I think this is milk.

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Ohh, or is that drink? My sister

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Yeah, it's it's a version of milk, but yeah, it's usually on two hands, yeah?

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Had that one.

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OK.

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I think my children were young, so before they my my nephews were young so before they could speak they could say I.

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Would like.

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Some milk which was just mind-blowing that again.

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Sometimes there is an intent to communicate. They have a need.

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They obviously haven't developed or can't. It can't yet, but they know what they want, which was quite fascinating for me.

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Yeah, and I think one of the things that's interesting people often ask, you know if I teach my child to sign, is that going to get in the way of them talking? Are they going to show preference for signing and then not talk?

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But actually the evidence is completely to the contrary, because what signing does is supports the natural progression of learning language, because naturally we gesture first, then we, you know gesture and put a word to that gesture.

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So if you think of very young children who will point to something that they want, then they might point and vocalise give you a noise to show you that they want something. Then they reach the point where they can name it.

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And overtime we start to use more words, but we continue to.

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Gesture and so that process of learning the sign first learning the sign in the word and then using more of the words is actually part of that natural progression, so it doesn't interfere with that process of language learning. It actually supports the process of language learning.

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I think so cause basically if you want something and you can't communicate in any way is gonna lead to frustration. If you can then in some form be able to communicate what your needs or wants are.

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And you get a response that's gonna want you want to communicate more in my head.

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Yeah, it's that whole idea of success begets success. So if you're having a successful interaction, you get the thing that you want.

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Well that's super motivating. I'm definitely gonna try that again.

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Is there a quicker way? Is there a better and then it goes into the whole having a Strop and?

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Yeah, and on the the contrast yeah, but the contrast of that is if you if we go back to the point we were making at the very beginning.

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If you're in an education environment where there's only one other person you can sign to, or a handful of people you can sign to you, what then happens is you sometimes find yourself signing and nobody is responding because that particular person's not there. That feels like a failure.

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And it reduces the amount that you sign.

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Because if you're not getting that positive feedback of somebody understanding the sign that you've used and responding to that, you actually start to sign less rather than signing more.

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Yes, I can imagine and also it'll be really it's it's.

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Would be really weird if.

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I was a.

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Child in a class and there's a teacher who I can't talk to.

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Sounds really odd in my head that actually if for her to go has has has he got this and then then I have to look at them and the person signs to me.

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Have you got this and I go no, I'm struggling with this. No he's struggling with this ohh can you it just adds so much time to everything and it is just.

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UM?

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Draining that, why can't you learn to speak to me? It would I would. That would really.

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It would hurt that would me.

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Well, I think it devalues the person you know if we're not taking the time to communicate with somebody in the way that they they're reliant on their communication, sort of preference, no?

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It's a reliance. They need that method of communication in order to be understood and to have a voice. If we aren't giving that voice equal airtime for want of a better phrase.

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Then we aren't actually fully respecting the person that we're trying to communicate.

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And I think there's some. There's a lovely article published by the ICANN charity some time ago. In their 'I can talk' series where they're talking about the research all around the use of AAC, so not signing specifically, but signing, use of voice output, communication, aids, etc.

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But essentially, what the research shows us is that everybody who works with a child, particularly those children, have severe speech and language difficulties or regularly comes into contact with their child. Whether it's a health professional teaching assistant, parent, you know other children in the class.

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They need to develop the skills to be able to understand and use the child's main.

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Method of communication.

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You know that the research shows us how important that is.

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It kind of is kind of obvious.

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It is but it.

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Doesn't happen, no, that's but it's that it's that willingness and there is. I remember when the whole GCSE, I think it was the whole GCSE change.

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I can't quite remember.

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And they were really pushing for a BSL GCSE. They were really pushing for this to be given the same status.

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As a foreign language.

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And it didn't happen.

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And there are GCSEs for languages that are not particularly widely spoken in England, so for example, as we've already mentioned, I come from South Africa.

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If I had come halfway through my education, I could have set a GCSE for Afrikaans language if I wanted to, and to say that there are, as I said, 127,000 people.

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Where BSL is their main means of communication, it is their home language, but they cannot sit a GCSE, you know, to get any kind of recognition of that.

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I think is really poor, particularly when you think you know. I think the statistics for last year I wrote it down because I knew I was gonna forget the numbers.

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There's 147,000 people who speak French as their first.

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Language in England.

