**Communication With Children Who Are Deafblind**

**Lesson 2 Part 1 Described Transcript**

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

Communicating With Children Who Are Deafblind

Lesson 2: Emerging Communication

**[On-Screen Text]** Maurice Belote

Deafblind Consultant and Educator

**Maurice Belote:** Deafblindness is a spectrum disability. And it's funny because deafblindness seems like such a specific group and, and such a small targeted group, that when you talk about a student who's deafblind, it sounds like you know so much about the child because they are deafblind. But in reality the term deafblind tells you very little about the student and how they function. And when we talk about deafblindness being a spectrum, it's a spectrum in terms of the presence or absence of any available vision and or hearing, the presence or absence of any additional disabilities, and whether or not the deafblindness was from birth or acquired later in life. And all of those three factors have a huge impact on how the student functions.

**[Visual Description]** A young girl holds a tiny lizard in her hand very close to her face.

**Narrator:** To effectively support communication development for a child who is deafblind, it's critical to understand how these and other factors influence how they learn and communicate.

**[Visual Description]** A young girl looks at a toad she holds her hands.

For example, for children who have some vision and hearing,

* How well can they see an object, symbol, sign, or facial expression?
* How clearly can they hear someone speaking and other sounds?

**[Visual Description]** A girl looks down at a paper that has tactile symbols, including one of an ice cream cone.

Are they able to clearly distinguish what they see and hear? Can they see there’s a picture of something on the worksheet in front of them but can’t tell that it’s an ice cream cone?

**[Visual Description]** A boy touches his teacher’s mask as she speaks. He turns away, then turns back and feels her mask again.

**Teacher:** “mmmm mask”

**Narrator:** Do they hear some sounds but can’t tell they are words?

Can they hear the difference between the sounds of letters?

**[Visual Description]** An infant girl reaches to touch a string of toy beads. She looks up and watches flashing colored lights on a toy in front of her.

Knowing the extent of a child’s vision and visual range will help you select and use appropriate strategies and accommodations when supporting their communication. And the same is true for how a child uses their hearing and other senses, especially touch.

But before we begin, let’s check what you know.

True or False?

1. Emerging communicators who are deafblind often express their thoughts and feelings using facial expressions, gestures, body movements, or vocalizations.
2. Because many children who are deafblind resist having their hands touched, using the hand-under-hand technique can delay a child’s communication development.
3. Imitation and turn-taking are excellent ways to engage in reciprocal interactions with children who are emerging communicators.

We’ll revisit these questions at the end of this lesson.

Lesson 2 has three learning objectives. After completing the lesson, participants should be able to

1. Describe the many ways emerging communicators who are deafblind communicate
2. Identify strategies that support the development of a child’s emerging communication
3. Explain how to engage in conversations with a child who is an emerging communicator to help expand their communication skills

Part 1: What is Emerging Communication?

**[Visual Description]** A series of videos and photos - A girl and her older sister are outside with their bikes. The younger one pulls her sister’s hand toward her head. The older girl playfully taps her sister’s head. A smiling toddler sits and looks up at the sky. An adult’s hand holds her steady.

Children who are deafblind and are emerging communicators communicate in a wide variety of ways, such as with facial expressions, gestures, body movements, or vocalizations.

**[Visual Description]** A woman cradles a young girl in her arm, and holds a plastic toy close to her face.

You might hear the term “presymbolic” used to describe emerging communicators who don’t rely on symbols, like photographs, line drawings, letters, or signs to express or receive information.

**[Visual Description]** A toddler kneels on the floor and watches his mother sing and sign the words to “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star.” She pauses after the word “little.” After a few seconds, the boy signs “star,” and she starts the song again.

Mother: Twinkle, twinkle little...star…

**Narrator:** Some emerging communicators are just beginning to understand a few symbols.

**[Visual Description]** An infant lying on his back signs the word “mother.”

Let’s meet a few children who are emerging communicators.

**[Visual Description]** An adult holds a young boy who is wearing dark plastic glasses.

You first met Jaxson in Lesson 1. He has CHARGE syndrome. He has colobomas in both eyes, which limit his vision, and he wears cochlear implants.

