**Communication With Children Who Are Deafblind  
 Lesson 1 Part 3 Descriptive Transcript**

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

Communicating With Children Who Are Deafblind

Lesson 1: Communication Essentials

Part 3: The Communication Plan

**[On-Screen Text]**

Susan Weigert, Ph.D.

Education Program Specialist

**Susan Weigert:** Sometimes a child with deafblindness who has significant cognitive impairment, will enter school having acquired an informal or idiosyncratic communication system in the home with the use of tactile cues, for example, only as what is about to happen. So, for example, a fork indicates mealtime or a piece of a seatbelt indicates it's time for a ride in the car. But no formal communication system which allows a child independence and flexibility in expressing their wants or needs or ideas has been developed.

So as a child entering kindergarten with this kind of informal system of communication, passes from grade to grade or location to location in the school, these informal systems get lost along the way, as new teachers and other staff become involved with a child. And for this reason schools can become a place where a child with deafblindness is left isolated, with no way to communicate or understand others. This is a tragic and unacceptable situation that can only be avoided when the child has a formal communication plan developed by a team of providers and including parents or family members.

**[Visual Description]** A teenage boy and an adult communicate using sign language while interacting with a small display holding photos of people.

**Narrator:** The importance of having a formal communication plan for a child who is deafblind—at any age—cannot be understated.

A well-written plan documents how a child communicates expressively and receptively, and the types of communication support they will receive.

A deep understanding of the child, including use of their senses, provides a foundation for planning.

**[On-Screen Text]** Tracy Evans Luiselli, Ed.D.

Director, New England Consortium on Deafblindness

**Tracy Evans Luiselli:** I find that teams don't often realize how individualized that communication plan has to be. Sometimes they try and apply one particular strategy or principle across a vast array of kids, when, in fact, that often doesn't work. So I think it's really important for the team to be planful and to be organized, and then related to the plan, I think. really looking at the daily schedule, everything from each individual activity and looking at the beginning, the middle, and end of the activity in the routine. And again, you can have the best laid out communication plan in the world. But if you don't have the sense of how you're going to use it, and what the purpose is, then I’ll find that a lot of times those things sit on the shelf, whether it's an approach or device.

**[Visual Description]** Three adults sit at a table in a school room. There are several papers on the table in front of them and a clipboard. An adult points to something on one of the documents.

**Narrator:** Let’s take a look at what’s involved in creating an effective communication plan.

Because they have differing areas of expertise and an array of knowledge about the child, everyone on the IEP or IFSP team, including family members, plays an integral role.

**[Visual Description]** A young child and a specialist touch their palms together as they sit on the floor of a classroom.

The plan should provide a detailed description of the child’s current communication.

For example, how does their combined vision and hearing loss impact their communication and access to information?

**[Visual Description]** A teenager and an adult sit at a table in a classroom. They look at each other and both make the same sign with their hands.

How do they communicate receptively and expressively?

**[Visual Description]** A toddler boy sits on his mother’s lap at a park while a toddler girl sits next to them and looks at the boy.

How does their communication vary in different settings and situations?

**[Visual Description]** A young girl sits at a table that has three computer devices. She looks at the middle device’s screen.

Who will ensure the child has appropriate low to high technology that aids their communication and that it is working properly?

**[Visual Description]** A young girl and an adult look at a workbook on the desk in front of them. They both point to a word in the book.

What kinds of communication support does the child need in various environments, including different classrooms and at home?

**[Visual Description]** A group of children laugh and play on a playground slide.

How will access to communication be provided throughout the school day as well during extracurricular activities and non-academic events?

**[Visual Description]** A teacher points to a large screen at the front of a classroom, while a student and an adult sitting next to her look at a computer screen in front of them.

How are the child’s methods of communication being used to access the grade-level general education curriculum? And what, if any, accommodations are required?

**[Visual Description]** Two adults sit at a table in a school room talking to one another. There are several papers and a pamphlet on the table. One adult holds a clipboard with a document attached. She uses a pencil to check something off on the document.

What educators, paraprofessionals, and other personnel will implement the communication plan? All staff members working with a child must be proficient in their communication modes and trained to provide access to communication throughout the school day. Who will be responsible for providing effective training?