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That's not a hugely dissimilar number to the number of people who speak BSL as they speak. Probably not the right word, but not in use.

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No, it's not.

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Is their main method of communication. Those are not vastly different and yet the recognition of French as a language here in the UK is much higher than the recognition of BSL as a language.

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And the other statistic that I think is really interesting. It comes from an EU Commission report. Sorry, I'm hitting you with all the stats I promised to.

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Stop being boring in a minute, but there was an EU Commission report in 2006 that said that in England and Wales, about 23% of people, and there's different reports that have different numbers, but about 23% of people can have a conversation in French.

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No, no keep going. I love it.

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Because of the emphasis of French as a modern foreign language taught here in England, and you know, immigration and all of.

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Those things as well.

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But it's possible for people to hold a.

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Basic conversation in French.

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But for most people, it's not possible to hold a basic conversation using signing and.

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This won't be the case for all of the French speakers in the UK, but for lots of the French speakers in the UK they will also have good competency.

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In English, but that might not be the case for our children with communication difficulties.

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In fact, it almost certainly won't be the case for children with communication difficulties who are reliant on makaton or reliance on BSL to get their basic wants and needs met. And yet we're putting a lot of time and education into teaching.

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Old and modern, foreign modern foreign languages. I'm not against that as a concept, but it's we're putting a lot of emphasis on time into that.

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And for good reason, we want our children to understand linguistics. How language is put together, how grammar differs. We want them to be citizens of the world. We want to improve their employability, really, you know, noble reasons for wanting to do it.

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But in contrast to that, we are not teaching children to communicate with those who have communication needs, and about 10% of children have a communication difficulty, and 3/4 of those that will be persistent and continue into adulthood.

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And we're not putting the same time and efforts into teaching our children at school how to communicate with others who have a communication need as we are teaching them how to have a conversation.

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With somebody in French.

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So I have to say that Brexit and foreign languages there's just a whole thing there.

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That that's a whole.

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I'm I would rather we stayed in Europe and.

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Be part of Europe as a.

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Whole so we don't be.

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In Europe, but we still learn French, German, Spanish and so on.

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Are we in? You're probably not, Umm, anyway, but yeah, no, I find it quite amazing how mould, if you. Generally people who come in French speaking, learn English now. It's just fascinating but that.

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What do you call?

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147,000 where French is their primary language.

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Yeah, so it's their first language.

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Compared to 127,000, if you turn that into percentage 125,000.

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So it's 125,000. Sorry I've got my numbers 125,000.

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If we did it as a percentage of the population, something tells me even to the 1st decimal point, that would be the same number.

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It is the same. It's nought .3%. So it's the same. And it's the same for makaton users as well.

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So makaton there are over 100,000 people who use makaton as their primary means of communication. Whether that's science, symbol or a combination.

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Of the two.

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Which again, is about 0.3% of the.

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In other completely unrelated news, obviously completely unrelated. My daughter is doing really well in her Latin GCSE.

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Wonderful, that sounds like that's gonna have great functional use for communication. I'm sure she's getting great academic benefit from that.

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I'll actually love it cuz she is learning it and.

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It's great and it.

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Will look good for her.

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But she's going up what you doing. Revising Latin, So what you doing for it? Culture.

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OK, what?

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In the same way, when you look at French, you look at the culture of the country. You have to look at the culture of Latin.

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Yeah, totally.

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What so she's literally studying Pompeii what?

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I think.

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How well God? How is BSL?

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Not as important as Latin.

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Yeah, but I think there's also other benefits to learn in learning to sign that are maybe overlooked, so there's some benefits to everybody learning to sign, particularly in primary school, where we're still, you know, acquiring language because, as I said, it supports that natural pattern of language.

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For somebody called Mr Gove said so.

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If we're learning a sign, it gives us the visual. It gives us a kinaesthetic model for the word as well, which means that as we're learning words and we're putting them into

our, the little filing cabinet of words that we keep in our minds, our lexicon, we file that word more accurately and therefore can retrieve it better when it's kind of stored securely with lots of information.

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And so we learn words more accurately when there's a visual alongside them, so any new vocabulary learning would be supported by the use of signing.

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The other thing that's useful when you have a visual form of communication is it reduces the amount of language you have to process and it reduces the memory load so it can be helpful in in situations in school as well, a bit of a trite example, but if you are learning songs for a show, you will learn them quicker with signs and actions alongside them then you will. When you're just working from a lyrics.

