



Communication and Deaf-Blindness

DEFINITION

Deaf-blindness is a rare condition in which an individual has combined hearing and vision loss, thus limiting access to both auditory and visual information. It may seem that deaf-blindness refers to a total inability to see or hear; however, the type and severity of vision and hearing loss differ from person to person. Deaf-blindness significantly impacts an individual's ability to access information, communicate, and interact with other people.

Source: nationaldb.org



HOW IT MAY IMPACT COMMUNICATION

- Deaf does not always mean fully deaf and blind does not mean fully blind - the individual may have partial access to visual and auditory information
- How they communicate may vary depending on their experience and level of hearing or vision loss
- The multiplied effects of vision and hearing loss occurring together impact every part of their life
- May use a variety of accommodations to support communication access (such as hearing aids, Cochlear implants, FM system, glasses, cane, etc.)
- Touch is a very important supportive sense to provide individuals access to their world



STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT COMMUNICATION

- Allow time and opportunity to develop trusting relationships; this is essential for communicating effectively with those who are deaf-blind
- Learn how much vision and hearing they have accessible to them; communicate using their strongest sensory channel
- Get their attention and identify yourself before beginning each communication attempt
- Identify people and topics clearly (instead of "she said" say "Julie said")
- Communicate in well-lit areas
- Reduce background noise in the environment
- Reduce visual distractions such as avoiding high traffic areas and/or too many bright colors
- Wear colors that contrast with your skin tone
- Have the individual's back to light source/ windows (reduce glare)

Source: nationaldb.org



Pennsylvania's leading source of autism-related resources and information.
877-231-4244

The ASERT Collaborative is funded by the Office of Developmental Programs, PA Department of Human Services.



Communication and Deaf-Blindness



HOW IT MAY IMPACT COMMUNICATION

- Depending on the vision and hearing losses, their experience of the world may extend only as far as their fingertips can reach
- Their concepts of the world depend upon opportunities for direct physical contact; they do not have the opportunity for incidental or indirect learning
- Social cues may be lacking and can impact things like turn-taking, understanding emotional cues, and building meaningful relationships



STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT COMMUNICATION

- Communicate using the individual's strongest sensory channel (depending on how much hearing or vision they have)
- Communicate at a close distance so your face and mouth are visible
- Use gestural, visual, and/or tactile supports
- Put an item or picture in front of a contrasting colored background when presenting it
- Utilize large print, Braille, or adapt daily living equipment if necessary
- Follow the individual's communicative lead
- Provide additional time to process communication
- Rephrase or repeat information, if needed; multiple exposures to information or new skills may be necessary
- Use hand-under-hand when helping an individual touch/grasp something; respect their hands
- Be consistent



THE KEY to achieving effective communication with a person with deaf-blindness is for the listener to intentionally engage in the process and accept the responsibility for it. How an individual is impacted by their combination of hearing and vision loss will vary and communication access depends on individual needs, looking different for each person.

 RA-PWSpecialPopUnit@pa.gov

www.intervener.org
www.nationaldb.org
helenkeller.org/hknc/search/communication
pattan.net/disabilities/deaf-blind



Pennsylvania's leading source of autism-related resources and information.
877-231-4244

The ASERT Collaborative is funded by the Office of Developmental Programs, PA Department of Human Services.