**Communication With Children Who Are Deafblind**

**Lesson 1 Part 2 Descriptive Transcript**

**Narrator:** Teaching Children Who Are Deafblind: Professional Development for Educators

Communicating With Children Who Are Deafblind

Lesson 1: Communication Essentials

Part 2: Communication Assessment

**[Visual Description]** Two images - A young boy smiles and holds up a paper snowflake he has made. Next to him is a card showing step-by-step instructions for how to fold a snowflake. A teenage girl carefully measures the weight of an object on a scale in a classroom while an adult looks on.

Children who are deafblind make up a highly diverse population. They have different types and levels of usable hearing and vision, and many have additional disabilities and complex medical conditions.

Most assessment tools, especially standardized tests, were not designed for them and are poor measures of what they can do.

Assessment must incorporate a variety of methods, including observation, interviews with those who know a child well, evaluations by specialists, and one-on-one interactions. And assessment tools should be chosen carefully.

**[Visual Description]** A young child and an adult kneel on the floor, taking turns tapping the keys of a toy piano.

In this section, we’ll highlight some key features of communication assessment for children who are not fluent in a spoken or signed language.

**[Visual Description]**  A young girl wearing glasses looks closely at a fish she holds close to her face.

Keep in mind that assessment of communication overlaps with assessment of other areas, such as how a child learns, their interests and preferences, and their use of sensory channels.

**[Visual Description]** A young boy looks at a book, and two specialists sit on either side of him.

The starting point for helping to develop a child’s communication is to assess their current communication.

For this, you’ll want to

* Conduct observations of the child over time in different settings and while engaged in a variety of activities
* Review prior assessment reports, medical records, and other documents
* And talk to family members, other educators, and support staff

**[Visual Description]** An adult with a child on his lap swings on a playground swing. The boy is smiling. The adult stops the swinging. After a pause, the child raises his hand and touches the adult’s hand, and the swinging begins again.

When you and the team observe the child, keep in mind that some children who are deafblind communicate in extremely subtle, unconventional ways.

For example, see how this little boy indicates he wants more swinging with just a slight movement of his hand.

**[Visual Description]** An adult feeds a baby in her arms. She stops feeding him, wipes his mouth, and tries to sit the child up. The child begins to cry for more food.

It can also help to know the level at which a child who is deafblind is communicating.

At Level 1, a child communicates using Pre-Intentional Behaviors, which include things like crying and spontaneous movements. At this level, a child is behaving automatically without any real intent.

**[Visual Description]** A toddler sits in a highchair clapping his hands and playing with a textured toy ball on the tray in front of him. He picks up the ball and drops it on the floor.

At Level 2, a child has Intentional Behaviors and control over some of their movements and actions. For example, they may drop a toy ball they’ve picked up, but not with the purpose of communicating that they don’t want it.

**[Visual Description]** A teenage boy rocks his body back and forth as he sits in a chair. Two specialists sit in front of him on either side. They encourage the boy to follow their movements with his hands. The boy pulls his hands away, rocks faster and waves his hands in the air.

Level 3 involves Unconventional Behaviors. A child at this level is intentionally trying to communicate, using, for example, movements, facial expressions, and gestures. However, the behaviors might not be socially acceptable when they're older—like rocking back and forth in your chair and waving your hands to show you’re excited and want something…

**[Visual Description]** A child knocks away an electronic tablet with her hand.

or knocking away something you don't like.

**[Visual Description]** A series of images - A child sitting at a table points at something. An adult behind him looks where he is pointing. An adult holds a baby, and the baby points in front of him.

A child at Level 4 uses Conventional Communication. Like Level 3, their behavior is deliberate and intended to communicate, but now they express themselves in more socially acceptable ways. For example, they might point to something, wave goodbye, or nod and shake their head.

**[Visual Description]** A baby sits on the floor and holds a colorful toy ball up to her face and smiles. Her mother looks on.

Level 5 involves the use of Concrete Symbols. These are symbols that mimic what they refer to: They look, sound, feel, or move exactly like what they represent. A ball might be a symbol for a ball or to play ball.

**[Visual Description]** A child looks at three picture symbols on a board in front of her. She touches each symbol briefly then touches the symbol for a banana.

At Level 5, a child can communicate about things that aren't in their immediate environment. They can point to a picture of a banana or touch a symbol for a banana to indicate they want to eat one.

**[Visual Description]** Two videos - A toddler sits on the floor and waves his hands up and down like he is beating a drum. The same toddler beats a drum with his hands.

At Level 5 children may also use gestures that pantomime actions, like “come here,” “sit down,” or “I want to beat a drum!”