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For example.

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Yes, that makes a lot of sense. That does. It does not that I do lots of song and dance everyone. I'm not hitting Broadway next year.

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That's an episode we'd like to say.

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You heard me sing a song once or write a song that's as far.

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As that's gonna go.

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But but yeah, that makes sense. That yeah, when you when you do, I remember going back to primary school and it's kind of if you concentrated on the dance.

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You could forget.

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About your mouth and it would just know what to do.

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If I think that's kind of what I remember is I was concentrating on the movements and it kind of the rhythm the words would fit in. And it all just seemed to work, whereas when you're just singing.

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There's a song that I introduced my daughter to, which was the old House of Pain. Jump around.

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Very much classic. We did a road trip together. It came on. I sang she looked in complete.

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Shock whilst I rapped.

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As a typical white man does it looked very embarrassing for her, but she was also in all that had all the words and there are a bit of actions as you have different words in there.

00:25:54

You put an action in, which again helps me remember the song because I stick a little action in the songs and it was, yeah, so that's the same thing. By having these little actions and it.

00:26:05

Makes me think of the.

00:26:06

Words in the in the song and it helped me.

00:26:09

Remember them, it triggers those words for you, so it acts as like a trigger to kind of remind you of what those words are.

00:26:15

So yeah, that makes so much sense, and we've already done podcasts with Doctor Susie Nyman who talks about multi-sensory teaching that if you just read a textbook.

00:26:27

It may go in.

00:26:30

But if you.

00:26:30

Walk around a a heart on a shower curtain and walk her through and talk her through.

00:26:37

It's going to go in a.

00:26:38

Lot better so if you are.

00:26:40

As you remember these words, you have symbols or signs which go with them. It is going to remember a lot more and I suppose with some of.

00:26:47

These non-verbal it is as.

00:26:50

Some of it is that recall being able to bring it out when.

00:26:52

You need that word.

00:26:55

So it will help with that if you know what you're trying to say, and you know the symbol and the word is linked to that symbol. It's going to be easier to retrieve that word.

00:27:04

Yes, exactly that exactly that, and I think there are other benefits too to learning to sign which are.

00:27:12

Processes that happen when you're signing that actually are very good for learning about communication in general. So when we sign we have to pick our words quite carefully because we have to think about right, we need to reduce the amount of language that we're using, so we're simplifying what we're saying so that the person we're trying to communicate with who has communication difficulties.

00:27:33

We can understand what we're what we're saying, so we have to think through simplifying our language, picking our vocabulary carefully, partly because we have to pick vocabulary that we know the signs for. So you find yourself adapting what you're saying to match the signs that you know.

00:27:48

So we're naturally simplifying language, and we're also simplifying language by saying what we mean rather than getting too hung up and figurative language.

00:27:58

So we're making sure that we're being really nice and clear about what we're saying, and that whole process of learning about how you simplify language and communicate it well.

00:28:07

Including that, but we were talking about earlier when we bring in our signing techniques like the use of movement and placement and body language and facial expression. We're learning a lot about how to communicate with others.

00:28:20

And to go back to the example of your daughter learning to speak Latin if we're being really ambitious for your daughter and we're thinking about her future career, whatever it is, she lands up doing.

00:28:31

Whether she becomes a dentist or a teacher or she works in an office, the chances are she's going to come across somebody with communication difficulties.

00:28:39

And she has learned by learning to sign how to adapt what she's saying to support the needs of the person that she's talking to.

00:28:47

Even if she doesn't end up doing it with signs, it's that process of knowing how to communicate with somebody who.

00:28:52

Is struggling to understand.

00:28:54

Yes, but she's not probably going to come across someone in the workplace who needs to her explain it in Latin.

00:29:00

No, I mean, if she does become a doctor, the lessons going to.

00:29:02

Come in handy.

00:29:03

But, or a lawyer nonetheless, even if she is a barrister, she's going to end up in that situation where she's got a witness in the dock who's got communication difficulties and she's going to need to adapt to.

00:29:07

She's going into computing.

00:29:15

Communication style for that.

00:29:17

Yes, and I'm I. I remember completely it entered my mind as we talked about translators early as when I was much younger at a jury service, which was fascinating.

00:29:28

There was a case I was involved in and it was two people in a relationship, but their primary language was different.

00:29:38

And neither of them were English.

00:29:41

So imagine the barrister asking a question in English.

