

Utilizing an Online Interactive Tool in the Process of
Exploring Language and
Communication Opportunities
(ELCO)

EHDI 2026



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Early Intervention and Family Services Coordinator.

Member of the Earliest Interactions Maine/ EHDI team.

Serve on the Maine Interagency Coordinating Council.

Initiated and continuously refine the ELCO process.

Live in Southern Maine exploring both ocean and mountains with my husband and 7 & 10 yr old daughters.



Disclosures

Amy Spencer is a paid employee of MECDHH/GBSD as their Early Intervention and Family Services Coordinator and is a member of Maine's EHDI team.



Today's Objectives:

Participants will recognize the benefits of utilizing an interactive online tool for ELCO.

Participants will identify three ways families could use this tool during their language planning journey.

Participants will determine ways this interactive tool could benefit their state's language and communication planning approach.



ELCO

Professional Guide and Sources &
Resources Available





ELCO Interactive Overview



Reflect on connection, access, exposure, and language outcomes.

Families role as the explorer and expert on their family system and child -
What will work for *them*?
Future vision?

Pivot as needed without judgement.

Caregiver-child interactions as a foundation.



Many pieces are happening simultaneously.

Explicit about our role as informer/ guide/ facilitator.

*Guide
NOT
a script.*





**Connection/Access/Exposure
EMPOWERMENT**



Giving families encouragement to explore, learn, and evolve.

Families valued learning about their child's deafness in a guided and exploratory way with no pressure to make one decision. When encouraged to explore this process, their journey began with emotion and then landed them at a place of normalcy, acceptance, and empowerment (K. Hopkins & Puhlman J. 2025)



Give them the tools

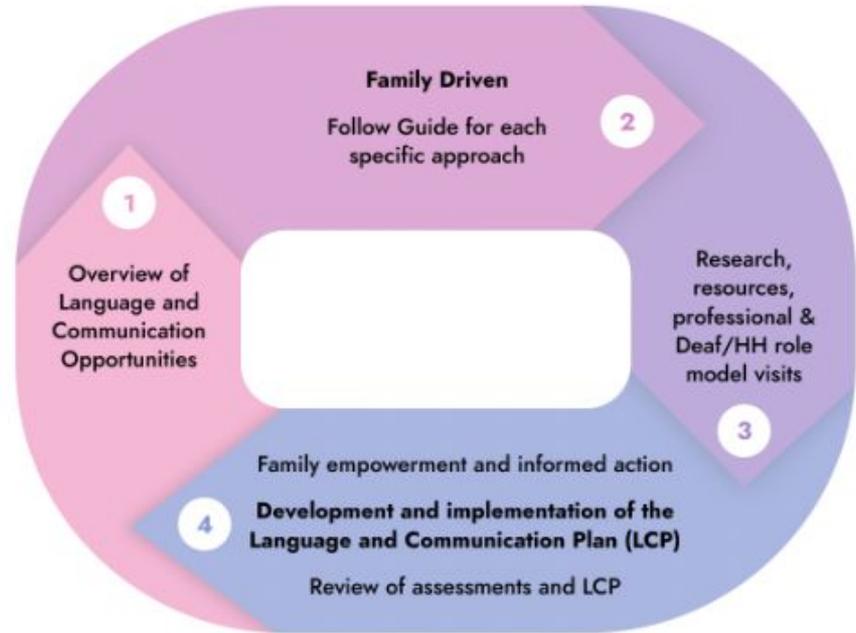
...

WAIT, WATCH,
WONDER

Revisit
together and
independently

...

