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# *Better Together*


## ASL and Spoken Language Professionals On the Same Team

EHDI Conference - March 2026


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*Presenters:*



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Communication Specialist - ASL



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### *Objectives*

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1. Identify successful components of ASL- Spoken Language collaboration with **both professionals on the same IFSP team**, joining visits together.
2. Examine **real-life early intervention scenarios** when partnership met the unique needs of family outcomes.
3. **Reflect** on professional boundaries and purposeful teamwork in your own programming/services.

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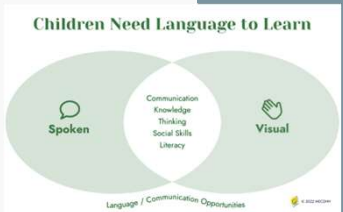
### *Setting the stage*

ASL and spoken language viewed on opposite ends of the continuum

Different languages, modalities, strategies

Different language specialists

Challenge:  
How do we bridge the divide?



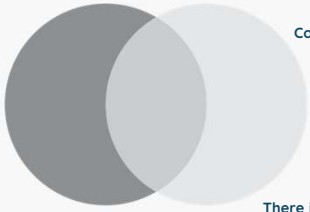
Language / Communication Opportunities

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### *Embrace the "Gray"*

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Collaboration is possible when professionals overlap



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Collaboration thrives in the gray space

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There is no "one-size fits all" for every child, every family, every language journey

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Not "either/or", but "both/and"

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### *Wisconsin's EHDI Model*




EHDI staff includes an early intervention multidisciplinary team



Full participating partner with Part C statewide program



ASL and Spoken Language Specialists as equal partners



Coaching professionals and parents/caregivers via virtual support

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### Framework for Successful Collaboration

#### Ongoing Communication

- Ongoing communication scheduled**
  - Weekly meetings 1:1
  - Team meetings weekly (Multi-disciplinary)
  - Case Conferences monthly with Support Parents
- Joint visits, In-person and Virtual**
  - Planning ahead of visit and reflection after visit
  - Visit summary notes



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### Framework for Successful Collaboration

#### Procedures

- ASL Specialist at Initial Eval / Initial IFSP**
  - Families meet Deaf Professional early in their Part C Journey
  - Both VCSSL and Auditory skills assessed from the start
- CARES Beginnings Framework with Early Intervention Coordinator**
- Differentiated Intervention support for each family**
  - Communication Opportunities presented early
  - Family's and baby's learning styles and communication goals
  - Both ASL and Spoken Language specialists available to every family with IFSP




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### Framework for Successful Collaboration

#### Assessment Protocol

- How we assess language acquisition:**
  - VCSSL
  - Auditory Skills Checklist
  - ASL/English Milestones Checklist
  - Vocabulary, Pragmatics, and speech sound Inventories
- Ongoing Assessment scores tracked via statewide database**
- Team meetings monthly**
  - IFSP updates, summary of progress shared
  - Child at-risk for delays in language acquisition?
  - Request for support (Support Parents, ASL Specialist, SLP, TODHH)




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### Early Intervention Scenario

#### Uncertain Start, Strong Advocate family

Initially, the family wanted listening/talking as primary

- Uncertainty with diagnosis and auditory access
- Functional listening activities



Early, both spoken language and ASL supports  
Later, family shifted to only ASL


**Outcome:** Family scored ASL resources independently; L1 ASL

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### Early Intervention Scenario

#### Young Mom

Former Loss To Follow Up and At-risk for Loss to Intervention



ASL primary language

Both team members join IFSP visits; Parent support especially important

Navigating path toward cochlear implant


**Outcome:** Growing together, thriving together

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### Early Intervention Scenario

#### Mixed Communication Preferences

Family of 6 uses spoken language, but as toddler grows...



**Mixed communication**

- Receptive Language: child's preference - spoken language
- Expressive Language: child's preference - ASL

ASL learning for parents and siblings, embedding into all daily routines

**Outcome:** Stronger parent-child relationship

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*Early Intervention Scenario* .....  
**Bilingual - Bicultural**


Families with newborns who are candidates for cochlear implants



Early supports: Parent-child bond, early attachment, ASL  
 Later, supporting new listening skills via CI  
 Language Plan - continue progress in both spoken language and ASL  
 Outcome: Advocacy and acceptance

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*Early Intervention Scenario* .....  
**Deaf Plus**



DHH and visual differences  
 DHH and autism  
 DHH and global developmental delays  
 DHH and craniofacial differences

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*Feedback from families*

Families value choice and feeling heard.  
 "We feel supported no matter the path."



*Feedback from Part C Providers*

Emphasis on relationship-based work.  
 Strong collaboration. Increased learning and confidence with low incidence population on their caseload. Coaching "just in time".

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*Myth Buster #1*

*Early Intervention should focus on only one communication approach.*



**Myth Busted:**

- Best Practice early intervention services are
  - Individualized
  - Family Centered
  - Flexible

Collaboration supports equitable language access.

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*Myth Buster #2*

*ASL Specialists interfere with listening goals.*




**Myth Busted:**

- Collaboration strengthens outcomes
- ASL supports engagement and connection
- Strong communication improves listening readiness

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*Myth Buster #3*

*Families must choose one language.*



**Myth Busted:**

- Families do not have to choose
- ASL supports and Spoken Language supports work together
- Supports both visual and auditory language access

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### Myth Buster #4



## ASL Specialists and SLP's do the same job.

**Myth Busted:**

- ASL Specialist
  - Visual language access and development
  - Parent-Child communication
  - Deaf culture and identity
- SLP/Spoken Language Specialist
  - Auditory access and development
  - Parent-child communication
  - Receptive language, expressive language and speech development

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### Lessons Learned: ASL Specialist



**Benefits**  
New knowledge and perspective

**Challenges**  
Balancing philosophies

**Growth**  
Stronger advocacy for families

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### Lessons Learned: SLP/Spoken Language Specialist



**Benefits**  
New knowledge and perspective

**Challenges**  
Communication and distance

**Growth**  
Learning to let go of control

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### Key Components for Success



- Scheduled ongoing communication
- Procedures to prioritize language acquisition
- Mutual respect and learner mindset
- Shared IFSP planning and responsibility
- Family centered care drives decision-making

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### Bridging the divide

Collaboration thrives in the "gray space"

Families are empowered when they are knowledgeable and when they are active participants in decision-making


ASL-Spoken Language teamwork strengthens outcomes

Everyone has the same goal: language acquisition!

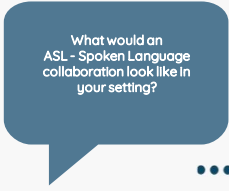


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### Reflection and Discussion



How might you expand your professional boundaries?



What would an ASL - Spoken Language collaboration look like in your setting?

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# *Thank you*

Lauren Burke & Christina Vorreyer-Davis

Contact info available upon request

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