00:29:45

That being translated into language one for that person to answer while at the same time the barrister was explained person with language two, what the question was then the first person was answering language one.

00:29:56

The translator would translate that back to English, so we could hear it translated to would then translate that.

00:30:04

Into language 2.

00:30:06

So that person could understand.

00:30:09

And the amount of time.

00:30:12

That took.

00:30:15

Was insane.

00:30:19

So just when people have, there are three different languages going on. The delays and things like that is insane.

00:30:29

If there is because the moment if the teacher explains something that teaching assistant has to then translate it and they've not understood it or anything.

00:30:38

That child is now reliant on one other person's understanding of what the teacher meant.

00:30:43

OK, whereas if other people in that class could.

00:30:48

Use some form of sign language.

00:30:51

And could communicate with that child. It could be more collaborative and they can also check their work and again it just makes that child more independent and more in charge of their own education.

00:31:02

Definitely, but it also includes them more in the incidental conversation, because what often happens when you're reliant on an interpreter model is that the interpreter decides what information is or isn't relevant for you.

00:31:14

So if you're having that classroom conversation and the teacher is talking what the teacher is saying might be interpreted for you.

00:31:20

Perhaps an answer to a question that another child gives might be, you know, signed for you. But if there's a, you know, an interruption and something happens at the door, or there's a kind of sub conversation happening somewhere, the interpreter decides for you which bits are useful to you.

00:31:34

And therefore translates those for you. You're not filtering for yourself what's relevant for you or interesting to you.

00:31:41

No, and it's interesting. So before this podcast, me and Sarah had a chat and we found out we are quite nearby and we've talked about things and talked about the weather and talked about this and then we started podcasting and we're recording and it's lovely.

00:31:55

If I was a child in school.

00:31:59

Who needed you to interpret for me?

00:32:03

I would arrive at school and stand on my own in the playground. I wouldn't be talking about. Did you watch Ben 10 or did you watch whatever the latest TV programme is? Or for boys or girls or.

00:32:12

Did you watch the care bears?

00:32:14

Did you do this? Did you watch the game last night? Did you see?

00:32:17

The football, did you do this?

00:32:19

I'm literally I'm waiting for you to come in and then we will do the lessons. We're I'm not having any jokes.

00:32:28

I'm not having any friendships. I'm not being invited around to anyone for dinner or no one's come around to mine.

00:32:35

It is.

00:32:36

Completely isolated apart from school.

00:32:42

Yeah, I've got a really good example from my own life that I'd love to share, even though for me it's it's an example.

00:32:48

I'm deeply ashamed about, but I think it really exemplifies what you were talking about about the experience of young people from our generation.

00:32:57

So when I went to university, I was young. I was 17 years old, went to university to teacher training

00:33:02

college and there was another young lady in my class who was deaf and she came to all of her lessons.

00:33:08

With a sign language interpreter.

00:33:11

I don't think I ever had a conversation with that other student. If I walked through the door and she was standing there, I might have waved and said hi, but I don't think I ever introduced myself.

00:33:22

I never asked her how she was. I never attempted to make any conversation with her and I would say that was probably true of my peers as well.

00:33:30

They are bound to have been people who were better at it than I was.

00:33:33

Who were making more effort

00:33:35

But she had a beautiful relationship with her sign language interpreter. They were very chatty amongst themselves. They'd set out at lunchtime on the grass, having a laugh and a joke. The communication between the two of them was beautiful.

00:33:47

But all of our interactions you know amongst the rest of the peer group were.

00:33:50

Separate from that, she was excluded from what was happening.

00:33:53

You know none of us ever asked her to come out for a drink or anything like that, so she was missing out on all of that university social experience.

00:34:00

Not that I'm saying we were the cool kids and anyone wanted to hang out with us, but but you get that idea of actually that wasn't naturally.

00:34:07

Happening and to some extent we felt on the outside of what was happening between her and her interpreter. We didn't feel like we could.

00:34:13

Interrupt that or get involved in that.

00:34:16

And that was a failing, not only on us as individuals, because of course we should have stepped past our own discomfort and made more effort 100%.

00:34:23

And I look back on that experience very regretfully, including being so embarrassed that I can't even remember what the girl's name was, which is.

00:34:30

Really shameful.

00:34:32

But I look back on that.

00:34:33

And I think not only did we fall down there because we didn't make enough effort, but nobody supported us as younger children to think about. If you meet somebody who has hearing impairments, if you meet somebody who uses sign language.