**[Visual Description]** Jaxson sits in a highchair. He smiles as his mom taps playfully on the tray in front of him.

As an infant, Jaxson communicates by crying when he’s hungry or uncomfortable and smiling when he feels content. Although it’s not intentional, his behavior often gets a response from those around him.

**[Visual Description]** Jaxson in his highchair wiggles his fingers as he tries to mimic some of his mom’s hand movements.

As Jaxson gains more control over his movements and behaviors, he starts behaving more intentionally. Although he isn’t purposefully communicating, he tries to move his fingers like mom.

He tries to mimic some of her hand movements.

**[Visual Description]** Jaxson, now a bit older, sits in a highchair playing with cereal. He grabs a handful and reaches out to his mom, gesturing that he wants to put the cereal in her hand. His mom’s hand appears and he carefully drops the cereal into it.

Soon, Jaxson begins communicating intentionally. Watch how he uses a gesture to tell his mom he wants to put his cereal in her hand.

**Mom:** Thank you, bubba!

**[Visual Description]** A young boy sits at a kitchen table with his mom.

**Narrator:** Orion is profoundly deaf and totally blind. He relies on touch for receptive communication. Watch how his mom lets him know she’s leaving the room by running her hands across his shoulders and back. And then does the same when she returns.

Touch cues like this are important to use to let a child know who is present and when someone leaves.

**[Visual Description]** A young boy sits in a wheelchair, touching an adult’s hands.

Tre’ was born with a rare chromosomal abnormality. He has limited hearing and vision and is autistic. He’s just starting to learn a few signs and symbols, but let’s listen to how his mom describes his nonsymbolic communication, which he uses the most.

**[On-Screen Text]** Ginger Knowles

Tre’s Mom

Family Support Specialist

Hawaii and Pacific Deaf-Blind Project

**Ginger Knowles:** He does use his sense of touch a lot. Whether it's rubbing your face, touching your, your arm and your hand or locking you down, he'll do a lot, some type of hold on you to bring you closer to you.

**[Visual Description]** Tre’ sits in a highchair and smiles broadly.

So yes, he is definitely using his other senses to help out where he's lacking. So, even though he's not verbal, we do know that he can comprehend what we're saying, because he laughs at times, and we're like, “Hmm! You know what we talking about?” and like, I said, he's very happy.

**[Visual Description]** Tre’ sitting on the floor with a book on his lap. He is looking up to the left with his eyebrows raised.

Well, Tre’ does a lot of moaning. He makes sounds, grunts. He also talks with his eyes. He'll raise his eyebrows and squint

**[Visual Description]** Tre’ sitting in his wheelchair and touching two cartoon drawings of ghosts on a tray in front of him.

So those were his first signs of communication, his body language, and gestures.

Oh, it's because I spent a lot of time just looking at him, you know. So that I, I make sure that I am understanding his wants and needs because, like I said, he's nonverbal. So he's not gonna say, “Hey, mom, I want something to eat.”

**[Visual Description]** A series of photos - Tre’ sitting at a table with a plastic dinner plate with the remains of macaroni and cheese. He rests his head on his hand and does not look happy. Tre’ with a sad expression on his face and his arms crossed.

**Narrator:** Parents like Tre’s mom are usually the first to recognize their child’s communication, assigning meaning to their sounds, movements, gestures, and other behaviors.

**[Visual Description]** A mom swings her small son rapidly back and forth in her arms. She stops the swinging, adjusts him so he’s sitting up straighter.

This child’s mom knows exactly what her son’s expressive behaviors and vocalizations mean! Many children who are deafblind, like this little boy, really love big body movements.

**[Visual Description]** The mom has the baby sitting on her lap, while supporting his back with her hand.

**Mom:** Alright, you want to swing? You wanna fling, I should say. You want to go? Tell me you want to go.

**[Visual Description]** The baby pushes himself backward against her hand. He repeats this action and excitedly waves his hands and kicks his feet.

