

Learning British Sign Language

ACTION ON
HEARING
LOSS

My parents use sign language and they taught me as a baby. It's such an expressive and impressive language that utilises not just your hands but body language and facial expressions too. When people see that I can use sign language, they also want to learn it – and those who do learn fall in love with it just like I did.

Andrew Palmer

In this leaflet we explain what British Sign Language is and how to learn it. If you have any questions, our friendly helpline team is waiting to answer your call or email.

Telephone 0808 808 0123

Textphone 0808 808 9000

SMS 0780 000 0360

(standard text message rates apply)

Email information@hearingloss.org.uk

Are you thinking about learning British Sign Language (BSL)?

Read this leaflet to find out:

- what BSL is and how you can learn it
- how people who are deaf communicate
- about sign language in different countries and regional variations in BSL
- some essential BSL signs used in everyday life, and the fingerspelling alphabet.

The photographs in this leaflet will introduce you to BSL. They are taken from our *Start to Sign!* book, which contains photographs of more than 800 signs to support your learning. Buying the book also gives you free access to see the moving signs online, and you can test yourself with our interactive quizzes.

See page 19 for more information.

What is BSL?

People who are deaf use various methods of communication, including speech and lipreading, but BSL is the most widely used method of signed communication in the UK. Some people use Sign Supported English (SSE), which is not a language in its own right, but more a type of English with signs.

It's hard to say how many people in the UK use BSL as their first or preferred language. Estimates vary from 50,000 to 70,000.

What kind of language is BSL?

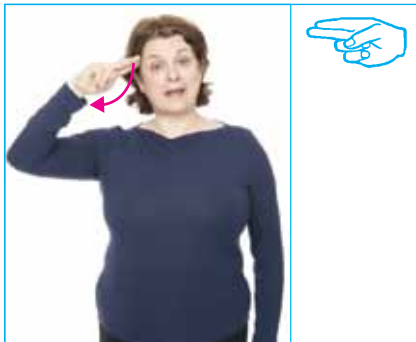
BSL has evolved naturally, as all languages do. It uses a combination of hand shapes and movements, lip patterns, facial expressions and shoulder movements.

BSL is structured in a completely different way to English. In BSL you start with the main subject or topic. After that, you refer to something about the topic.

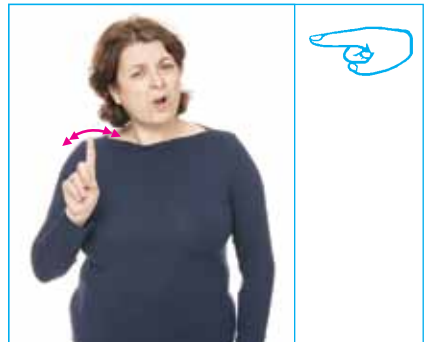
For example:

English - 'What is your name?'

BSL - 'Name - what?'



Name



What

Lip patterns

Lip patterns are a very important part of BSL. The signs for 'uncle', 'aunt', 'nephew' and 'niece' illustrate this (see opposite page). The handshape and movement are the same for these four signs, but the lip pattern is different.



Uncle



Aunt



Nephew



Niece



How can I learn BSL?

It is very difficult to learn to sign from a leaflet, book, video or CD-ROM alone. The best way to learn BSL is to take a course taught by a qualified sign language teacher.

Our experienced trainers can come to where you work to teach an introductory Start to Sign course. Contact our helpline (see back cover) about this and for details of BSL courses near you.

Is sign language the same around the world?

No, sign languages are as varied as spoken languages. Different countries have their own unique sign language, but some sign languages do have a similar structure. BSL is only used in the UK.

In Northern Ireland, people who are deaf like to use Irish Sign Language (ISL) and BSL.

Is BSL the same across the country?

No, there are regional variations in sign language, just as there are in spoken languages. In different parts of the country, signs will have different meanings, or there will be different signs for one word. For example, there are 10 to 12 variations for the word 'holiday'.

What is fingerspelling?

Fingerspelling is the BSL alphabet. Certain words – usually names of people and places – are spelled out on fingers. However, fingerspelling alone is not sign language.

See opposite for the fingerspelling alphabet.

We have cards, bookmarks and posters of the fingerspelling alphabet (sometimes called the manual alphabet). We also have cards of the Welsh, Irish and deafblind fingerspelling alphabets. See page 19 for further details.