00:34:46

You know, here are some tools to get you into that, whether that's some signs or even just understanding, it's OK to go up to somebody and introduce yourself and the interpreter is gonna help you out.

00:34:55

You know that there are ways to to involve yourself and get you know, get involved with other people, even if you can't sign. But none of that early learning had happened.

00:35:06

For us, so we felt self-conscious and couldn't push past that self-consciousness to do the right thing.

00:35:12

And I also think that the university should have been doing more to make sure that you know there was a conversation with the students about. You know how we could be more inclusive and make more efforts, and I think.

00:35:28

In that sense, it was a really negative experience all around, and I'd love to be able to speak to that person now, who is probably out teaching in a school for hearing impaired children living her best life.

00:35:38

But I would love to ask her about what her university experience was like.

00:35:41

And how that felt at.

00:35:42

The time because she had spent her whole education up until that point in a school for the deaf.

00:35:46

Where she would have had a peer group.

00:35:48

But she then came to university and had no peer group.

00:35:51

Wow, it it completely isolating at that time?

00:35:55

I would have thought so. I mean, I obviously can't speak for her, but as I say I look back on that really regretfully, because I there are so many things I could have done better in that situation.

00:36:04

If I had been more mature, if I had had a better understanding.

00:36:07

Of what I could have done.

00:36:10

It could have been quite different, even if what could have been different is that we discovered we didn't get on and we never spoke to each other again.

00:36:17

But that's important communication to you.

00:36:17

You would.

00:36:19

Yes, and I think I think my Gen. I think I am older than you.

00:36:24

I would say that.

00:36:26

My generation hearing aids were for really old people and when you saw something different you more or less stared.

00:36:34

Because you weren't having deaf people on TV unless it was like there's a Sunday morning thing.

00:36:41

I think in the olden days and one morning or something BBC had the sign person on the.

00:36:45

Side of it, and that was about it.

00:36:47

But apart from that you never saw it. It was not out in the world. So when you see it, you just remember you just there.

00:36:54

And it would be different. And yeah, I think there are experiences where you can freely feel really excluded. And I I've been to a couple of hearing impaired schools where I've had the translators and I said there I had two and I go.

00:37:08

Why have I got two? I said and it was like because their arms get tired. I was like.

00:37:12

That makes a lot of sense actually, because they are having to. It's a very full on process of hearing what I'm saying and I'm talking education which isn't so simple.

00:37:23

I'm using government.

00:37:27

Language to say things. Plus I'm also talking about specifics in our software.

00:37:33

And they're having to listen and understand and translate it as you said into what?

00:37:37

Are the keywords.

00:37:39

And do this so it's a really physical thing and time draining so they would change over. And then I I try to be very aware of trying to just.

00:37:48

Look at people's faces.

00:37:51

And if they signed back, I'd just pause.

00:37:54

And there's one point somebody was signing, so there was a question coming back and a couple of other people, so I just didn't start again because I'm thinking I can't interrupt you.

00:38:01

You're obviously having an important conversation, and this person who I think every person in the room could do sign language but me.

00:38:10

And so I just sat there waiting and they were having this conversation. And this woman just went oohhhh, no you can keep going. They're discussing their shopping list.

00:38:20

But for me, that was probably the flip of.

00:38:25

What every person with sign language is, I've got no idea what's being discussed.

00:38:30

But I'm just I'm so I just had to wait and go. What's going on? I don't know.

00:38:33

If I've got to wait for this or what so I'll just stand here waiting and this person just went. Oh, they're just doing. It was like.

00:38:38

And again, it's a small.

00:38:41

It's very very.

00:38:42

Small idea I understanding of what it will be like for someone who's going. There's lots of communication going around.

00:38:49

I don't know if I can ask my question. I don't know who I can communicate. I don't think they've noticed me.

00:38:54

Yeah, and I think although it is just a small example, the way you feel at that moment is really.

00:39:01

It's almost deskilling, so even though you've gone in, there is the expert and you're talking about your product which you know inside out and back to front, you start to touch yourself and question question what you want to talk about. Even though you know the material inside out and you.

00:39:12

Immediately feel self-conscious.

00:39:16

You know, as you say, that's only the slightest window into what it feels like for somebody who is, you know, on the outside of what's happening most of the time.

00:39:23

And also, I've I've been translated one other time and that was really awkward because it was with another language. It was in Hungarian

00:39:33

And there's a bit when I talk about product, I always say.

