

94 - Sign Language in Classrooms: Language and Support for Challenging Behaviors

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Purpose: The purpose of the transcripts is to provide readers and listeners with a written version of each episode of the UAGC Center for Early Childhood Education's Early Childhood Chatter Podcast so they can follow along with the audio content. www.uagc.edu/ece-center/chatter-podcast

Audience: Current Active & Enrolled Students

Episode Transcript

Host Dr. Shipley: Hello everyone, and welcome to Early Childhood Chatter with Dr. Shipley and Dr. Hield. We will upload a new episode every other week on Wednesdays.

Host Dr. Heald: Twice a month we come to you with a short professional development with new ideas for you to try. Don't forget to subscribe to the podcast for notifications about future episodes.

Today we are so thrilled and honored to have Tanya Hayes with us as our special guest. Tanya is a veteran speech therapist with a master's in education and has specialized as an early intervention speech therapist.

She served children for over 30 years in the home, in childcare settings, and in public schools. Most importantly, she has a heart for helping parents and early childhood professionals know and use strategies that help children find their voice. Tanya has worked with the South Carolina schools for the deaf and blind and for the past 12 years, she's worked with Sprout Pediatrics and specialized in children with language delays, apraxia, and children on the autism spectrum.

We're so honored to have Tanya here with us today. Welcome Tanya.

Tanya Hayes: Hi, well thank you for having me.

Host Dr. Shipley: Hi Tanya, super excited. We've had you on before, and so if you haven't listened to our other session, it is also about sign language, so please go and listen to that. But your title today is Sign Language in Classrooms, Language and Support for Challenging Behaviors. We know that challenging behaviors is something that teachers have to overcome every day almost. So, I'm so excited about this topic, so tell us why you're here to talk about this one and the challenging behaviors.

Tanya Hayes: Yeah, well, you know, one of the things that I have found as a speech language pathologist and working with teachers and families is that oftentimes those children who do have language delays are the children who also have the challenging behaviors, because if I can't talk and I can't use my words to tell you what I need, what am I going to do? I'm going to rely on those physical skills that I have.

That means I might bite, I might pull hair, I might push or, you know, hit you, but I'm going to get across my message to you in whatever way I can. And so, I love talking about this because I think it covers a wide variety of professionals, whether you're an administrator, a teacher, an assistant, a parent, or just even a childcare professional who maybe works in afterschool care. And so, we see challenging behaviors all the time, and sometimes they're language issues, but sometimes they're just behavioral issues.

Children do not have the social emotional skills to do what they need to do. So, I just think it's a great topic for a variety of professionals that might be listening to your podcast.

Host Dr. Shipley: I love it, Thank you.

Host Dr. Heald: Yeah, and you bring up a really great point. We're in that moment, right, whether we're parents, whether we're caregivers, whether we're educators, and we have those moments, right, in the moment where the child is not able to communicate in a way that we need them or want them to. Walk us through what educators, parents, family members can do in those moments.

Tanya Hayes: OK, so first off, we need to realize, as just all the adults in the room, that we are the adults in the room. We do not need to join the chaos. And oftentimes that's very difficult. I mean, I can remember, you know, my boys are 26 and 28 now, and I can remember having those moments where I would just lose it. And I'm like, you know, five minutes after it happens, I'm like, I am professional. Like, I know, I teach people how to parent and be a professional. What in the world? So, I know how quickly it happens. We get so frustrated.

But what we have to remember, first off, is we're the adult in the room. So, we're always modeling. We need to use good social emotional skills. We need to use our words and not yell. We need to use our words and not our actions so that we are teaching those just nurturing, supportive, social emotional skills.

But we often see that children in the school age population in particular are seven times more likely to meet the criteria for ADHD than if they spend more than two hours a day on screens. So, one of those first things that we can do as a parent when we want to address challenging behavior is make sure we're monitoring screen and TV exposure.

We want that less than two hours a day. So, if you see your child just, you know, turning into this monster, check yourself. Let's take a look at how much time they're getting to spend on their screens.

You know, take a poker chip or a Sunny D Cap and put, you know, ""screen time on it and have two or three worth 15 minutes a piece. And when they spend their tokens, that's it. No more screen time, no more phone time, no more tablet time. They've spent their allotment for the day. So that's one kind of thing that we can do early on to mitigate.

But when we have a child who's having behavioral issues, just got off the phone with a parent this morning, she's a PA, a physician's assistant, very educated, has a two-year-old who's not yet talking and he is biting everybody in his classroom, his brothers, them.

And he's just completely frustrated because he has no words. And so, he's using his physical skills to communicate when he wants somebody to stop. So, one of those first things that we're going to do is we're going to be there to notice when the behavior comes.

We're going to want to step in and hopefully get there before that biting happens and teach that sign. Stop. Left hand is flat, right hand karate chops on it.