Fingerspelling alphabet



A



B



C



D



E



F



G



H



I



J



K



L



M



N



O



P



Q



R



S



T



U



V



W



X



Y



Z

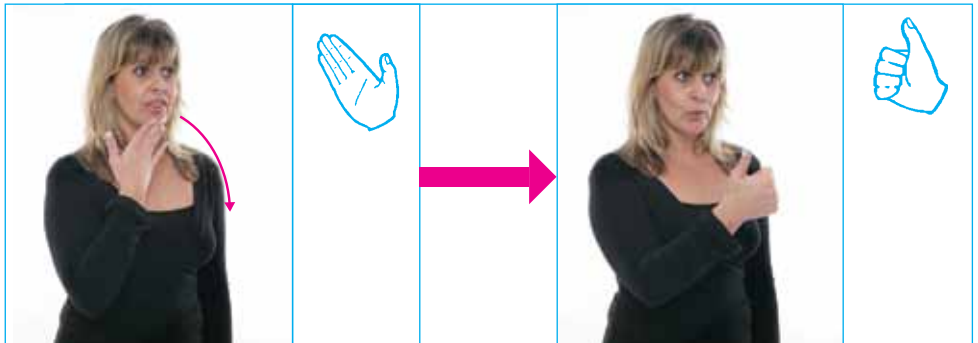
Greetings



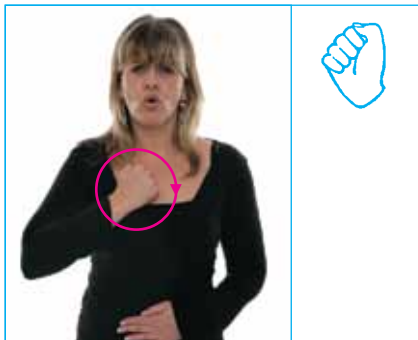
Hello



Please



Thank you

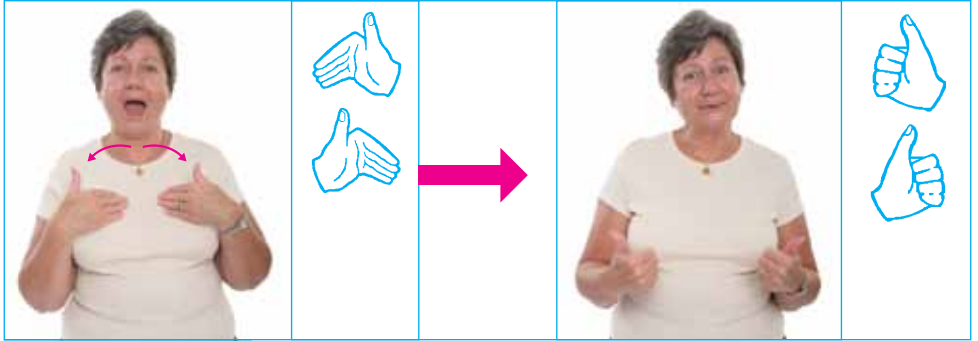


Sorry



Goodbye

Greetings



How are you?

Questions



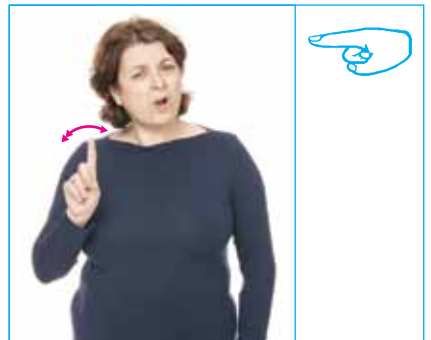
Question



Ask (directional verb)