00:39:35

Something which is.

00:39:35

Quite funny, so I'd say this and I was on a stage in front of 200 people. I said it.

00:39:41

And you need it. You deliver a line and.

00:39:43

You deliver it.

00:39:45

Then I had to wait for the.

00:39:46

Translator to say in Hungarian for everyone to then laugh.

00:39:52

But that was really.

00:39:53

Awkward for me, standing on the stage going I said something funny.

00:39:57

And waiting and then laughing and it again. When I did the sign language thing literally going, I'm not going to crack jokes. I don't know if these translate.

00:40:06

I don't know if it's if my sarcasm.

00:40:09

When I say this.

00:40:11

When when if I said in the classroom? Well, we've all got so much.

00:40:15

Time being teachers, haven't we?

00:40:17

Would that translate in the exact same way? And I don't know.

00:40:20

And to some extent, yeah.

00:40:21

I don't know how the humour.

00:40:22

Works, I don't know how.

00:40:23

Sarcasm. It's a it's a British thing, but is that a still part of?

00:40:26

British Sign language.

00:40:28

It is, but to some extent it will then be up to how well that nuance is translated by the person who's translating. Whereas if you are able to sign yourself, you can put the emphasis wherever you.

00:40:39

Want to and so. A lot of the nuances lost through interpret interpreting, and I'm not in any way bashing people who do.

00:40:47

Interpreting as a job, they do an absolutely amazing job, but my point is, the more we can have direct conversations.

00:40:54

More we get the richness of language, the richness of the social experience, the richness of the humour. Because we're having that conversation directly rather than through a third party.

00:41:03

So I want to go back.

00:41:04

To your numbers again.

00:41:06

147,100.

00:41:09

And French.

00:41:10

Yeah, 147,000 first language French speakers.

00:41:14

But 23% of us could have a conversation in French at a basic level.

00:41:20

That that's what the EU Commission is telling us. There are some other numbers I read somewhere else 15% but the EU Commission is telling us about 23% of people can have a basic conversation in French. I'm not.

00:41:29

One of those people. So let's not test that.

00:41:32

But I can. I can go bonjour, je m'appelle Dale quel age as tu, I think, and ca va? And then if you ask me, I go ca va bien merci, which is, I'm fine.

00:41:40

How are you?

00:41:41

And that's it.

00:41:43

That's 100% more French than I can speak.

00:41:43

You asked me how old I am.

00:41:46

If you ask me how old I am in German Ich Bin Elf Jahre Alt, which I'm still stuck at being 11 because that's what I learned in year seven, so we've got all this amazing numbers. But then we think of British Sign Language which was 125,000.

00:41:52

Fair enough.

00:42:03

We will probably need 125,000 interpreters.

00:42:07

Yeah, I guess so.

00:42:08

Type thing, so that's now 250,000 people who need to understand because.

00:42:15

If you have if there is a family of five people and one person requires British Sign language.

00:42:22

That means five people will learn British Sign language.

00:42:26

Well, we would hope.

00:42:27

So I think one of the things that I found interesting on my journey with Makaton is how often in a household one person lends up.

00:42:37

Taking more of the responsibility for the signing than other members of the family, and I think that's always for me personally. Disappointing, so you may end up with a situation where.

00:42:47

The child has a communication need that's reliant on signing, and one parent will learn to sign far more than the other.

00:42:54

Or the parent may learn to sign more than the siblings, and I think we really want to encourage everybody in the household to be getting involved with learning to sign and to be having those direct conversations.

00:43:05

And as said, to get all of that richness as much as possible. So yes, I think everybody in a family would learn to some.

00:43:12

Extent, but it's possible that.

00:43:14

Some people will learn more than.

00:43:16

I can imagine in there are situations where.

00:43:19

I'm going to say, and I'm not sexist. Either way, there is generally a primary carer and a primary worker in like these situations, somebody is off to work and always working.

00:43:27

The person spends a lot more time. I could expect a certain level of communication difference in that situation. If there are siblings, I kind of would expect there to be.

00:43:39

And is there a lot of time I do see the siblings will support that each other, so I would hope in terms of the other children house they would pick up learn sign language as well so they can be part of it. Might even be a.

00:43:52

Completely made-up sign language with them.

