

## Language Deprivation and How Our Digital Resource Library Can Help

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Today, I would like to discuss two different topics:

1. Language deprivation
2. Community
  - a. Language deprivation means language was not provided to a child between the ages of 0-5. "Language deprivation is a phenomenon so rare among hearing children that it is seldom seen outside famous cases of severe developmental pathology or criminal abuse/neglect, and yet so common among DHH children and adults that it often fails to provoke the alarm it deserves" (Hall, 2019).

Therein lies the burning question: How does someone "provide" a language? Gestures, eye-contact, and play. Yes, play. Virginia offers a Deaf Digital Resource Library that offers parents the opportunity to "play" with their children by offering ASL books online.

Deaf children are suffering. We, the Deaf community, need to "step up" and help these parents develop strategies to eliminate language deprivation. Two good books to read? "The Wild Boy of Aveyron" by Harlan Lane and "The Butterfly Cage" by Rachel Zemach. Both books are enjoyable and will give you better insights to the struggles of language deprivation, and, hopefully, encourage you to become a Deaf mentor to help eliminate language deprivation here in Virginia.

Community: There are two types of people in our community, Deaf and Hearing. Within these two communities is much intersectionality. There are variations in language for both communities.

Our Deaf children need to master at least ONE language, be it signed or spoken in order to be active participants in our community. However, there are those in the hearing community who feel spoken language is the only language our Deaf children need to master, that teaching sign language will limit their ability in life. This is far from the truth!

The science behind language learning proves that a baby exposed to sign language improves their vocabulary, visual awareness, and language acquisition in spoken language. The head scratcher for me is why is it okay to teach hearing babies sign language but not Deaf babies? The language acquisition journey is nuanced. We need YOUR help! With our new Deaf resource library, we have a way to make a difference in our community. What do I see? Opportunity! For families, for Deaf and hearing lives, for language acquisition and for Virginia to be the forerunner in embracing not only diversity, but also community.