

## “Signs” of the Holidays



What the holidays mean for many of us is the opportunity to get together with family and friends to reminisce about times past and to make good memories for the future. In many families these celebrations are made even sweeter by the addition of babies and toddlers who still have stars in their eyes when they see holiday sights or hear holiday sounds. Seeing their joy can make even the most reluctant “Scrooge” smile.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if these special little people could tell us more about what they are thinking—what is fascinating them as they gaze at a decorated tree or blazing candle? Well now they can! The secret is one that more and more families are discovering: helping babies and toddlers communicate using **simple signs**. In fact, around this time of year we hear wonderful stories of how children who can't yet talk are still able to tell their parents what they see, what they hear, and even what they feel as they encounter holiday symbols. Here's a brand new one from staff member, Bonita, about her 19-month-old daughter Julia (see photos).

Julia and Bonita had just returned from a brief visit to Grandma's house in Virginia. That evening when Dad came home, Julia took his hand and led him over to the Christmas tree and pointed to a new ornament. Dad asked her where it had come from and Julia responded using signs: GRANDMA + TREE + ONE+ HOME. “Oh!” responded Dad. “Grandma let you pick one from her tree to bring home?” to which Julia proudly said loud and clear, “Yup!” Without the signs, Dad would never have understood why the ornament was special!

Here are a few more holiday examples from our Baby Signs® files:

- 13-month-old Jared was mesmerized when his father first plugged in the string of lights wound around the Christmas tree, immediately opening and closing his fist (his sign for “light”) over and over as he grinned from ear to ear. For the next three weeks, as soon as he woke up in the morning, he would eagerly sign “light,” clearly sending the message that he remembered what was in the living room.

- 15-month-old Maddy had been pretty leery of the bearded man in the bright red suit inviting her to sit on his lap in the department store and had cried until her mother sat with her. From then on, whenever she saw a picture of Santa Claus she would rapidly pat her chest (her sign for “afraid”) and then move her open hands up and down her chest (her sign for “clothes”). Why “clothes?” Maddy’s mom quickly figured it out: “Clothes” was as close to “Claus” as Maddy could get!

- Ever since his first birthday, 16-month-old Jacob had been fascinated with candles and had quickly learned the “candle” sign: blowing on a raised index finger. That’s why his parents weren’t surprised at Jacob’s attraction to menorahs, the 9-branched candelabrum used during the Jewish holiday, Chanukah. What did surprise them, though, was Jacob’s creativity. Instead of raising a single finger when he saw a menorah, Jacob quite deliberately would raise his whole hand with fingers spread, blowing on each in turn!

With simple signs, these babies, and thousands like them, are making sweet, new holiday memories for their families. What’s more, the wonderful thing is that it’s so easy. Just as babies learn to wave bye-bye and shake their heads for no and nod for yes, they can easily learn lots of other signs to help them share what they’re thinking with those they love. And, the truth is, what better holiday present could parents receive than a priceless window into their baby’s mind and heart?

Happy Holidays and Happy Signing!

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