

Developing Concepts with Children and Adults Who Have Limited or No Access to Vision & Hearing:

15 Things We Can Do Every Day To Help Children Develop Positive Self-Concepts

1. Start by noticing and listening as a way of respect.
2. Take turns.
3. Establish mutual attention & interest in a common topic.
4. Use memories as conversation topics.
5. Don't make assumptions; be open to surprise.
6. Use language to talk about a concept the moment you think the child has that concept in mind.
7. Model actions.
8. Invite the person who is DeafBlind to access the environment.
9. Make experiences tactile and within close range.
10. Use the person's interests to help design activities.
11. Provide interesting materials that encourage exploration.
12. Document the concepts that each individual knows.
13. Use family and school routines for learning concepts.
14. Use objects, pictures, and drawing to enhance concepts.
15. Include the person who is DeafBlind in the whole process.



What's important about this study?

Children and adults who have limited access to vision and hearing or who are DeafBlind have trouble understanding their world without careful partners.

They need families and teachers and friends to help them develop concepts that will lead to their happiness as adults.

We cannot teach these concepts only through "lessons".

These experiences will help them develop the positive self-concepts that are likely to lead to happiness in their lives as adults.

Key concepts about the world that help a person with vision and hearing challenges to have a happy life:

- I can communicate my needs.
- I am an individual with my own interests, ideas and experiences.
- Communication is about taking turns and sharing interests.
- I have feelings and can share my feelings, and I can listen when other people share their feelings.
- I belong to a family or group.
- I belong to a community.
- I know how to interact with people in the community in enjoyable ways.
- I can contribute to my community.
- The world is interesting, and I can explore and learn, both by myself and with others.

The CDCI RAPs describe recently published studies and reports in the field of developmental disabilities. Our goal is to explain what the publication was about and how it impacts our field and community, with new support ideas for practitioners.

Source:

Miles, B., & McLetchie, B. (2008). Developing concepts with children who are deaf-blind. National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness.

CDCI Research for Applied Practice (RAP)



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Start by noticing and listening as a way of respect.

1

Watch the child or adult engage with the environment around them and pause. Notice what the student's whole body tells you, especially their hands, feet, movements, and facial expressions. **How might you use your observation to approach an interaction with this student?**

Take turns.

2

Children and adults come to understand turn-taking through repeated experiences. A child or adult moves, and a partner responds by moving with them or imitating their movements and taking turns. **Once a child or adult learns to take turns within a playful interaction with objects and with others, they are more likely to realize they can take turns with words.**

Establish mutual attention and interest in a common topic.

3

Individuals who are DeafBlind explore objects with their hands and bodies. Mutual attention is first established through touch if the child is blind, and/or through vision (if the child has usable vision). **When people feel affirmed in their feelings, they develop stronger self-concepts as well as positive concepts about others.**

Use memories as conversation topics.

4

You can use memory boxes and memory books as concrete references to help create conversations about shared experiences. Memory books are also a valuable concrete way to share school experiences with families. **This sharing allows the student to develop the concept, "My teachers and family talk with each other."**

Don't make assumptions; be open to surprise.

5

It's easy for any of us to make assumptions about what another person means when they use language. **If we listen carefully, a child is likely to develop a positive self-concept: "People listen to me carefully and they are really interested in what I have to say."**

Use the language to talk about a concept in the moment you think the child has that concept on their mind.

6

When you are interacting with people who are DeafBlind and you can tell they have an idea or are thinking about an action, that's the time to use that word in a mode appropriate for the person.

- Ideas for combining communication modes:
- Sign and/or say "jump, I see you're happy" when you know the child is likely to be enjoying that action.
- Sign and/or say "we touch cat, soft" when you and the child have just touched the cat together.
- Sign and/or say "enjoy" when the child or adult is obviously enjoying the experience. Invited them to touch your smile.

These modes may include movement, sound, gesture, body language, speech, objects, concrete symbols, sign and/or communication devices.

Model actions.

7

Children and adults who are DeafBlind often do not have many opportunities to learn by simple observation. **A clear benefit of teaching by example is that, when skillfully done, it lessens the likelihood of power struggles.**

Invite the person who is DeafBlind to access the environment.