00:43:55

But so they can communicate with their sibling and that parent who goes off to work. I would hope if you actually graft it throughout the year when they have that two weeks off, there is a spike in their language, and then they just it drops down again because they're back at work and not spending as much time at home.

00:44:06

Yes yeah yeah.

00:44:12

The thing that makes the biggest difference is if people commit to trying to sign all of the time that the child is around.

00:44:19

Because often what happens in a family situation and in a classroom situation is that when somebody is speaking directly to the child, they'll sign.

00:44:26

But when they're speaking to other people, they won't. And what that means is it reduces the amount of language that's understood by the child, but also the opportunities to learn the signs themselves. So if we take the example of that family sets up.

00:44:39

If, when the sibling is talking to their sibling who has communication difficulty, they might use signing then, but they also need to sign when they're talking to their mum or their dad if they're in their siblings company so that signing is part of the fabric of all of the communication that's happening around their child, and not only when the child is directly spoken to.

00:44:58

Because if we think about going back to when your children are really young, you're told to talk all day.

00:45:04

They cannot comprehend they cannot understand, but you need to talk constantly. I'm doing the washing up now. Oh look, I'm washing a bowl.

00:45:11

Oh look, it's a.

00:45:11

Fork done now and you're doing all this language. They get used to it and it kind of. They kind of repeat that they they kind of mirror.

00:45:18

You just make ohhh noises trying to and then the meaning stuff will come later, but you're told to do this and the more language that goes on around them, the more they pick it.

00:45:29

Up so now if you've got a.

00:45:31

Child who?

00:45:33

Cannot hear.

00:45:34

And there's no communication. They can just sit there go. Oh, what are they talking about? You cannot have that curiosity.

00:45:43

Again, that's where a lot of children will be sitting there talking about something, and generally your children want to be part of your life.

00:45:50

So if you're into something, your kids will try and be interested in it just so they can get some attention. And by having conversations which completely exclude them because they don't can't actually listen.

00:46:02

Again, you're kind of isolating them at another level.

00:46:10

And it's definitely something to think about, and I think it's something that I think it happens. It's done better in families than it is in schools so often families are better at doing that and being really mindful of including their child or their sibling and what's happening.

00:46:24

But in classroom situations, when I first started to work at a school that is a full signing environment where everybody.

00:46:30

signs all the time.

00:46:31

I already knew how to use signing because I'd used it in my previous school, but what I had to learn was to sign all of the time, because when I was standing in front of the class, if I was talking to the class or to an individual child, I would sign if I spoke to another adult I wouldn't, and I had to become disciplined about signing, even when I was speaking to another adult, because when you're teaching in the classroom, something will come up like you'll turn to.

00:46:54

A colleague and say or could you grab those pencils? Or could you close the door? It's a bit noisy outside or you know what?

00:46:59

Or could you go and work with those group of children and actually getting into the habit of even when I was saying you know some you know on some side topic keeping my signing going.

00:47:10

Really providing that model, but also showing children that signing is for everybody and that all of the language that happens in this room is for you too. I think is a really.

00:47:21

It opens up a whole new world of opportunity and really makes people feel much more valued.

00:47:26

It makes them realise that you're kind of you're not doing that just for me, you're doing it as part of your communication, and I I've been in schools for hearing impaired where it's me. One other person in that room. Neither of us have.

00:47:41

Any hearing issues?

00:47:43

Yet the person I'm talking to is constantly signing.

00:47:47

And it was a. It's a little bit. It's just you and me. But it is. It is just she expresses vocally and through her hands which is great.

00:47:56

So if she's in the staff room and she's having a conversation with someone, somebody else can sit there and go. Oh, they're talking about Jack.

00:48:03

Ohh I need to tell them it. It's just one of those things you can overhear conversations if you're deaf and everyone is.

00:48:08

Signing yeah, and as said before for you, as the person who's signing your use of sign is going to improve dramatically the more you're using it, so you know it's a great habit to get into, because actually all it does is improve your own skill.

00:48:24

So I I guess the gist of what I'm trying to to say. Dale is I'm essentially laying down a bit of a gauntlet to senior leaders in in schools to say lots of you are doing a brilliant

job of introducing, signing in your schools, having some you know, great signing in the annual nativity or nursery rhymes, or maybe in your nursery.

00:48:44

Class, but I would love to say we want that embedded more deeply and more broadly, we want to see it happening so much more often.

00:48:53

And generally, as everything it needs to come from the senior leaders.

