**Communication With Children Who Are Deafblind**

**Lesson 2 Part 2 Described Transcript**

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

Communicating With Children Who Are Deafblind

Lesson 2: Emerging Communication

Part 2: Supporting Emerging Communicators

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

Professor and Coordinator, Program in Extensive Support Needs

Boston College

Deafblind Consultant

**Susan Bruce:** So there are just so many different communication skills. But I think where we start is by acknowledging the skills that professionals have, especially when they start working with the child. And then we build from there, you know. So they have confidence because just, deafblindness may make some people reluctant to even try to communicate. And we don't want that to happen. We want the kids to have a nice circle of communication partners.

**[Visual Description]** A young boy and his mother look at something the boy is pointing to.

**Narrator:** Building on what you already know about communication, in this section, we’ll discuss specific strategies for supporting the development of children who are deafblind and communicate at an emerging level. In particular, we’ll discuss

1. Being present
2. Positioning
3. Close observation
4. Affirming communication
5. Joint attention
6. And hand-under-hand

**[Visual Description]** A toddler sits on the floor between the legs of a specialist who holds an elastic bracelet with jingle bells close to the child. The child takes the bells and turns to look at the specialist.

Helping emerging communicators make progress begins with being present—and deeply attuned to a child’s behaviors, such as facial expressions, sounds, movements, and gestures.

**[On-Screen Text]** Chris Montgomery, CTVI, M.Ed.

Deafblind Consultant

**Chris Montgomery:** I think one good bit of advice is to slow down. And now I realize you might be in a situation where you've got a student who's deafblind, and you've got five or six other kids, right? And you can't just ignore what's going on around you to be with that kid who's deafblind. But as much as you can, if you can even get 10 minutes a day to just be, and you be present in the situation, not have an agenda.

Because I think that gets in the way, too. We've got, we feel like we've got to teach something, you know. It's always like, I'm not doing my job if I'm not teaching something and then getting results. And oh, they can do this today that they couldn't do yesterday. And it's, it's our nature, you know. There's nothing wrong with that. We should always try and be trying to teach. And, but I think that the first thing that we've got to do is just to slow down and be present.

**[Visual Description]** A series of videos - A toddler sits on the floor with her hands on top of a very large drum. Her mom kneels beside her and beats the drum with a drumstick. The mom beats the drum harder and the child begins to laugh and wave her hands excitedly.

**Narrator:** Sometimes waiting for a child to initiate communication can take several minutes—it might feel like an eternity on a busy school day!

Just being present with the child will help you better recognize their sensory learning channels as well as their social, physical, and cognitive skills.

**[Off-screen sounds]** People laugh and cheer

**[Visual Description]** An infant boy sits up in a plastic support chair and holds a white cane.

**Narrator:** In your interactions with a child, be aware of their positioning, and make sure they are posturally secure and well-supported. Improving a child's positioning also improves the child's availability for learning.

**[Visual Description]** A young boy sits in a stroller with straps around his shoulders to support him. There is a tray in front of him as well.

Use prescribed and adaptive equipment to give them physical support and better control of their movements.

**[Visual Description]** A young girl sits in a chair with a brace supporting her upper body. She smiles at colorful mylar streamers hanging in front of her.

Be aware of the placement of materials and devices, too, and position them in ways that are easy for a child to access.

**[Visual Description]** A young girl stands upright in a stander that supports her legs and body. Her younger sister nearby looks up at her.

Physical and occupational therapists and teachers of students with visual impairments can provide guidance on support strategies that will facilitate a child’s communication.

**[Visual Description]** An adult holds a touch-screen tablet in front of a boy. The boy rapidly moves his arms and head from side to side. The adult supports the boy’s elbow, helping him reach out to touch the screen. The adult then touches the screen with his own fingers, and circles pop up on the screen.

This child has hyperkinetic movement disorder, which causes him to move constantly. This makes it difficult for him to use assistive technology devices, like iPads.

Adding chest and head supports as well as elbow support, which his teacher is demonstrating, will help his eye-hand coordination when using communication systems and assistive technology.

**[Visual Description]** A toddler boy sits on the floor and uses his hands to pound on a drum. An adult places her hand on the drum to quiet it. The boy moves his hands down to his sides and makes a very sad expression, then he reaches up and starts banging the drum again with his hands.

Another key strategy is close observation of a child’s expressive communication behaviors. In some cases, it might be fairly obvious. Let’s watch how this child communicates his displeasure when his mom interrupts his drumming.

His sad expression makes it clear he is not happy about it.

**[Visual Description]** A teacher sits on the floor with a young girl in her lap and rocks side to side as she sings a song.

But expressive communication can be quite subtle, so watch closely. For example, this child is enjoying listening to her teacher sing while rocking back and forth in her lap. When the teacher pauses the song and movement, watch how the child subtly lets her know she wants “more” by touching the teacher’s hands.

**Teacher:** “More? Ok.”

**[Visual Description]** A young boy sits in a high chair watching his mom, who stands in front of him, raises her arms high and waves her hands. The boy raises his arms in the same way. She laughs and claps her hands. Then, she taps the boy on the arm and repeats the movement several times, encouraging him to do the same. After a few tries, he raises his arms again.

**Narrator:** Once you recognize a child is communicating, affirm their communication behaviors. This is a critical part of obtaining their trust and supporting their communication development.

**Mom:** Ahhhh! Good job, yeah!

**[Visual Description]** A young boy and his mother sit on the floor. The boy stacks a large colored bead onto a small dowel that is sticking up from some modeling clay. The mom’s hand reaches toward his as they both look closely at how he is placing the bead on the dowel.

**Narrator:** Another important strategy to encourage meaningful communication is joint attention.

**[Visual Description]** A teenage girl sits in a wheelchair, while an adult crouches down next to her. They are both looking at and touching something in the girl’s hand

It involves mutually exploring something—such as an object or texture.