That's the sign for stop. Or maybe we teach the sign for move. And that's just like taking your hand and moving it left to right so that they have some functional skills to tell their friends to stop or tell their brother or sister to stop or move out of my way.

So immediately trying to figure out what that child is trying to communicate and then stepping in with a sign that we can functionally teach them. And what that means is we're not only going to show them how to do the sign hand over hand. We're actually going to start using that sign with them.

They go to grab my cup. I'm going to say mine. I'm going to put my hand to my chest and I'm going to say mine.

That's my cup. Here's your cup. And I'm going to give them their cup.

So that when they get frustrated and somebody is trying to take their toy, instead of pushing that friend down, they're going to use the sign mine. What's one of the first words they learn how to say? No. How do they learn how to say no? Because we use it to them.

So, we're going to be modeling these signs. So, addressing screen time use and then also knowing some functional signs that directly tie in with behaviors that we're seeing.

Host Dr. Shipley: Right. OK. And all of those things you said are so important. And I really liked that you gave the parents and the teachers kind of a little bit of advice on how much time they should have, because I know that most children are getting way too much screen time. And I think it is contributing to some of the behaviors in the classroom and things that are happening. So right now we have teachers and administrators and even family members listening to this.

What are five signs that you would encourage a teacher to learn first that they can learn quickly that a child can learn or the whole class can learn?

Tanya Hayes: Yeah, so just real practical signs, because signing is auditory, visual and kinesthetic.

We're wrapping all those learning styles into one. And some of those go to signs for teachers are when we're giving directions, when we want children to stand up, we take our left hand, we make a floor, and our right two fingers are up. And then we put those two fingers on top of the floor that we made with our left hand.

So it's just a visual representation of, OK, boys and girls, we need to stand up. And so I'm putting those two fingers in that left palm and they're seeing stand, they're hearing stand, and then they're seeing their friends who are following the directions, you know, begin to stand and push their chair in.

Another one is, oh, it's time for us to sit down. So, again, two fingers on left and right hands. The left is going to go down and then the right is going to go on top of it. And the right fingers are going to kind of bend at the middle knuckle as if they're sitting on the chair that was created by the left hand. So that's the sign for sit. Oh, boys and girls, time to sit down. We want to get in our circle time. Everybody sit, whatever, you know, you're asking them to do as far as sit down.

Another one that I would really recommend is line up. When we're talking about, you know, trying to get in a line, going outside, going to music, going to the cafeteria. You just take your left and right hands, have the number five kind of fingers spread, and you're going to let your left pinky and your right thumb touch each other.

It looks like children standing in a line. It's visual and it's very easy for that visual learner to see what you're asking them to do, that auditory learner to hear what you're saying and see what you're saying. And then if you have that child who is struggling to follow directions, you can say, Tisha, what did Natanya ask you to do? I asked you to line up, show me, you show me the sign for line up. Good job. Oh, there you go. You're in a line.

Thank you for listening. So we're just doing that kind of more direct instruction for that child who's not yet doing what we asked them to do. And we're giving them a chance to sign it back to us, which gets them listening directly to us and kinesthetically doing what we ask.

And then there we go. So we've got sit, we've got stand, we've got line up.

Another one that's really great is the restroom. And you just take your right finger and you do kind of like a times sign, like you put your third finger on top of your index finger, like you used to say when you were growing up, like, you know, times I'm, you know, not yet, not yet, whatever. And that's the letter for R. And you just drop it down and you kind of touch left, touch right. And that's the sign for restroom.

Another sign for restroom is the letter T, which your thumb goes between your pointer and your middle finger on your right hand. And you just kind of shake it. That's the sign for potty or TT.

So, any of those signs are great kind of just classroom management signs. If you have a bathroom in your classroom and a child looks at you and does the sign for potty or restroom, you know, they need to go to the bathroom. You can quickly wave them off.

You don't have to interrupt your instruction time, but they're communicating to you. I need to go to the bathroom. You're saying yes, and they're on their way.

And it just kind of allows you to almost have like a little secret code with your students. But they know what you mean, what they mean, and you know what they mean. It's just a great way to kind of communicate.

So, another one might be outside. And that's just you're going to make a cup with your left hand. And then you're going to put your right hand in the cup, pull it out.

And then that right hand is going to kind of move in the direction of the door that leads outside. So it might be time to go out and you're just going to pull your finger out of your cup and wave in the air towards that door. So those are all really good ones.

Another one that's just super practical is look. Like you want their eyes. So you want their attention. Eyes on me. So you just take your two fingers, touch under your eyes, and then take those two fingers and point them out towards your class. So you're just asking for their eyes, asking them to look at you so that you know that you have their visual attention before you start giving that next set of instructions.

So those are just some of my top signs that I would really encourage you to know.

