

ASL Mealtime Signs

27 Activity Cards for Families

Tip for parents: Sign consistently every mealtime. Start with 3-5 high-motivation signs (EAT, MILK, HELP, HUNGRY + a favorite food). Receptive understanding comes before expressive signing - keep going even when your child isn't signing back yet! For video references, visit [Handspeak.com](https://www.handspeak.com) or [Lifeprint.com](https://www.lifeprint.com).

■ Eat

ACTION

HOW TO SIGN

Bring flat O hand (fingertips touching thumb) to mouth repeatedly, as if placing food in.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Say 'eat' + sign every time food comes out
- * Ask 'Do you want to eat?' before each meal
- * Let child sign EAT to request more food

■ Cereal

FOOD

HOW TO SIGN

Crook your index finger and drag it across your chin from side to side like a rake.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Sign while pouring cereal into the bowl
- * Name the cereal brand + sign each morning
- * Let child pick cereal + practice the sign

■ Apple

FOOD

HOW TO SIGN

Place a bent index finger against your cheek and twist it forward and back.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Sign when offering apple slices
- * Look at apple colors together + sign
- * Pair with fruit songs + signing

■ Cheese

FOOD

HOW TO SIGN

Place palms together (dominant on top) and twist back and forth, like pressing a wheel of cheese.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Sign while grating or slicing cheese
- * Try different cheeses + sign each time
- * Add to snack routine: 'cheese?' + sign

■ Egg

FOOD

HOW TO SIGN

Hold two H hands together and arc them apart and down, like cracking an egg.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Let child 'help' crack eggs + sign together
- * Sign scrambled, fried, boiled to expand
- * Read 'Green Eggs and Ham' + practice sign

■ Like

FEELING

HOW TO SIGN

Place thumb and middle finger on chest, then pull outward as if pulling 'like' from your heart.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Ask 'Do you like it?' after each new food
- * Make a 'foods I like' chart with signs
- * Pair with facial expressions for fun

■ Don't like

FEELING

HOW TO SIGN

Same as LIKE but flick hand outward away from body and shake head slightly.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Validate the sign - it's okay to dislike foods!
- * Sign 'don't like + food name' together
- * Use to avoid mealtime meltdowns

■ Good

FEELING

HOW TO SIGN

Touch fingertips to lips (flat hand), then bring hand forward and down into other palm.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Sign 'good' + praise after tasting
- * Ask 'Is it good?' + wait for response
- * Use in 'good morning' routine too

■ Bad

FEELING

HOW TO SIGN

Touch fingertips to lips, then flip hand downward and outward (opposite of GOOD).

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Pair with GOOD so child learns both
- * No pressure - let child express 'bad' taste
- * Use for hot/cold too: 'bad hot!'

■ Hamburger

FOOD

HOW TO SIGN

Cup both hands together (one on top, one below) then flip and repeat, like shaping a patty.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Sign while assembling burger ingredients
- * Play pretend restaurant + sign the order
- * Sign during grocery shopping for beef

■ Hot

FEELING

HOW TO SIGN

Cup hand at mouth and quickly move it away, turning wrist outward - like spitting out hot food.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Sign 'hot' before child touches steam
- * Use at stove, oven, and hot plates
- * Pair with COLD for contrast games

■ Cold

FEELING

HOW TO SIGN

Hold fists near shoulders and shake them as if shivering from cold.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Sign when opening the fridge
- * Practice with ice cubes - feel + sign
- * Contrast HOT food vs COLD drink at meals

■ Hungry

FEELING

HOW TO SIGN

Make a C-shape on your chest and slide it down toward your stomach - tracing hunger.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Ask 'Hungry?' before every meal
- * Teach child to sign when they want food
- * Pair with EAT: 'hungry eat!'

■ Cup

ACTION

HOW TO SIGN

Form a C-shape with dominant hand and place it on flat non-dominant palm, like setting down a cup.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Sign when setting out cups at meals
- * Practice: 'cup + drink'
- * Let child choose their cup + sign together

■ Drink

ACTION

HOW TO SIGN

Make a C-shape (like holding a cup) and tilt it toward your mouth as if drinking.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Sign every time you offer a beverage
- * Pair with specific drinks: 'drink milk'
- * Use to check in: 'want to drink?'

■ Help

ACTION

HOW TO SIGN

Place A-hand (fist, thumb up) on flat non-dominant palm and lift both hands together.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Teach early - reduces frustration!
- * Prompt 'need help?' when child struggles
- * Practice with opening food packages

■ Cracker

FOOD

HOW TO SIGN

Tap elbow of one arm with the opposite fist, like knocking (think: crack-er).

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Sign at snack time with crackers
- * Let child sign to request crackers
- * Pair with CHEESE: 'cracker + cheese'

■ Bird

FOOD

HOW TO SIGN

Place G-hand (index + thumb extended) at side of mouth and open/close like a beak.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Use when serving chicken or turkey
- * Watch birds outside + connect to food sign
- * Pair with farm animal sounds for fun

■ Milk

DRINK

HOW TO SIGN

Squeeze hand open and closed repeatedly, like milking a cow.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Sign every time you pour milk
- * Practice with the 'moo' cow connection
- * Let child sign MILK to request refill

■ Orange

DRINK

HOW TO SIGN

Hold C-hand at chin and squeeze it closed repeatedly, like squeezing an orange.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Sign when offering OJ or orange slices
- * Practice squeezing a real orange
- * Match orange color objects + practice

■ Grape

FOOD

HOW TO SIGN

Bent hand hops down the back of opposite hand, fingertips bunching like clusters of grapes.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Count grapes + sign while eating
- * Compare purple + green grapes, sign both
- * Practice fine motor + signing together

■ Juice

DRINK

HOW TO SIGN

Sign the letter J (pinky out, draw a J in the air) after the sign for DRINK.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Sign at juice box or cup time
- * Practice J handshape as a letter activity
- * Compare: 'juice' vs 'milk' vs 'water'

■ Coffee

DRINK

HOW TO SIGN

Stack fists and rotate dominant hand in circles on top of the other, like grinding coffee beans.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Parent models while making morning coffee
- * Child learns 'that's mommy/daddy's drink'
- * Discuss hot drinks + sign HOT + COFFEE

■ Tea

DRINK

HOW TO SIGN

Pinch fingers with dominant hand and stir in a circle inside the other O-hand, like dipping a tea bag.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Sign during tea time or afternoon snack
- * Compare COFFEE vs TEA motions
- * Ask: 'is tea hot or cold?'

■ Hot Dog

FOOD

HOW TO SIGN

Link index fingers and thumbs in a chain and pull apart in segments - like linking sausages.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Sign at BBQs and cookouts
- * Let child help slice (safe knife) + sign
- * Connect: 'hot dog = bird?' conversation

■ Ice Cream

FOOD

HOW TO SIGN

Hold a fist (like holding a cone) and lick downward with two licking motions near the mouth.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Use as a motivating treat sign!
- * Practice on a hot day for extra excitement
- * Sign the flavor too: 'ice cream + orange'

■ Spaghetti

FOOD

HOW TO SIGN

Extend both pinky fingers and make small circular spirals moving apart from center - like long pasta twirling.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS

- * Sign while twirling noodles on a fork
- * Cook pasta together + practice sign
- * Silly spaghetti sounds + signs = fun memory