**[On-Screen Text]** Tracy Evans Luiselli, Ed.D.

Director, New England Consortium on Deafblindness

**Tracy Evans Luiselli:** I find sometimes, it's just a personal decision, I can sit back and observe a classroom, or a morning, say from 9 to 12, and the SLP may come in and she's working on the AAC device, and she's not using sign language at all. And then the para or the intervener comes in, and they start using sign language. And then they move over to another professional, and it may be well they're using all tactile symbols. So when you think about the plan and the approaches, it's really critical that the team takes the time to tease out when and how that's all going to come together for that student.

**[Visual Description]** A mother and her child sit on the floor in a school hallway and look at a book of symbols. A teacher kneels on the floor and watches them.

**Narrator:** An effective plan should explain how communication will be embedded in the child’s routines throughout the day.

Make sure to provide examples of routines and how they support communication.

**[Visual Description]** A teacher smiles at a young girl in a wheelchair who is in front of her. The teacher uses her hands to help the girl touch a book that is open on her wheelchair tray.

For example,

* What are the main parts of the routine?
* What verbal, touch or object symbols, or language will be used?
* And what accommodations or adaptations will be needed?

**[Visual Description]** A teenage boy cuts up pieces of an apple on a countertop. An adult helps him by holding the apple and helping to guide his hand that holds the knife.

To avoid confusion and frustration for a child, family, and educators, it's essential to have good communication between school and home when developing and implementing a communication plan.

**[Visual Description]** A line drawing of a young boy in a t-shirt and shorts with his arms spread wide. Drawing provided by Chris Cheney.

A variety of other documents are sometimes included in the plan. For example, if a child uses touch cues, they can be documented on a “Touch Cue Map” like this one.

**[Visual Description]** The same line drawing but with labels to show touch cue areas and their meaning.

It shows the outline of a body and descriptions of where and how to touch a child as well as what each touch means.

**[Visual Description]** A page of an example communication dictionary with three columns called “What he does,” What we think it means,” and “How we respond.”

“Communication dictionaries” list a child’s communication behaviors and what they mean. For example, “If Julie rubs her head, she is processing information. If she hums, she likes what she is doing.”

**[Visual Description**] A toddler is standing in front of the mirror doing a variety of movements with her hands and arms.

Many communication plans also include video recordings showing how the child communicates in a variety of situations.

**[Visual Description]** A young boy and his teacher sit across from each other at a slantboard. Large letters are attached to the board. The teacher holds up a separate card with the letter A. The child looks at the board, finds the letter A, removes it from the slant board, and puts it in a plastic bin.

A well-documented plan helps ensure that, regardless of setting, everyone who interacts with a child has access to this important information.

**[Visual Description]** An adult and a teenage girl face each other while standing in a kitchen. They are having a conversation, using sign language.

Keep in mind that communication is fluid, and communication development should be ongoing.

**[Visual Description]** A young girl sits at a wooden table and types on a brailler.

You’ll want to ensure the plan specifies how to provide a child with multiple opportunities to practice their current modes of communication.

A child's communication plan is a living document. It’s best practice to do continuous data collection and assessment to monitor progress, update goals, and ensure everything is documented in the plan.

**[On-Screen Text]** Lanya McKittrick, Ph.D.

Project Director, Idaho Project for Children and Youth with Deafblindness

**Lanya McKittrick:** And so I think it's really important to constantly be assessing where you're at on the communication plan, because families’ desires, and what they want for their child, can change as I get more information. Situations change based on transitions where, you know, where's the child at? And so, you know, not just creating a communication plan, and then, you know, never looking at again, but constantly every time you meet and more frequently always looking at that and making sure that you know everybody that's on the team really understands what that is.

**Narrator:** Now, let’s take a break and check what you know...

Why should the development of a child’s communication plan involve the family?

Stop the video if you need time to think.

It’s essential to develop the plan collaboratively with the family and have open communication between home and school. This way you’ll be able to compare and keep track of progress in both environments.

Now, let’s review our pre-lesson questions:

True or False?

1. A child who is deafblind always communicates receptively and expressively in the same way.

False. It’s not uncommon for a child to communicate one way receptively and another way expressively.

1. The best way to assess the communication of a child who is deafblind is by using typical assessment tools and standardized tests.

False. Standardized tests were not designed for children who are deafblind.

1. A well-documented communication plan helps ensure that everyone who interacts with a child has access to information about how the child currently communicates.

True. Consistency across all communication partners will help support communication development.

This is the end of Lesson 1. In Lesson 2, we’ll examine what emerging communication looks like and how you can best support a child who is an emerging communicator.