



# COMMUNICATION CONSIDERATIONS A-Z™

## *Signing Exact English*

By Patrice Stephenson and Esther Zawolkow

### **1. What is SIGNING EXACT ENGLISH (SEE)?**

Signing Exact English (SEE) is a sign system that matches signs with the English language. It is one of the first manual English systems to be published (1972). Children who are exposed at an early age to SEE are able to learn English, including the many idiomatic expressions and uses of figurative language so unique to English. Thus, language learning opportunities are provided equivalent to those of hearing children.

### **2. What issues are at the forefront of SEE?**

Parents are the first and most influential teachers for their children and they need a way to begin communicating with their children at birth. More than 90% of deaf or hard of hearing children are born to hearing parents. For those whose native language is English, SEE is quickly and easily learned, following the rules of the language they already know. The terms “native” or “natural” are frequently used to define a language associated with deafness. The truth is that the natural language of any child is that which is used consistently and continually in communicating with the child.

SEE also provides support for the growing number of children who use cochlear implants, or who use residual hearing, allowing them to match what they see with what they hear and speak in a simultaneous communication environment. This capability provides a natural bridge

to the child's hearing peers as well as educational professionals and extended family members, whether those individuals sign or not.

### **3. What should every parent or professional know about SEE?**

SEE was developed with one objective in mind – to provide the deaf or hard of hearing child with the same English communicating capability as his/her hearing counterpart. The system provides a visual counterpart to match both spoken and written English. It is often used in combination with speech and/or auditory training, and in simultaneous communication programs. The use of SEE does not exclude the use of ASL or other sign languages or sign systems. In fact, roughly 75% of the signs in SEE are the traditional signs that are common to all sign languages or sign systems used in the United States, i.e. ASL, PSE, CASE, Signed English. Those signs in SEE are used to represent only one English word. For example, the word “finish” in other sign languages or systems can also mean “complete” “done” “end” “over”, etc. In SEE, the traditional sign for “finish” is maintained. The synonyms, or “sign family” words, have a separate sign for each word representing the actual spoken and written word in English. With that recognition, the transfer to the printed English form is done naturally. Additionally, the use of the visual features such as facial expression, body language, use of placement and directionality are shared with all the sign languages and sign systems.

The overall philosophy of the SEE Center is for every child to develop skills for communication with every person within his or her community. Establishment of a first language leads to the capacity for the child to build upon that knowledge to learn a second language. This includes ASL: a child who knows English grammar well can learn to adapt to the structure and syntax of ASL and the features unique to that language.

### **4. Where else can I find information about SEE?**

Parents can get support, learn about signing, and meet other parents and educational professionals at Skillshops conducted by the SEE Center at various locations throughout the U.S. and Canada.

Many colleges, universities and adult education centers offer classes in SEE. Wichita State University and Butler Community College (Kansas), and Cypress College, (California) are a few. Inquire in your local area for availability or request that one be established.

The most direct way to find information about SEE is by visiting the web site or contacting the SEE Center directly at:

**The SEE Center for the Advancement of Deaf Children**  
P.O. Box 1181  
Los Alamitos, CA 90720  
562-430-1467 V/TTY  
www.seecenter.org  
seecenter@seecenter.org

Another source is through materials such as curriculum tapes or DVDs offered by:

**Modern Signs Press, Inc.**  
562-596-8548  
www.modernsignspress.com  
modsigns@modernsigns.com

### **About the Authors:**

**Patrice Stephenson** became involved with deaf education nearly 28 years ago when her deaf son was born. From that time forward, clear, accurate communication has been the focus of her work. Patrice has worked internationally with the SEE Center for the Advancement of Deaf Children since 1989 and she co-edits the SEE What's Happening newsletter (on-line at [www.seecenter.org](http://www.seecenter.org)). She has worked as a skill specialist and mentor for Front Range Community College's Educational Interpreter Certificate Program, teaches in and coordinates the Educational Interpreter Development Certificate Program at Wichita State University, presents at workshops and conferences, and works actively in many related organizations to raise standards of service to students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

**Esther Zawolkow**, as a child of deaf parents (CODA), has known American Sign Language all her life. She holds a Comprehensive Skills Certificate from the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, and worked as an educational interpreter in the secondary level in southern California for many years. She is one of the developers of SEE. She has served on the National Task Force on Educational Interpreting. Esther continues to teach sign language, lecturing and conducting workshops nationally and internationally. She serves as president of Modern Signs Press and is the co-founder and a board member for the SEE Center.

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*Communication Considerations A to Z™ is a series from Hands & Voices that's designed to help families and the professionals working with them access information and further resources to assist them in raising and educating children who are deaf or hard of hearing. We've recruited some of the best in the business to share their insights on the many diverse considerations that play into communication modes & methods, and so many other variables that are part of informed decision making. We hope you find the time to read them all!*