Who



What

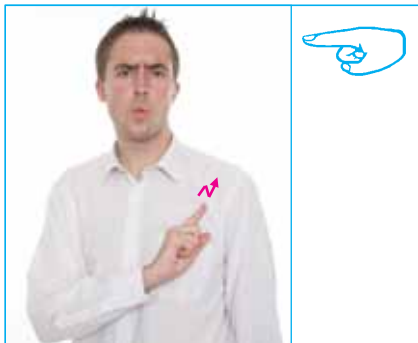
Questions



Where



When

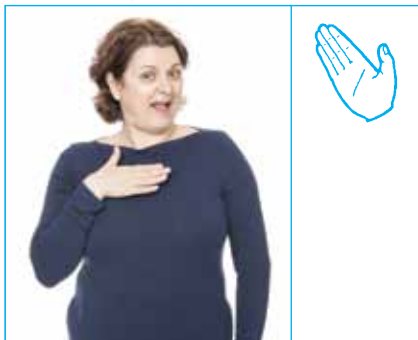


Why/Because



How

Feelings



Like



Dislike

Feelings



Good



Bad



Happy



Sad

Family



Family

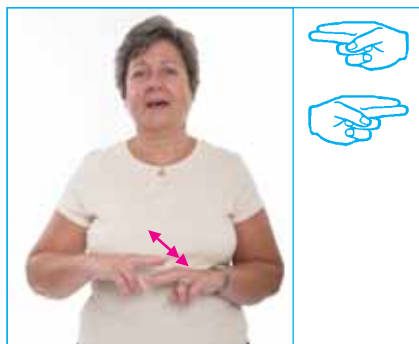


Husband/Wife

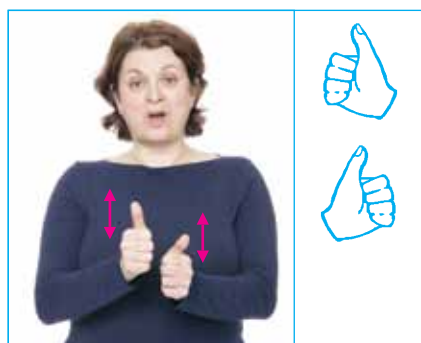
Family



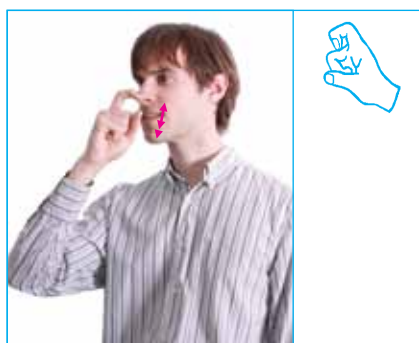
Mother



Father



Brother



Sister

Food and drink

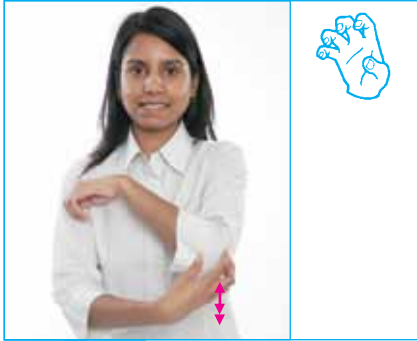


Sandwich

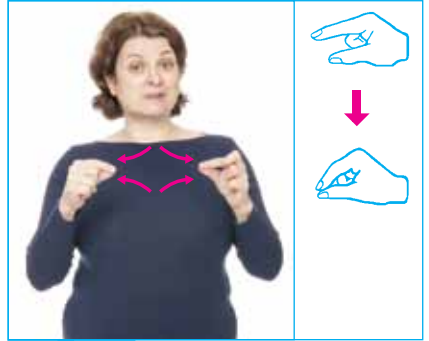


Fruit

Food and drink



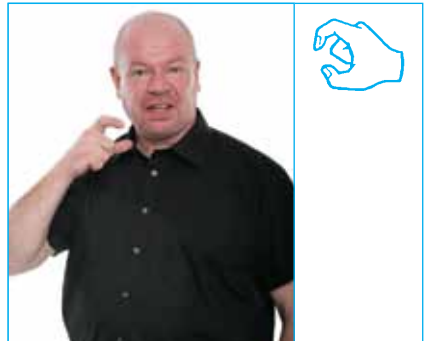
Biscuit



Chips



Tea



Coffee

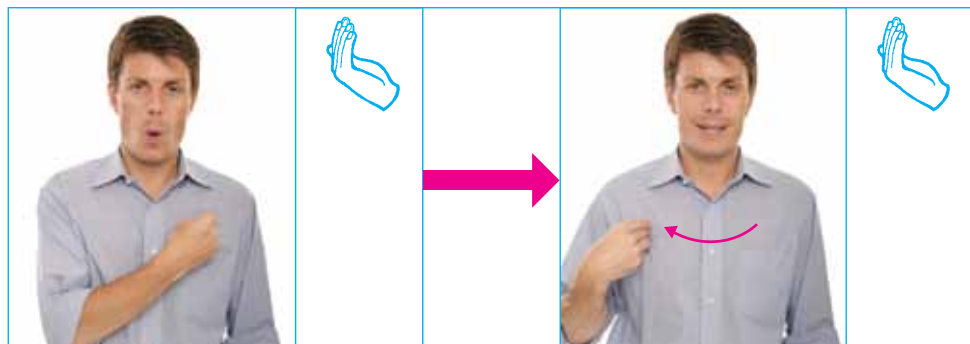


Water

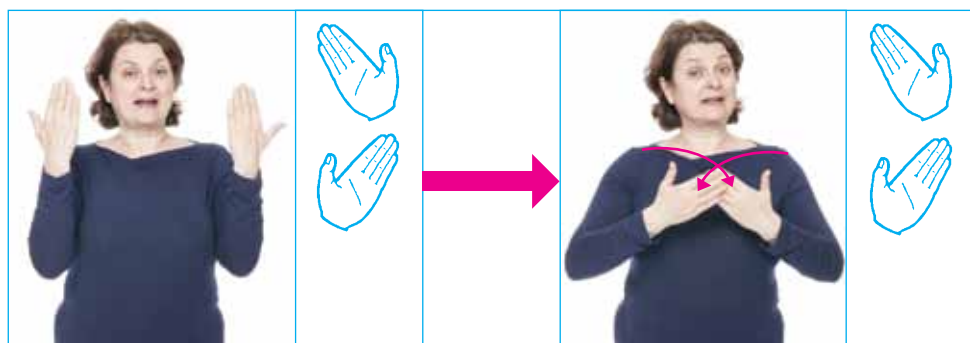


Wine

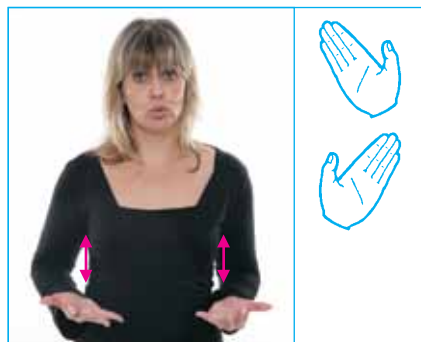
Time



Morning

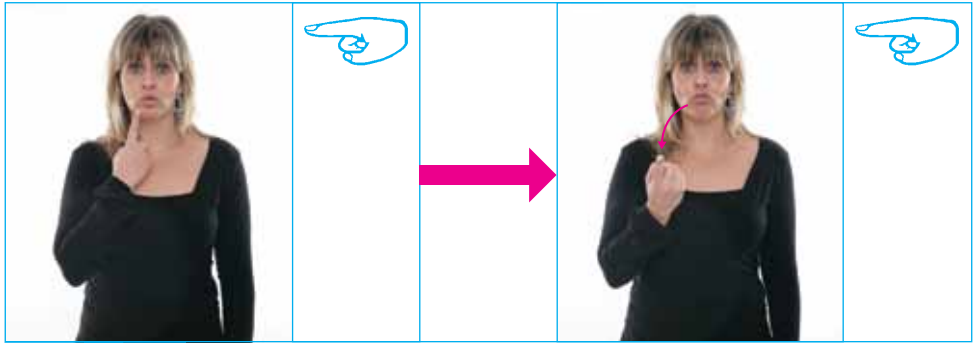


Night

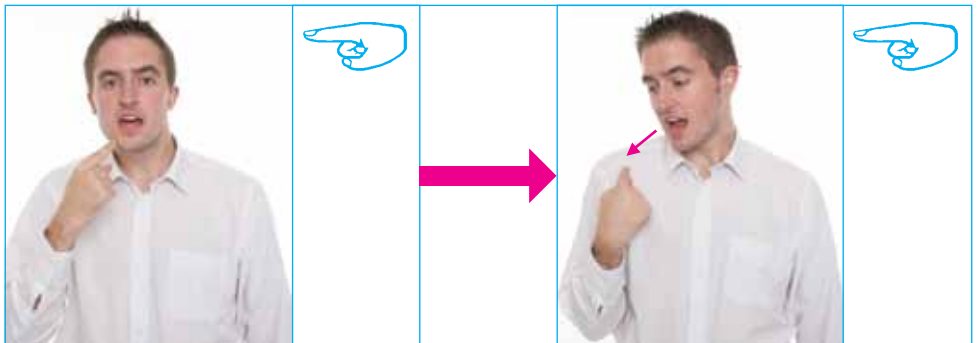


Today

Time



Tomorrow



Yesterday

Work



Work



Office

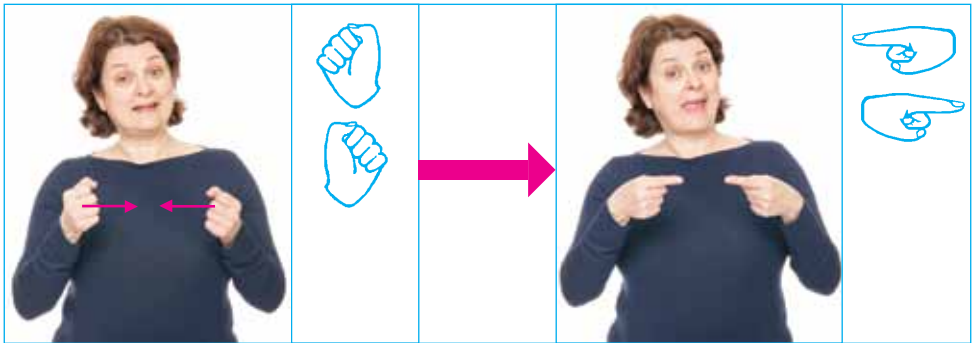
Work



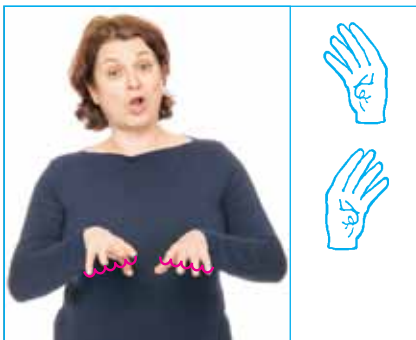
Textphone



Telephone



Email



Computer



Want to get involved?

We work for a world where hearing loss doesn't limit or label people, where tinnitus is silenced, and where people value and look after their hearing.

But we can't do this alone. We need your help to raise vital funds and awareness.



Have fun and fundraise

There are lots of fun ways you can get involved and make a real difference to the lives of the 10 million people in the UK who have some form of hearing loss. Whether you want to cycle to Paris, run a marathon, jump out of a plane or stick to cake bakes and collections, we have an event for you.