Professional Approach



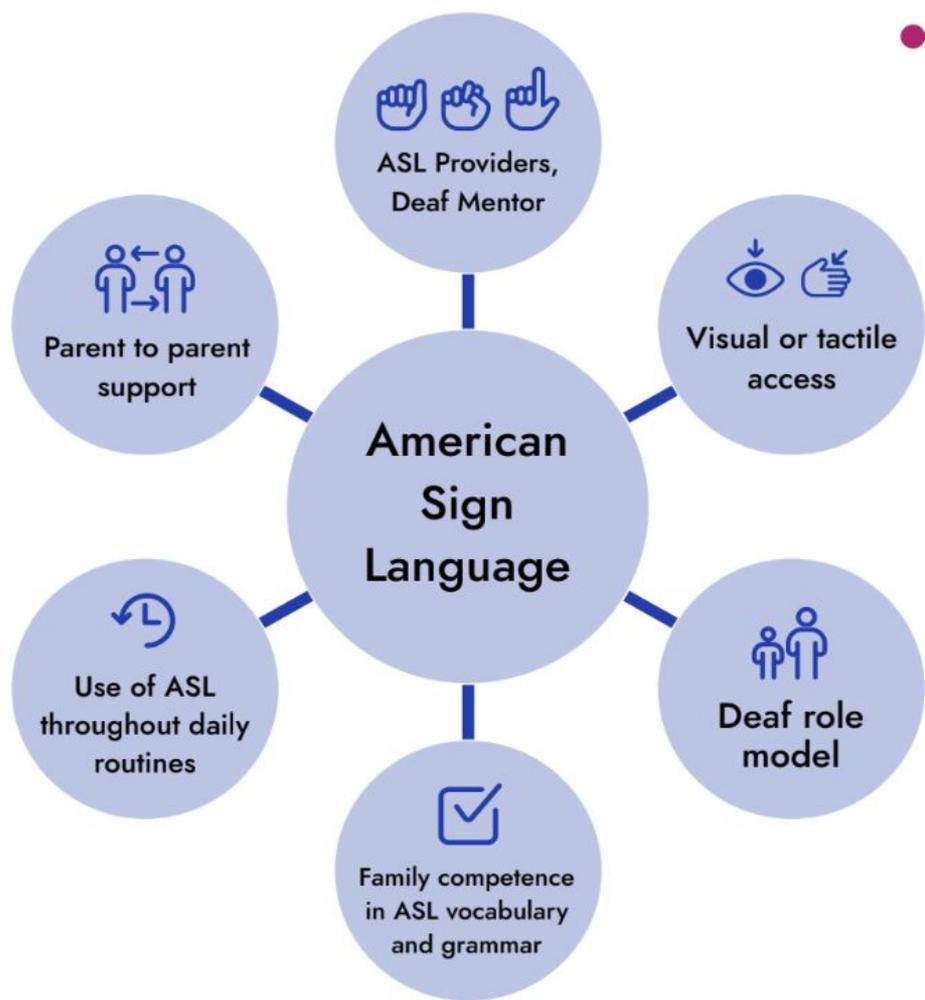


ELCO Interactive Overview



What needs to be in place

Builds the IFSP
services and outcomes



Click to...

One Paragraph Description

Professional Overview Video

Family Perspective Video

Resources

American Sign Language

ASL is a visually perceived language that uses the hands, body, and facial expressions to communicate the same kinds of words and thoughts as spoken languages. It is a formally recognized language used by the Deaf Community. ASL is a fully accessible language to children who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing regardless of their hearing levels and can be a building block to spoken language development.

[American Sign Language: ELCO Overview](#)

[ASL Nook](#)

[Signing Time](#)

[VL2: Visual Language and Visual Learning](#)

[Family Experiences: ASL](#)

“When information was provided in a variety of formats, families were able to access in a way that was meaningful to them.” (K. Hopkins & Puhlman J. 2025)



