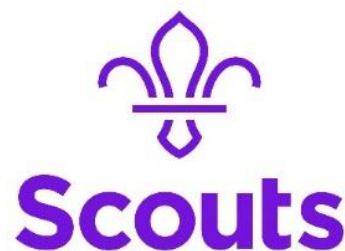


Sign language facts

Use this sheet to learn a little more about sign language



What is sign language?

Sign language is a visual means of communication. It's used by some people who are D/deaf, or who have hearing impairments – but it is also used by people with a range of learning and communication difficulties, people developing their language and literacy skills, and people looking after young children. Evidence suggests that gestures develop earlier than speech, so some people teach young children signs to help them communicate before they can talk.

Not all D/deaf people use sign language, and not everyone who uses sign language is D/deaf.

Types of sign language

British Sign Language (BSL) has its own grammar, structure, and syntax. This means that the words aren't necessarily in the same order as they are in spoken English.

Makaton uses signs and symbols to support speech. You speak while you sign, so you sign words in the same order as in spoken English. Makaton is the sign language used by programmes like Something Special.

Other countries have their own sign languages – they can be very different.

Sign language in the UK

Around 145,000 people in the UK use BSL (there are lots of different estimates depending on whether BSL is someone's first language).

BSL is a recognised minority language in the UK. It has been recognised since 2003.