

Deaf-Blindness Fact Sheet



Communication

The most important challenge for parents is often to communicate meaningfully with the child who is deaf-blind. Continual good communication will help foster his or her healthy development.

Principal communication systems for persons who are deaf-blind are these:

- touch cues
- gestures
- object symbols
- picture symbols
- sign language
- fingerspelling
- Signed English
- Pidgin Signed English
- braille writing and reading
- Tadoma method of speech reading
- American Sign Language
- large print writing and reading
- lip-reading speech

Adapted from NICHY (2011)

What is Deaf-Blindness?

A person who is deaf-blind has a unique experience of the world. For people who can see and hear, the world extends outward as far as his or her eyes and ears can reach. For the young child who is deaf-blind, the world is initially much narrower. If the child is profoundly deaf and totally blind, his or her experience of the world extends only as far as the fingertips can reach. Their concepts of the world depend upon what or whom they have had the opportunity to physically contact.

If a child who is deaf-blind has some usable vision and/or hearing, as many do, her or his world will be enlarged. Many children called deaf-blind have enough vision to be able to move about in their environments, recognize familiar people, see sign language at close distances, and perhaps read large print. Others have sufficient hearing to recognize familiar sounds, understand some speech, or develop speech themselves. The range of sensory impairments included in the term "deaf-blindness" is great.

Definition of Deaf-Blindness under IDEA

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), defines Deaf-Blindness as...

...concomitant [simultaneous] hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness. [34 CFR §300.8(c)(2)]

Orientation and Mobility

Helping a young child who is deaf-blind learn to move may begin with thoughtful attention to the physical space around him or her (crib or other space) so that whatever movements the child instinctively makes are rewarded with interesting stimulation that motivates further movement. Orientation and mobility specialists can help parents and teachers to construct safe and motivating spaces for the young child who is deaf-blind.

Though deaf-blindness presents many unique challenges to both those who have visual and hearing impairments and to their caregivers and friends, these challenges are by no means insurmountable. Many persons who are deaf-blind have achieved a quality of life that is excellent. The persons who are deaf-blind who have high quality lives have several things in common.