

# You Can... **Make the most of your hands**

*Non-verbal communication is very powerful in the classroom. It appears almost as though the teacher is performing magic – he or she can get a class to listen and behave, apparently without doing anything at all! Your hands are a particularly expressive part of your body, and young children seem to respond to hand signals especially well. Make the most of your hands to help you create a calm atmosphere.*

## Thinking points

- Non-verbal communication helps keep noise levels down, and encourages you to control your temper. Communicating non-verbally helps you resist the temptation to talk loudly or shout over the class.
- From our earliest days, we use our hands to touch and to interact with the environment.
- Your hands are one of the most expressive parts of your body: they are vital for communicating with others.
- Watch what you do with them – they can cause friction if used in the wrong way. Pointing at individuals is generally interpreted as an aggressive action, so try to avoid doing this.

## Tips, ideas and activities

- Train yourself to talk less and communicate more in a non-verbal way. Explore a variety of ways of talking to your class with your hands. You might:
  - put your finger to your lips to get silence
  - tug on an ear lobe to signal *please listen*
  - push both hands palms downwards to calm the class or to signal *sit down*
  - put one hand up, palm outwards, as a *Stop!* signal
  - give a 'thumbs up' sign to show your approval.
- Use clicks and claps to gain the children's attention: for instance three short sharp claps to silence the class. Tell the children that they should stop work and join in when you click in a rhythm, then gradually slow down the speed until you all stop together. Children find it hard to click/clap and talk at the same time, so this is a good way to get the class silent.
- Use a series of hand movements to 'talk' with the class. Although not all the children will understand fully, usually enough of the class will know what you are 'saying' and the rest will follow. Here is a series of hand signals to get the children standing silently and lining up by the door:
  - fingers tug ear to indicate *listen*
  - index finger to lips to say *be silent*
  - three, two, one countdown on fingers to prepare them to move
  - both palms lifting upwards to indicate *stand up*
  - palm facing class to show *stop and wait for my next instruction*
  - point to the door to show the direction
  - arm held out straight to show *line*, two fingers of other hand moving down the arm to show *single file*
  - three, two, one countdown on fingers, then thumbs up to say *off you go*.
- I have had great fun teaching my students sign language, and this can be combined with introducing the alphabet. For a series of animated pictures showing the British Sign Language alphabet, see [www.british-sign.co.uk](http://www.british-sign.co.uk).