And if you'd like to organise an event in your own community, we can offer ideas and plenty of materials.

Find out more about how you can get involved

- visit www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/fundraise
- call or text our Events Team on **0845 634 0687**
- email events@hearingloss.org.uk
- write to:
Action on Hearing Loss
19-23 Featherstone Street
London EC1Y 8SL

Please send me information about:

(tick relevant boxes)

- your programme of fundraising events
- how I could help to raise money in my local community

Title (Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss) _____

First name _____

Surname _____

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

Email _____

Telephone _____

Textphone _____

Signature _____

Please return this form to:

Action on Hearing Loss
FREEPOST NAT21395
London EC1B 1BR

Please tick here if you would like to receive emails from us including your membership email every two months.

Occasionally, we may want to let you know about the work we are doing. If you would prefer not to be contacted in this way, please tick this box.

Occasionally, we will allow other organisations to contact you, but if you would prefer not to be contacted, please tick this box.

If you are happy for us to contact you by phone or by email tick this box.



Where can I get further information?

If you want to find out more about hearing loss or tinnitus, our leaflets are the perfect place to start. And if you're looking for more detailed information, we have a wide range of factsheets covering everything you need to know.

You might also find some of our other publications useful:

- *Fingerspelling alphabet* (bookmark, card or poster)
- *Irish fingerspelling alphabet* (card)
- *Welsh fingerspelling alphabet* (card)
- *Deafblind fingerspelling alphabet* (card)



Please contact our helpline (see back cover) for free copies of these. And let us know if you'd like any of our factsheets and leaflets – including this one – in Braille, large print or audio format.

You can also download our leaflets and factsheets for free at **www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/factsheets**

Start to Sign! is our British Sign Language (BSL) support book for beginners with free online access to BSL video clips. It contains colour photographs of more than 800 signs, plus lots of information on the development, structure and grammar of BSL.

To order, contact us on **01733 361199** (telephone), **01733 238020** (textphone), email **solutions@hearingloss.org.uk** or shop online at **www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/buystarttosign**

Published: September 2012. Review date: September 2013.

We welcome your feedback – please email **reviewpanel@hearingloss.org.uk**

We're the charity taking action on hearing loss since 1911. We can't do this without your help.

To find out more about what we do and how you can support us go to www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk

Telephone 0808 808 0123

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(standard text message rates apply)

Email information@hearingloss.org.uk

Action on Hearing Loss is the trading name of The Royal National Institute for Deaf People.
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**INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE**