



Making Sense of DeafBlindness: Key Terms for NC Families

.....

Understanding the world of DeafBlindness can feel overwhelming, especially for families navigating this for the first time. Whether your child has a combined vision & hearing loss diagnosis or you're simply seeking clarity on the terminology professionals use, this guide is for you. This resource defines essential terms that you may encounter while working with educators, medical providers & support agencies. We hope that this information empowers you with clear, family-friendly explanations that support informed decision-making and effective advocacy for your child.

American Sign Language (ASL)

Definition: *A full visual language with its own grammar and rules, used by many people who are Deaf or hard of hearing.*

Why It Matters: ASL is often adapted for DeafBlind individuals through tactile methods.

Assistive Technology

Definition: *Any tool or device that helps a person with a disability do something more independently - like a braille display, screen reader, or vibrating alert system.*

Why It Matters: Assistive tech supports access to learning, communication, and the environment.

Braille

Definition: *A system of raised dots that people read with their fingers. It's used by people who are blind or have low vision to read and write.*

Why It Matters: Braille provides access to literacy and communication for many children with visual impairments.

CYSHCN (Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs)

Definition: *CYSHCN have or are at increased risk for having chronic physical, developmental, behavioral, or emotional conditions. They have conditions such as asthma, sickle cell disease, epilepsy, anxiety, autism, and learning disorders.*

Why It Matters: They may require more specialized health and educational services to thrive, even though each child's needs may vary.

Concept Development

Definition: *How a person learns and understands ideas about the world - like knowing what "cold" means or understanding the use of everyday objects.*

Why It Matters: Children who are DeafBlind need repeated, hands-on experiences to develop concepts that others might learn by seeing or hearing.

DeafBlind

Definition: *A person with both hearing and vision loss, which together make it difficult to access information, communicate, and move independently. A person does not have to be completely deaf or completely blind to be considered DeafBlind.*

Why It Matters: DeafBlindness is a unique disability category, and children with this combination of sensory losses may need specific supports to learn and thrive.

Dual Sensory Loss

Definition: *Another way to describe DeafBlindness, meaning the person has both hearing and vision loss.*

Why It Matters: The term is used in education, assessments, and healthcare and may appear in evaluations or eligibility documents.

Educational Interpreter

Definition: *A trained professional who helps students by translating spoken language into sign language or another form of communication.*

Why It Matters: Interpreters help DeafBlind students access learning and interact with others in the school setting.

Etiology

Definition: *Etiology describes the cause or causes of a condition.*

Why It Matters: More than 70 etiologies of DeafBlindness are identified. Many of these causes are associated with coexisting complex medical conditions.

Haptics

Definition: *A system of touch cues delivered on the body (such as tapping or stroking on the back or arm) that shares emotional, social, or environmental information.*

Why It Matters: Haptics help individuals who are DeafBlind understand what's happening around them during conversations or events.

Hearing Impairment (HI)

Definition: *Any kind of hearing loss, from mild to profound, including deafness.*

Why It Matters: Hearing impairments affect how a person receives spoken language and sounds and may qualify them for services.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Definition: *A federal law that ensures students with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) through special education and related services.*

Why It Matters: IDEA is the foundation for services like IEPs, IFSPs, and related supports. It guarantees that eligible children with disabilities - including those who are DeafBlind- have the right to learn in the least restrictive environment and receive services tailored to their needs.

IEP (Individualized Education Program)

Definition: *A legal plan for students aged 3–21 who qualify for special education. It lists services, goals, and supports based on the student's needs.*

Why It Matters: Children who are DeafBlind often need personalized goals and services written into their IEP to support communication and learning.

IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan)

Definition: *A service plan for children from birth to age 3 that focuses on the child's development and includes goals and support for the family.*

Why It Matters: It helps babies and toddlers who are DeafBlind get early support to grow, learn, and connect with their families and caregivers.

Intervener

Definition: *A trained support professional who works one-on-one with a student who is DeafBlind to help them access information, communication, and the environment.*

Why It Matters: Interveners are key to helping students who are DeafBlind connect with the world around them in meaningful ways.

Language Facilitator

Definition: *A Deaf para-professional that provides direct language instruction for Deaf students who are language deprived between preK-3rd grade, who without any language and has an urgent need to acquire a first language as soon as possible. Language facilitators combat any delays in acquiring a first language by immersing the child in a natural language environment.*

Why it Matters: Without addressing such language deficits it can result in language difficulties for life.

NC DeafBlind Census

Definition: *A yearly statewide count of children and youth in North Carolina who are DeafBlind.*

Why It Matters: The census helps improve services, guide planning, and secure funding for needed supports.

Parent Counseling and Training

Definition: *A related service that helps families understand and support their child's disability and special education plan.*

Why It Matters: Families play a critical role in their child's education, and this support builds their confidence and knowledge.

Person-Centered Planning

Definition: *A process for making decisions and setting goals that focuses on what's important to the individual, with their voice at the center.*

Why It Matters: This approach ensures that the child or youth is seen as a whole person - not just their disability - and helps build a future based on their strengths and preferences.

Proprioception

Definition: *Perception or awareness of the position and movement of the body.*

Why It Matters: Children who are DeafBlind may need extra support with body awareness, movement, and coordination.

Related Services

Definition: *Extra supports a student receives through an IEP, such as therapy, interpreting, or orientation and mobility instruction that are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education*

Why It Matters: Essential for students who are DeafBlind to benefit fully from their education.

Sensory Integration

Definition: *The way the brain processes and organizes information from the senses (touch, movement, sight, sound, taste, and smell).*

Why It Matters: Some children who are DeafBlind struggle with sensory integration, which may affect how they react to their environment or new experiences.

Tactile ASL (TASL)

Definition: *A form of American Sign Language received through touch—usually by placing hands on the signer's hands.*

Why It Matters: Children who are DeafBlind often rely on their sense of touch to explore, communicate, and learn about the world. Tactile ASL allows individuals who are DeafBlind to communicate directly with others using sign language.

Total Communication

Definition: *Total Communication is the philosophy of educating children with hearing / vision loss that incorporates all means of communication; formal signs, natural gestures, fingerspelling, body language, listening, lipreading and speech. The goal is to optimize language development in whatever way is most effective for the individual child.*

Why It Matters: Each DeafBlind child is very unique. Total Communication provides a variety of ways to interact with an individual, allowing them every opportunity to make connections, learn and grow.

Vestibular

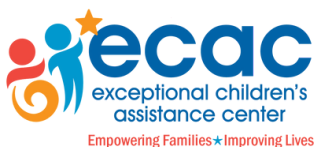
Definition: *Related to balance and movement, managed by the inner ear.*

Why It Matters: Some children who are DeafBlind have vestibular challenges that affect walking, standing, or maintaining balance.

Visual Impairment (VI)

Definition: *A loss of vision ranging from mild to total blindness.*

Why It Matters: Children with visual impairments may need materials in braille, large print, or tactile formats to learn and participate.



1-800-962-6817
www.ecac-parentcenter.org

NORTH CAROLINA
DeafBlind Project