Bilingual Bimodal



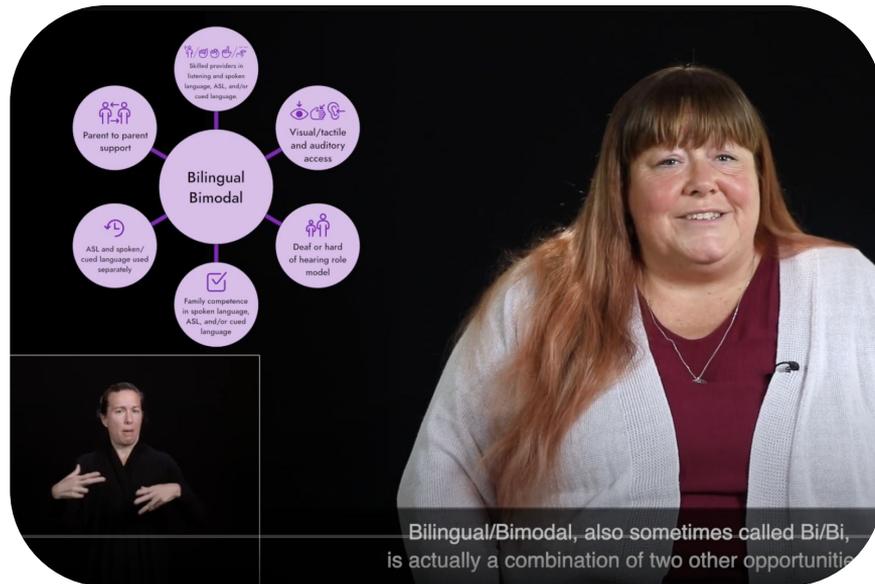
The Bilingual Bimodal approach supports the acquisition of both American Sign Language (ASL) and spoken language. “Bilingual” refers to the fluent use of both languages. This approach includes early access to visual language, while providing the use of hearing technology for access to spoken language. The languages are kept separate, and not used simultaneously. The family prioritizes learning and using both ASL and spoken language throughout their day to day activities.

Links

- [Bilingual/Bimodal: ELCO Overview](#)
- [Family Experiences: Bilingual/Bimodal](#)
- [Language First](#)
- [The Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center](#)
- [ASL Nook](#)
- [ASL Pro](#)
- [Gallaudet University](#)
- [Handspeak](#)
- [Signing Time](#)
- [VL2: Visual Language and Visual Learning](#)
- [Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#)
- [Hearing First](#)



OVERVIEW



Listening and Spoken Language



These methods focus on maximizing the use of residual hearing and hearing technology in order to learn the spoken language of the family. The child is encouraged to use listening to understand spoken language in their environment in order to communicate. Auditory skill development is built into the child's daily life, as are speech and language goals. There are two approaches: The Auditory Oral (AO) approach encourages the use of visuals as a supplement to listening, such as gestures and sign support. The Auditory Verbal (AV) approach emphasizes listening, without visual support. Supplementary visual support may be added as needed.

Links

- [Listening & Spoken Language - Auditory Verbal: ELCO Overview](#)
- [Listening & Spoken Language - Auditory Oral: ELCO Overview](#)
- [Family Experiences: Listening & Spoken Language Auditory Oral Approach](#)
- [Family Experiences: Listening & Spoken Language Auditory Verbal Approach](#)
- [Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#)
- [Hearing First](#)
- [Sound Beginnings](#)

FAMILY PERSPECTIVES



Cued Speech / Language



Cued speech is a visual system of eight hand shapes used in one of four positions around the face (called cues) that a speaker uses to clarify speech sounds and words that look alike or are not visible on the lips. Cued speech provides complete visual access to the sounds of spoken language, regardless of hearing levels, and is an effective tool for literacy development.

Links

-  [Cued Language: ELCO Overview](#)
-  [Family Experiences: Cued Language](#)
-  [CueOn, LLC.](#)
-  [Cue College](#)
-  [Cue Everything](#)
-  [Cue Sign](#)
-  [Daily Cues](#)
-  [National Cued Speech Association](#)

RESOURCES to EXPLORE



Manually Coded English Systems



Manually Coded English Systems were developed to provide visual access to spoken English. Many families utilize Sign Supported Speech, which involves the addition of signs to support understanding of spoken language. Unlike ASL, manually coded systems use signs in English word order and may add certain signs to show the grammar of English.