8

Use respectful touch and gestures to invite the person who is DeafBlind to access the world. This can provide a secure base for them to explore their environment. It's especially important to pay attention to the social environment. **Support the development of peer interactions and social exchanges. Model patience with wait time and respond to whatever initiations you see them make.**

Make experiences tactile & within close range.

9

Many concepts are learned first with reference to the DeafBlind person's own body and involve touch. For example, "on" and "off" can be learned by getting on and off a swing. **In order for objects to be meaningful, most children and adults who are DeafBlind need to be given plenty of time to touch and explore them.**

Use the person's interests to help design activities.

10

Whenever possible, create learning opportunities while engaging in activities that are fun and interesting to the student. You will have their attention from the beginning and be able to further develop concepts through play and exploration. For example, if they're interested in lights, explore the parts of a flashlight with the. Take it apart and put it back together again. **It's important to develop and facilitate activities that are person-centered, based on the individual's preferences.**

Provide interesting materials that encourage exploration.

11

Notice the kinds of materials that are interesting for a person who is DeafBlind to explore. Do they like a particular color, texture, sound, or movement? Try to find other objects with similar qualities. You can also notice what part of their body they use to explore: hands, mouth, feet, head, etc. Children are more likely to explore when they are comfortable and in a safe environment that encourages their curiosity.

We can set up meaningful environments for children with consistent placements of objects and materials in order to support the child to independently explore. **Independent, interactive exploration is referred to as Active Learning. Active Learning helps children to learn many important self concepts as well as concepts about the world around them.**

Document the concepts that each individual knows.

12

You can take video clips of a DeafBlind person interacting, communicating and participating in activities. Videos can help others — like new teachers or caregivers — become familiar with each person's unique ways of thinking and interacting.

- You can save videos that show how their understanding of concepts changes over time.
- You can look several times at a brief video of your own interaction with a person who is DeafBlind.
- You can notice how you move, if you take turns, and if your movements communicate what you were hoping. You can also notice what communication you might have missed from your partner.

Videos can also be a tool for an intervener, teacher or family member to learn from their own successes and mistakes.

Use family & school routines for learning concepts.

13

Routines repeated daily, weekly, or seasonally provide the person who is DeafBlind the opportunity to become used to sequences. They can also develop body memory of the actions, and become more independent.

In routines, it's often helpful if the partner goes first, providing a model for a person who is DeafBlind. A light-hearted attitude helps. For example, a partner might say, "I don't like brushing my teeth either, but we have to do it to keep our teeth clean." A light-hearted attitude can be expressed with body language. **Routines are natural opportunities for learning.**

Use objects, pictures, and drawing to enhance concepts.

14

Objects, pictures and drawings help move any conversation toward literacy. It's useful for a teacher or a parent or an intervener to remember this, especially at the moments when a DeafBlind child or adult has a strong interest in a conversation or in a particular thing.

Children and adults who are DeafBlind often need to participate in drawing an object and writing a word in order for it to have meaning for them.

Include the person who is DeafBlind in the whole process.

15

Sometimes it may seem to a person who is DeafBlind that objects or people just "magically" appear or disappear. Including a child or adult who is DeafBlind in the whole process of activities is likely to help them develop a better understanding of the way things work.

Although activities may take a little longer to complete in this way, each one will be much more meaningful and full of opportunities for learning.

- For example, at meal time, invite the person who is DeafBlind to join you in taking out the food from the refrigerator, utensils from the drawer, and plates from the cabinet.
- When it is time to make an art project, invited them to help gather the supplies.

The big take-away:

Individuals with DeafBlindness have a lot to teach others around them about the way we all develop concepts.

DeafBlind people will learn to explore their world more fully when their partners use these 15 unique approaches and techniques.

In turn, we who have the privilege to know people with DeafBlindness each have the opportunity to experience the world more fully in ways we never have before.

Further reading:

Miles, B., & Riggio M. (Eds). 1999. *Remarkable conversations: A guide to developing meaningful communication with children and young adults who are deafblind*. Watertown, MA: Perkins School for the Blind.



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