**[Visual Description]** A toddler boy sits on the floor with a specialist. She places a plastic object in a bowl next to them and reaches out to touch the boy’s fingers. They both look at the object.

The sharing involved in joint attention strengthens your relationship and lets them know that people can experience things together.

**[On-Screen Wording]** Chris Montgomery, CTVI, M.Ed.

Deafblind Consultant

**Chris Montgomery:** You have to notice what this person is doing. What they're interested in maybe, is a better way and how they're interacting with that thing that they're interested in.You know. Maybe if it's I've got a pen here, maybe they're just kind of because maybe they do have, so I never ever give up that a kid can hear me.

feeling this pen in a certain way. So if I was to answer back to them. I would kind of ask permission. I wouldn't say Hey, I might say, Hey, can I look at that too verbally. That's fine but I would also try to do it tactually. I don't care if they're audiological reports. Say, there's no hearing. I'm still going to talk, because. there's still air pressure changes, and there's stuff that a person might pick up with that. But that's an aside. you know. I would try to ask permission tactually. Don't just come in and grab the pen. But just say, Hey. you know I'm here very gently. and I'm checking this out with you. Does this person, if this is the deaf blind hand, and I'm the adult pan seeing, hearing hand, you know. Does this person: bump up against me and say, Oh, there's somebody here eventually, and then through imitation, you're letting them know that I see you, and that I'm answering, and that I'm speaking as best I can in the same language. And that's just a very small place to start. And, but that's really the general idea of how you build onto that. It just keeps going from there.

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

Director, New England Consortium on Deafblindness

**Tracy Evans Luiselli:** The other thing that we've been looking at is we may have children who can really engage visually, and you can address joint attention at the beginning of the school day. But as their fatigue increases that vision, their ability to kind of maintain visual attention begins to wane. So sometimes we have to say, “Okay, we're going to use a little bit more tactile input and a little bit more touch to give the student information and let them take a little bit of a vision break, but still give them that information tactfully.”

**[Visual Description]** An intervener sits behind a young girl at a school table. The child puts her hands on top of the intervener’s and together they roll a ball of cookie dough..

**Narrator:** It’s critical when interacting with any child who’s deafblind, but especially when engaging in joint tactile attention, to use the hand-under-hand technique—never hand-over-hand.

**[Visual Description]** A teenage boy sits in a wheelchair. An adult sitting in front of him helps him place his hand over hers. Then she prises the lid off a plastic container while his hand rests atop hers.

This involves placing your hands underneath a child’s hands, or alongside them, to help the child explore objects and materials.

**[On-Camera Wording]** Jessica Meisel, M.S.Ed.

Early Childhood Special Educator

Deaf-Blind Specialist

**Jessica Meisel:** This was 3 or 4 years ago, but she always had her hands up and back, right, and to me, and it was anytime an adult would approach, hands up and back,

So that tells me that at some point in her life, somewhere in her daily interactions, a grownup is grabbing her hands, and when she’s not quite ready, right.

**[Visual Description]** Series of images - A young girl sits on the grass and her teacher, Jessica, kneels behind her. The girl’s fists are tightly closed. The same girl sits at a table with Jessica behind her. Jessica’s hands are open in front of them, where colorful sand is spread out on a tabletop. The girl’s hands are spread wide but pulled back toward her. The same girl sits with Jessica behind her. Jessica’s hands reach to touch a pompom that is directly in front of them. The girl’s hands are in tight fists held close to her body.

And the student had cortical visual impairment, and so we knew it took a good 15 to 30 seconds for what was happening in front of her to make sense to her brain, and so she needed a lot of wait time.

So I think I just kind of had one day where I went, “This has got to change,” you know. “She's not communicating.

She's not using a communication device because she doesn't want to use her hands.” You know, we're trying to use a head switch at that point to see if she would make choices using a head switch because the hands weren't an option, because they were being handled too much

**[Visual Description]** The same young girl sits in a sandbox. There is some sand on her legs. Her hands are open and held close to her body.

**Narrator:** After making sure that everyone at school and home was exclusively using hand-under-hand, things began to change.

**Jessica Meisel:** You know, slowly but surely we started seeing her more willing to reach out.

**[Visual Description]** The same girl sits at a table with Jessica behind her. They both rub their hands in colored sand on the table in front of them. Jessica picks up a glass container filled with the sand, and the girl feels the opening of the container as it is turned to pour some out.

And I remember by the end of the school year, her hands in the sand. And we're all just, you know, so excited because she's touching things that feel really, you know, scratchy and uncomfortable. It's not the soft things, even cold things she would touch briefly, you know.

So it was things that she had been averse to before, she was starting to come around, all because we, she just needed a little more time, and she needed to feel safe. That grown-ups weren't going to grab her hands.

**[Visual Description]** Two images - The same girl sits on the floor with Jessica behind her. They are both feeling the strings of a guitar lying in front of them. The girl sits in a wheelchair with a big smile on her face. Her head is against a head switch.

**Narrator:** As you’ve seen, there are a number of strategies you can use to support an emerging communicator’s development—no matter their physical or sensory abilities.

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

**[Visual Description]** A young boy lies in an adult’s lap. Together they look closely at and feel a small plastic toy that rests on the child’s chest.

Watch this short video clip and identify the strategies the educator is using to support this child’s communication.

In addition to close observation, the educator is using joint attention to share in tactually exploring the child’s toy. Joint attention can strengthen your relationship with the child and let them know that people can experience things together.

This ends Part 2 of Lesson 2. In Part 3, we’ll learn more ways to engage and connect with a child who is an emerging communicator and help expand their understanding of the world.

**[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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