**[Visual Description]** A mother and her toddler share a kiss.

And they sometimes use sounds that mimic what the sounds represent, such as making kissy sounds for “I want a kiss.”

**[Visual Description]** A teenager and an adult sit at a school table and practice signing. The teacher holds an electronic tablet in front of them.

At Level 6, Abstract Symbols, children use speech, manual signs, braille, or printed words. Abstract symbols have no relationship to what they represent.

**[Visual Description]** A series of images - Braille for cat. An image of a cat. An adult doing the ASL sign for cat.

In other words, the written or brailled word “cat” looks nothing like a cat or the sign. Children at Level 6 use abstract symbols one at a time, rather than in combination.

**[Visual Description]** A child and an adult look at letters in a workbook on a school desk. They both point to the same word on the page.

Finally, at Level 7, Language, children are using two or three symbols in combination following rules of grammar and syntax.

We’ll see examples of children at each of these levels in the lessons that follow.

**[Visual Description]** The website homepage of the “Communication Matrix.”

Now that we’ve reviewed the seven levels, let’s take a look at a tool that’s often used to assess communication of children who are deafblind: the Communication Matrix. It uses the seven levels we’ve discussed as a framework.

**[Visual Description]** A teacher works with a student at a table. The teacher writes letters with a pencil and the child holds the pencil as she writes.

To complete the Matrix, you answer a series of questions about a child’s behavior, such as how they refuse things, ask for things, seek information, and socially engage with others.

**[Visual Description**] A toddler and an adult sit facing each other. The adult taps the toddler’s back with her hand. The toddler pushes her hand away, and the adult smiles. The adult taps again, and the child stands up and hugs the adult.

The results help you pinpoint a child’s current level of communication and the kinds of messages they are expressing. This information can be used to inform goals and objectives in the child’s IEP and communication plan.

**[Visual Description]** The first page of an article with the title “Holistic Communication Profiles for Children Who Are Deaf-Blind.”

Another tool, developed for children who are deafblind, is the Holistic Communication Profile.

**[Visual Description]** A mother and her toddler sit on the floor with their early intervention specialist. They look at large drawings of letters, each with an illustration of a hand making the letter’s sign. The toddler watches closely as her mother signs the toddler’s name to her.

Created by Susan Bruce of Boston College, the Profile provides a structure for assessing how a child communicates and a template for recording the results.

**[Visual Description]** A young child sits on the floor with her teacher. The child strums the strings of a guitar in front of her.

Using the Profile, you assess a child based on developmental milestones that correspond with achievements in communication (like the ability to share attention or imitate others).

**[On-Screen Text]**

Susan Bruce, Ph.D.

Professor and Coordinator, Program in Extensive Support Needs

Boston College

Deafblind Consultant

**Susan Bruce:** So communication does not exist by itself in isolation, communication, and language and are developed really through our interactions with other people. So the holistic communication profile is really a format for assessment. But it's also in a record of your findings about really being a big can-do statement about how the child communicates.

**[Visual Description]** A toddler wearing a cochlear implant stands and looks around the room as her mother holds her body steady. A specialist makes a humming sound and the child turns her head toward the sound.

**Practitioner:** [humming]mmmmmmmm, yeah, you heard that! Good job!

**Narrator:** As you interact with and observe a child who is deafblind, always remember that communication for every child is progressive. To help a child improve, pay close attention to how they receive and express information, and how their communication changes over time. Fully document what you discover.

Ongoing assessment will

* Help you and the team identify and react to changes in a child’s communication
* Help document the child’s communication system and record things that change
* Provide a framework for determining long- and short-term goals
* And inform the child’s formal communication plan

These subjects and more will be further explored in Part 3 of this lesson.

Now let’s take a break and check what we’ve learned...

True or false?

Most assessment tools, especially standardized tests, were not designed for children who are deafblind and are poor measures of what they can do.

Pause the video if you need time to think.

True! Standard assessment tools are typically not appropriate for children who are deafblind. Instead, assessment of children who are deafblind and not fluent in a spoken or signed language can incorporate a variety of methods depending on the child’s abilities. Some assessment tools, like the Communication Matrix and the Holistic Communication Profile, are appropriate for children who are deafblind.

This ends Part 2 of Lesson 1. In Part 3, we’ll discuss developing a communication plan.

**[On-Screen Text]** National Center on Deafblindness

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Special thanks to

* State deafblind projects
* The many young people, families, and educators who shared their photographs and videos with us for this program

The contents of this video program were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, #H326T230030. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. Project Officer, Rebecca Sheffield.

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