

Still unable to speak, Tina signs "all done."



Here, Tina gives the sign for "bee."



Hopefully, an "apple" is on the menu.



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# 'SIGNS' OF ENDEARMENT

**BY HEATHER SCHULTZ**

**A** baby's first words are music to their parents' ears. With that in mind, Lifeskool programming (available free via On Demand cable television) is featuring the instructional series "My Baby Can Talk" to help preverbal tots learn how to communicate through basic sign language skills.

The 10- to 15-minute segments are based on videos by Kathleen Waidhofer, creative director of Baby Hands Productions. Waidhofer, who founded BHP after raising her son and daughter, taught her daughter how to sign at age 10 months through an American Sign Language dictionary — and without having any background in sign language. Within two weeks, her daughter started signing

back, reaching the 100-sign mark at 12 months.

Compared to her son's upbringing, raising her daughter was a more positive experience and less frustrating, she says.

"One of our goals is to reach as many parents as we can," says Waidhofer. "Lifeskool has high-quality programming. We were careful about who we partnered with."

### VISIONS OF AT-HOME 'SKOOLING'

Lifeskool's On Demand platform offers 40 hours of content to 14 million homes nationwide each month. Dan Ronayne, executive vice president, believes the innovative series fits his network's vision to provide educational and inspirational programming.

"My Baby Can Talk is the next evolution where we're

taking our kids programming," he says. "It's all about helping people get better at the things they really enjoy."

A study conducted by two professors at the University of California Davis — published in 2000 by the National Institute of Health — claims that babies who use sign language speak sooner and develop a higher IQ. Learning sign language also reduces temper tantrums associated with the "terrible twos."

Parents are encouraged to watch the series four to five times a week until their babies master the signs they're interested in. After babies develop the 200 muscles needed for speech, they sign less.

"We want to make sure preverbal babies don't have to cry to get wants and needs met," says Waidhofer. "Our goal is to help hearing babies get to the point where they speak."

of Liberty to snap a picture. A percentage of ticket sales