Links

-  [Manually Coded English: ELCO Overview](#)
-  [Family Experiences: Manually Coded English](#)
-  [The S.E.E. Center](#)
-  [Signing Exact English Online dictionary.](#)



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Benefits to Families...



Revisit overview and the needed elements of CONNECTION, ACCESS, EXPOSURE for each approach.

Exploration guides creation of a family vision.

Allows for reflecting on what is working, not working, or any gaps that need to be filled.

Repetition of information in a variety of formats for adult learning.

Share accurate information with others.



Benefits to DHH EI Providers/ Agencies...

Ensure complete and accurate statewide consistency in information sharing.

Clear overview and the needed elements CONNECTION, ACCESS, EXPOSURE for each approach.

Repetition of information in a variety of formats for adult learning built in.

Ability to offer a place for families to explore and learn from independently.

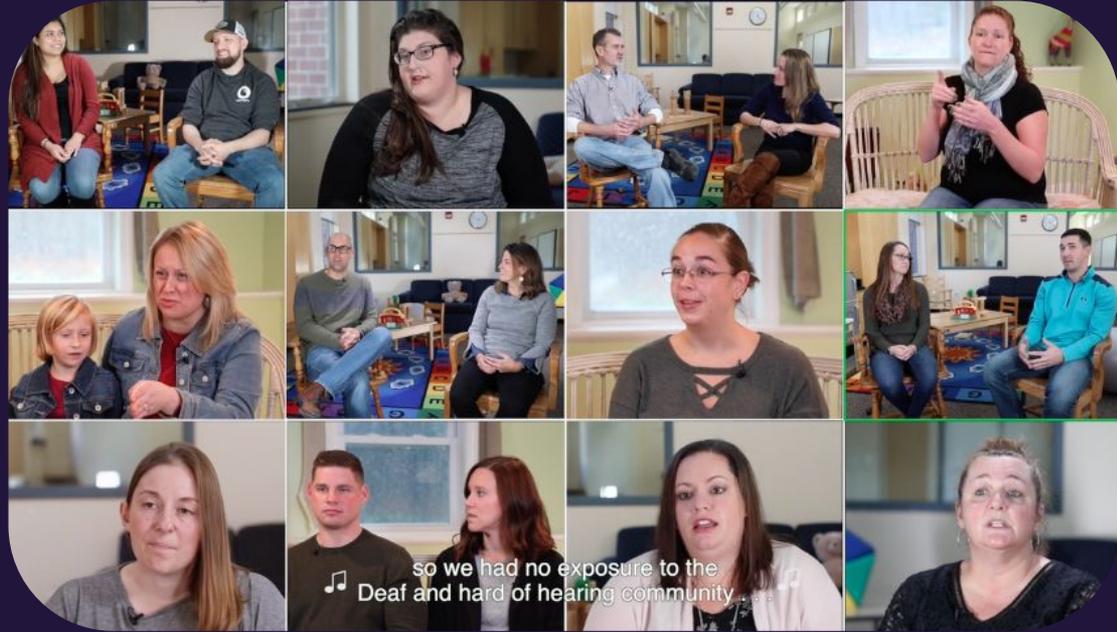
Parents felt that they could “guide the process in a way that felt right for them, appreciating the balance of independence and professional guidance from their early interventionist.” (K. Hopkins & Puhlman J. 2025)



Exploring Language and Communication Opportunities

Advice From Parents

<https://vimeo.com/761194758/ba29c4d72a>



How do you share language and communication opportunities with families?

What are 3 things you can do to improve family empowerment in this process?



Maine's EHDI Website

Welcome to Earliest Interactions

We are a HRSA grant-funded program of the Maine Newborn Hearing Program that supports families of children who are deaf and hard of hearing throughout their journeys, from screening, to identification, to early intervention and beyond.



**Family
Resources**



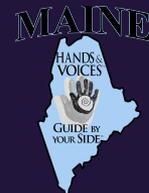
**Professional
Resources**



QUESTIONS/ Contact Info

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