**Communication With Children Who Are Deafblind**

**Lesson 2 Part 3 Described Transcript**

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

Communicating With Children Who Are Deafblind

Lesson 2: Emerging Communication

Part 3: Expanding Communication Through Conversation

**[Visual Description]** A baby girl sits on the floor between an adult’s legs. The baby is holding on to the adult’s little fingers as the adult raises and lowers her hands.

**Narrator:** In this section, we’ll look at how reciprocal interactions, or conversations, can be used to help a child improve their communication.

**[Visual Description]** A young boy sits at a kitchen table with a plastic plate in front of him. He reaches for his mom’s hand and pulls it over to his plate. She taps on his hand, then pushes the plate under his hand. The boy moves his hand to explore what is on the plate.

As we discuss this topic, keep in mind that conversation involves more than language. For example, gestures, facial expressions, and movements communicate a lot of information.

**[Visual Description]** An adult and a boy sit across from each other laughing and having fun playing games with their hands.

In this video, watch how Nolan uses gestures in a fun conversation with Chris Montgomery.

See how Chris encourages Nolan to give him a high five.

**Chris Montgomery:** Gimme five. Gimme five.

[clapping sound]

Yeah baby that was a burner!

**Narrator:** Watch how Nolan tries to move Chris’s hand toward his own. He wants more of the “give me five” gesture!

And later, watch as Nolan pulls Chris’s hand to his own head for head rubs.

Did you notice they are also imitating each other’s verbalizations?

**Nolan:** Ahh!

**Chris Montgomery:** Ahh!

**Narrator:** Every child needs communication partners like this—to enjoy being with—to share thoughts, feelings, and ideas.

A variety of good conversation partners gives a child experience interacting with different types of people. They help children learn that movements, sounds, and objects can be used to communicate—and that people are interested in and want to spend time with them.

**[Visual Description]** A young boy sits in a stroller twirling a colorful ball hanging on a string. His older brother is in front of him mimicking the twirling movements with a similar ball. The young boy puts the string in his mouth and his brother does the same.

As you’ve seen, imitation and turn-taking are excellent ways to engage in reciprocal interactions with children who are emerging communicators.

Let’s hear how imitation can be used to build trust and support with an emerging communicator who’s just getting to know her new teacher.

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

Early Childhood Special Educator

Deaf-Blind Specialist

**Jessica Meisel:** So, right now, the student being new in my classroom, I'm not hearing as many vocalizations as she might give at home, because she's still getting used to the environment, it’s noisier. But so, without these vocalizations at this point, right now

she's breathing. She takes a sigh, you know, and I'll do the same, or I feel a little, maybe movement, in her arms. So I make a little movement with my arm. And I, you know, like I'm saying to you in our language that I am acknowledging this movement, and then it's meaningful to me, because it's meaningful to you, and you know. And then figuring out, you know, when we're looking at things, or she notices something. You know, she has some limited vision that I can hold it up, and I can say something like “you like looking at this? I like looking at this, too.” And then, “oh, this is a car that lights up and cars go vroom,” you know.

So, so then, using these actions and then waiting. Does she want more? Is there any sort of movement that tells me that she wants to do this again? To continue this action? Or maybe she doesn't really like the car, and she just liked how it lit up.

**[Visual Description]** A young girl sits on the floor looking at colorful balls. An adult sits behind her and places a hand on the girl’s back.

**Narrator:** If you are having difficulties interacting with a child, it’s a good idea to check whether they’re truly understanding what you are communicating. For example, if you’re presenting something visually, is it in a format that they can see? If a child wears hearing aids, are they functioning properly?

If you suspect that they are not perceiving you, consider making changes to their positioning and environmental factors (like background noise and lighting). Consider, too, whether objects, materials, and instructional strategies take advantage of their best sensory learning channels as well as their social, physical, and cognitive skills.

**[Visual Description]** A baby and her mother look at each other face to face. The baby touches her mother’s lips and mouth with her hand. The mother makes kissing sounds and opens and closes her mouth. The baby giggles.

Next, let’s look at how you can use conversations to help shape a child’s communication. Shaping involves reinforcing their behavior—no matter how small or subtle–in ways that shape their understanding of ideas and concepts.

**[Visual Description]** A young girl lies tilted back in a high chair and looks at the ceiling. An adult’s hands are rubbing her legs.

Here’s how it works: The child you see here is deafblind and has limited mobility and use of her hands. The adult knows that she enjoys having her legs rubbed.

Watch what happens when the rubbing stops.

The child slightly kicks her leg. Whether the movement was purposeful or not, the adult immediately responds as if the child asked for the rubbing to start again.

The more the adult does this, the more she reinforces the behavior (leg kicking) and its meaning (more rubbing). Her actions are shaping the child’s communication.

**[Visual Description]** A teenage girl sits in a chair and smiles while her teacher greets her by talking and rubbing her shoulder. The teacher picks up a touchscreen tablet and makes a few selections on the tablet and on a device in front of the girl.