**Mom:** There you go. He’s already pushing himself back. OK, are you ready? Are you ready?

**Off-screen voice:** “That’s his way of telling you he wants this fun game”

**Mom’s voice:** “OK, well let’s not end up on the floor.”

**[Visual Description]** A series of videos -The same mom lays her son on a bed. She grabs his feet with her hands and he wriggles excitedly. The mom starts quickly pulling his body around on the bed by his feet. Then she rolls him over several times, moving side to side.

**Narrator:** Let’s watch this child during another fun movement activity with his mom. Again, see how she’s learned to recognize his vocalizations and what they mean. And notice how she enthusiastically responds to him.

**Mom:** “Do you want to swing like a snake? Yeah? Tell me. You ready?

**Mom:** OK! One, two, three. Wee. wee!

Ok wanna turn? One, two, three, Wee! Yeah, he wants more, he doesn't want to stop.

**[On-Screen Text]** Susan Bruce, Ph.D.

Professor and Coordinator, Program in Extensive Support Needs

Boston College

Deafblind Consultant

**Susan Bruce:** So I think we must, must regard their communication in multiple modalities. The early communicators may have differentiated vocalizations. So many children will do this continuous “ahhhh” to draw attention to themselves, and family members often know what these early vocalizations are, so we differentiate them, right? We discriminate them, and we respond accordingly. So we should be watching for communication across multiple forms, also known as modes, and we should be highly responsive.

So the best way to get a child to communicate more often is to respond to them. If people do not respond to us, we just reduce our efforts, and that's what we want to avoid. So being responsive, even if you're not exactly sure what the message was, is always the most important idea.

**[Visual Description]** A teenage boy sits in a chair across from his teacher. She is holding a hand pump that can be used to blow up balloons. The boy explores the pump with his hands as the teacher shows him a balloon that they will be blowing up.

**Narrator:** Next, let’s watch how this student expresses his excitement over blowing up a balloon, and see how enthusiastically his teacher responds.

**[Visual Description]** A series of videos -The teacher signs and speaks to the student. She uses the pump and blows up the balloon. The instructor finishes blowing up the balloon, counts down and releases the air from the balloon. The teenage boy feels the balloon deflate.

**Teacher:** “We’re gonna open the balloon!”

**Narrator:** He moves his body back and forth and verbalizes as he anticipates the balloon.

[Sounds of him vocalizing]

**Teacher:** “Yeah, I’m excited about the balloon!”

**Narrator:** Notice she’s using a few signs…for “thank you,” and “ready.”

And just before she releases the air in the balloon, “two” and “one.”

**[Visual Description]** A young girl sits in a wheelchair, with her intervener next to her. The intervener holds a toy fishing pole and is trying to get the young girl to hold the pole to play a fishing game.

Like the boy we just saw, Sloan communicates in many ways including body movements and facial expressions. She and her intervener are playing a fishing game at a school carnival.

At first, Sloan rejects this new activity. The intervener acknowledges this.

But then, things start to look interesting! The intervener is watching Sloan’s communication closely. She notices when Sloan raises her eyebrows.

**Off camera voice:** “Oh my gosh, you got a fish!”

**Various voices:** “Yay!”

**Narrator**

Sloan waves her hands excitedly and shakes her head. Her intervener is just as excited and reaches to tickle Sloan’s belly.

**[Visual Description]** A series of images – Jaxson in his highchair trying to mimic his mother’s signs. Tre’ and his mother smile. Tayen watches his mom’s sign. A teenage boy watches his teacher as she blows up a balloon.

As you’ve seen, children who are deafblind and who are emerging communicators communicate in many different ways—and have a lot to express!

They need engaged communication partners who can recognize and affirm their communication in whatever form it takes.

These are the beginnings of the communication and connection that all children who are deafblind deserve and that are essential for learning.

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

What is one important way you can encourage a child who is an emerging communicator to communicate with you more?

Stop the video if you need time to think.

One of the most important things you can do is to recognize and respond to their communication.

This ends Part 1 of Lesson 2. In Part 2, we’ll discuss specific strategies you can use to support a child who is an emerging communicator.

**[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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