



Is it appropriate to sign certain concepts even if young Deaf children might see them?

To answer your question, yes, it is best to use ASL visual imagery so that Deaf communities can clearly understand messages.

There are certain signs we need to sign directly for clear communication. Please allow me to share my experiences working with young Deaf children during my visits, mentor sessions, and performance shows. Sometimes it is necessary to use specific methods of communication to fit audience understanding and communication levels.

Some Deaf people use high visual-gestural communication. Some use contact sign (formerly called PSE). Some use Signing Exact English (SEE). I sat next to a deaf person who was watching an interpreter. The Deaf person's back-channel feedback showed that some signs were not understood. The interpreter was using contact sign (PSE, or sign that incorporates English).

I noticed some signs that were used, such as

- 1) Make a baby
- 2) Change the oil
- 3) Become a police officer (cop)

The Deaf person didn't get these messages clearly, so I translated into ASL:

- 1) Mom and Dad, Mom pregnant (If a Deaf student asks "how?" someone can elaborate in another setting)
- 2) Open car's hood, go under car – take oil out, put new oil in
- 3) Person goal to work

In my video showing various meanings for the English word, "love" you will notice the direct sign I use for "making love." That is a realistic sign that is in common use throughout society. If we, instead, sign "make love" in English, I don't think all Deaf people would understand the concept. Hearing people tend to understand both direct and idiomatic words and phrases. However, Deaf people tend to understand visual imagery. Using visual imagery in ASL is best. I put the word "intercourse" in the captions, as an appropriate word that people can learn is

associated with a specific sign. Of course, using captions labeling the sign as "f ... ing" would be inappropriate. Usually, choosing a sign is dependent on the context.

Sex education is being taught in middle schools, and it is appropriate to offer deaf children clear communication about this topic. We can teach Deaf children appropriate ways to sign and write, and we can identify inappropriate ways. When I visited a deaf school, there were high school Deaf students who just didn't know how to use manners in the ways they signed and wrote. I jumped up to explain how to use positive words, instead of negative words. They hadn't realized that there was a difference. Perhaps there are many situations in which Deaf students are provided only limited education. We need to offer correct and clear communication.

It's difficult to say if signing something generally recognized as the idea of "intercourse" is a reasonable choice, or an inappropriate choice. An instructor can make that decision. I understand the controversy about an "explicit" sign such as "intercourse". English has about 1,000 ways to obscure/hide/obfuscate/use euphemisms to say something that is unclear. This type of writing or speech may be used to seem tactful. Euphemisms change throughout history. Example: People used to use the words "He's a little slow" and as that meaning became insulting, people changed to "special needs" until being "special" became an insult. Then the phrases changed to "intellectually challenged" and "developmentally delayed" ... these types of vocabulary changes are meant to be respectful, yet sometimes they simply confuse Deaf audiences. Hearing people who speak and write English tend to use a lot of euphemisms.

To my knowledge, ASL has very few signs that are euphemistic.

ASL is generally direct and clear. Showing the meaning of a word or phrase in English may require a direct sign in ASL that could be criticized as too direct. Yet trying to "hide" an idea or concept by changing from ASL to "English signing" to express that one idea without offending anyone may leave ASL-users confused.

Translating "making love" as "intercourse" could be OK. It could also offend some people. It could also be rejected by some people as inappropriate for children to see. In English, "making love" generally (most often) means "having intercourse" but not always. Sometimes it means "physical intimacy" in a broader sense. To say this in ASL might require a long list of possible specifics. That could be considered even more controversial.