Host Dr. Shipley: I love that. I used the restroom one in my classroom with the tea and shake it. ou shake your hand. And it worked really well. Um, so I know that you explained those, but is there a place that they can go? Do you send anyone anywhere to start figuring out these signs so they can learn them on their own or a website?

Tanya Hayes: Yes. I love BabySignLanguage.com has some great pictures. And what I have done is there. I have compiled some images and put them into a PDF.

And I will send you all that link so you can link it in your show notes. But we on Sprout Pediatrics page, we have a resource page for parents. And there is a quite a lengthy document there of like 25 different signs, like take turns, first, next, play.

You know, we're going to go to the it's time for us to go do reading time. So we're going to go to the table. You know, just all the different kind of key signs that I use on a regular basis in classrooms and with small groups of children.

So that document is a great one to have. You can print it and use it and just, you know, cut them apart. Pick the ones that you most use. But certainly just super great handout. They are free. You don't have to put in your email.

We're not trying to capture anything. It's just a resource we want to make available to professionals.

Host Dr. Shipley: Perfect.

Host Dr. Heald: Thank you. I love that question, Dr. Shipley, because as Tanya was explaining, I was over here actually literally doing them. So this is when I wish we had the video going, because and then when I was doing them, I wanted to remember them.

And so I started to kind of take notes and I put the arrow back and forth. But ultimately, Tanya, that resource is great, because I can tell you I want to know more about these. This, for me, was fun.

I don't have sign language in my toolbox, my resource kit. And for me, it is fun. And that is an important aspect to the integration into our classrooms. So how can this be done with kids in a fun way to learn the signs and honestly, not seen as just a negative or, you know, an association with bad behavior?

Tanya Hayes: Yeah, so I always say it's like our secret code. Our little classroom community has this secret code and not all the classrooms in our school knows our secret code. So when Miss Tanya does this and I'll do a sign, what does she mean? Oh, play, it's time for us to go play.

That's right. Well, what if I do, I hold my left hand out and I have my right-hand kind of going back and forth as if I'm strumming on my left hand. I'm like, oh, boys and girls, it's time for us to go too.

And then I'll do the sign and they'll say music. And I'm like, yes. So it's just like our little secret code.

And so, we have some fun signs in there. But then we have some, you know, more directive signs like sit and stand and stop and wait. Wait is a great one to teach.

And that's just two hands out and you're wiggling your fingers in front of you. So wait. So just, you know, there's good, easy ones in there.

Yes, no, take turns, first, then, all the different ones. But there's, you know, fun ones in there that, you know, when we're going to related arts or it's time to go outside, we have those. But then we also have those signs that are super important.

So, if, you know, we're having a school-wide program and every one of my class members are sitting together and I look down the row and I see someone who's doing something they shouldn't, I'll get their attention. And I'll just do the little sign that says, you need to sit or, you know, wait, or I'll, you know. So just getting their attention.

I'm not having to speak. I'm not having to yell. I'm just gesturing to the signs. And because it's the secret code we've learned before, they know what I'm asking them to do. And so it really is a respectful, nurturing, supportive way to help children do the next right thing.

Host Dr. Heald: And you take something that can have a negative connotation or something that is completely associated with those bad behaviors. And I want to be in Miss Tanya's class because that secret code sounds so cool. I love it. I love it.

All right, Miss Tanya, can you leave our listeners with three takeaways that they can ponder and reflect on?

Tanya Hayes: Well, I would just say, always, always remember that sign language is movement. And when the body is moving, the brain is learning. So when we ask children to sign with us, we're helping cement that word, that concept into their brain and their brain is remembering it faster.

Visual cues are super important to many, many children who are on the spectrum or have Down syndrome or just need some extra supports because their language is not there. So that's a great way that you can support inclusion in your classroom. And so it's way bigger than just a secret code.

It is a deeply needed concept for all children to succeed in our classrooms. And when appropriate, sign language can be that reflective listening tool. What did Miss Tanya ask you to do? Oh, do it with me, sit.

We're gonna sit down, thank you. So, it's just me asking and then them replying by verbally and kinesthetically signing back what I asked them to do. So just, again, just a way to foster that positive behavioral support in a way that's not negative, but gets that point across and the compliance is increased.

Host Dr. Shipley: Tanya, these ideas are amazing. I have loved American Sign Language since I was in college. So, I've been doing it for over 23 years.

I'm not using it as much, obviously, because I'm not directly with young children, but I appreciate it. There is a place for it. And it's much more than just teaching kids signs. So, thank you so much. As we leave today, what is one challenge you have for our listeners?

Tanya Hayes: Well, I would just say, take some time, log onto the website, print that handout and pick two or three that you know would be useful in your classroom and start trying it out. I mean, I think you'll be surprised at how easy it is to pick up on the signs, use them and how fun it is to incorporate them into your classroom community.

Host Dr. Shipley: I agree with you. Thank you so much for being here again. And we appreciate you.

Tanya Hayes: : Thank you.