00:48:57

Definitely you know if they had teachers out on a walk in assembly chest into children on the playground. I would love to see them signing.

00:49:05

I think things like you go to some schools and they have all the visual symbols everywhere. The head, teacher symbol and everything and and it's great.

00:49:13

So if you can't read, you can recognise that and go oh head teacher. You know in theory I think kind of all schools should do that. Not everyone needs it.

00:49:20

And those people can ignore it, but if it actually helps 1% of the population and it's doing nothing negative, why not do it? And in the reality the sign language, the more you do.

00:49:32

As you said it can. It's an aid as well, so for those struggling to hear.

00:49:37

Us but again.

00:49:39

If we think of.

00:49:41

Everything I perceive I'm going to believe all I've learned differently now that you perceive it exactly the same as me.

00:49:48

So if I'm a child at the back of the classroom and I can't see the whiteboard, but that's just cause we're at the back of the classroom. You can see it if you're closer.

00:49:56

Then someday you commented it goes. No, I can read it clearly and you're going.

00:50:02

Oh, might need glasses. Are there children who are struggling with hearing? Are they struggling with filtering their hearing? Are they? But they think everyone's like this, so I it's fine.

00:50:12

But actually, what you can do is just change that communication slightly, giving them an alternative which they can see.

00:50:19

And now.

00:50:21

They're understanding everything much better.

00:50:24

Yeah, and also interesting. Interestingly, it holds children's attention better so because you're moving your hands and you're providing that visual.

00:50:30

The children are more likely to be looking at you, and you can hold their attention for longer when you're signing, even if that particular child isn't reliant on signing to understand the language.

00:50:40

No, it is. It is so thank you for sharing all about signing with me today and anyone who's listening.

00:50:50

I I said at the beginning before we start recording, I want to go online and learn sign language.

00:50:55

But I kind of haven't got. I don't go into schools really, so I haven't got anyone to sign with.

00:51:01

So I will get very rusty very quickly, but I am going to big make a big effort.

00:51:07

Because it's just things I've seen when and again talking to previously various people is it is can be very isolating.

00:51:14

It can be isolating, and I think if you have done a course and now there are lots of courses available online, so makaton training for example used to always be delivered in person since the pandemic there are now online courses as well.

00:51:26

And the same for BSL. There are online courses for BSL.

00:51:29

The thing is, once you have some signing vocabulary, if you see somebody else who signing, you're much more likely to say hello or to ask if somebody needs help.

00:51:38

If you have some signs than you are if you don't because you feel a little bit more confident when you've got something to work.

00:51:44

Yes, definitely.

00:51:46

So we should all go find a course and watch it and learn and improve.

00:51:51

I think so. I would really encourage people.

00:51:53

To do that?

00:51:55

Excellent, so thank you for coming the.

00:51:56

Show today Sarah's an absolute pleasure Dale, thank you for letting me talk so much about the.

00:52:00

Topic I'm so passionate about.

00:52:02

So you've probably me a couple of links and I'm going to find a link to that.

00:52:05

Singing hands and put.

00:52:06

That in there as well, and I'll put those in the show notes along with your contact details and you'll find the show notes on our website or wherever you listen to the podcast.

00:52:15

And thank you for listening. So if you haven't subscribed already, please subscribe. You can find links to subscribe across all the different podcast platforms we are.

00:52:23

On our website, please follow us on social media on Twitter. We're at the SENDcast on Facebook. The SENDcast on Instagram the send cast quite simple.

00:52:31

And and please use social media to share the same cast with others. Let them know how amazing my guest like Sarah are and help spread their message to as many people as possible.

00:52:42

And before we go I would just like to want you to check out what we do here at B Squared as well as this podcast we have our online CPD platform training for education.

00:52:51

You'll find a number of the guests our speakers at one of our virtual send conferences, or they've recorded their own training courses.

00:52:57

Training for education is a great way to get CPD for all staff around SEND that is effective and affordable. Visit www.trainingforeducation.com For more information. And lastly, don't forget.

00:53:10

Our assessment product. This is what B Squared is famous.

00:53:13

For helping schools show the small sets of progress pupils with SEND.

00:53:18

We cover a huge range from early years to post 16 and preparing for adulthood. Visit www.bsquared.co.uk For more information.

00:53:27

So thank you for listening. We'll be back soon with another episode of the SENDcast. It's goodbye from me.

00:53:32

And goodbye from me. Thank you.

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