Let’s examine how shaping works with Kollette, who is deafblind, non-ambulatory, and has complex medical issues. At 19 years old, she is an emerging communicator. She’s learning a few symbols and using them to communicate with a head tracking device.

**[On-Screen Wording]** Emma Mayes, DD, M.S. Special Education

Nationally Certified Deafblind Intervener

**Emma Mayes:** So she used to be able to use her hand to press a switch down.

But now she's really only got control over her head. and her mom had always been told that, you know she probably can't learn how to use a device. But I went to a conference, and I saw this device, and I tried it out, and I was like, I feel like this would be a great fit for this student. So I mentioned it to her mom, and she's a very motivated mom. She was like, “Okay, we're gonna jump right on this!”

**[Visual Description]** Emma places a sticker on Kollette’s glasses. A screen in front of Kollette shows a large green circle. Emma touches the screen and makes some adjustments. Emma then shows Kollette a tablet device with a drawing of a large yellow sun.

**Narrator:** For this to work, a tiny sticker dot is placed on Kollette’s glasses, and as she moves her head, the device tracks her head, moving an on-screen cursor. Positioning of her head and body is very important to enable optimal movement.

Kollette makes choices—in this case to move to the next page of the story Emma is reading—by moving the “cursor” on the screen in front of her and pausing on the green circle.

**[Visual Description]** Kollette moves her head so the cursor lands on the green circle.

**Emma:** Tell me to turn the page and I will go

**Computer:** Go

**Emma:** Good job.

**Narrator:** Her teacher, Emma, has been working on helping her learn the concepts of “stop and “go”—and to understand that the green circle on the screen means “go” and the red one means “stop.”

**[Visual Description]** Kollette sits in her wheelchair and looks at a screen in front of her showing red and green symbols. Her feet are in a footbath, and Emma is beside her with her hand on a switch that activates the bubbles in the footbath.

**Computer:** “Go”

[machine whirring and bubbles rumbling]

**Narrator:**  A routine that Kollette enjoys is a footbath, and when Emma presses a switch, the warm water bubbles around Kollette’s feet. She is learning to use her head tracking device to turn the bubbles on and off.

**Computer:** “Stop”

**[Visual Description]** Using eye gaze, Kollette moves the cursor to the red stop symbol.

**Narrator:** Watch how Emma gives her plenty of time to make a choice by pausing on the green “go” or the red “stop.”

**Emma:** “Can you say go?

**Computer:** Stop  
  
**Emma:** Oh, you were really close. You have to get your head up.

**[Visual Description]** Kollette moves the cursor to the green go symbol.

[machine whirring and bubbles rumbling]

There you go! Good job! Bubbles!

**Narrator:** Kollette’s mom reinforces the meaning of the red and green symbols and the concepts behind “stop” and “go.”

**[On-Screen Wording]** Angela Kinsley

Kollette’s Mom

**Angela Kinsley:** She really has to know, you know, which is which and what to do. And so for example, today, we were working on a book together, and when Kollette says, “Go,” I begin reading the book, and I'll keep reading the book until she, she doesn't purposely, I don't think it's purposeful yet, she hits, “Stop.” Like her head will turn to “Stop,” and I stop. And by stopping I become very, very quiet and, and the book goes down. I don't make eye contact with her, and she kinda just has to figure out what, what to do next. Sometimes this can take a little while. Which, eventually she hits the word “Go,” and immediately I am animated again. So I would begin reading or singing, or something like that. So she really starts to understand, “Oh, you know, if I do this, this happens. If I do this, that happens.”

**[Visual Description]** A series of images - Chris and Nolan look at each other and smile. A young boy and his brother mimic each other as they both play with a ball on a string. A baby giggles as she feels her mother’s moving lips.

**Narrator:** As you’ve seen, having meaningful conversations and helping to shape a child’s understanding strengthens their communication and supports concept development. They begin to realize that their communication can affect what happens—a powerful concept that lays the groundwork for a deeper sense of self and self advocacy.

**Angela Kinsley:** I think the one thing I would like to communicate to as many people as possible is there, there is a way for them, for any child to communicate, and it, just be patient and keep trying. Kollette is 19 and you know you, I love the fact that we haven't come to a point where we said, “well, we're just going to forget it. You know she is, she is who she is. We're not going to try anymore.” You know that kind of and, and really, it's just paying a lot of attention. If you pay attention to these kids, and I know a lot of teachers don't have a lot of time, individual time. But that's really what it takes, a lot of just trial and error. But there is a way, and whether technology is caught up with the best way, you may have to wait. But don't give up. I mean, if that's Kollette story, it's that, that would be the number one thing is, don't give up. There is a way.

**Narrator:** Let’s take a break and check what you know...

If you are having difficulties interacting with a child, what are some things you can do to make sure they’re receiving and understanding what you are communicating?

Stop the video if you need time to think.

There are many steps you can take if a child isn’t interacting with you. For example,

* Are you communicating in a mode the child best receives information, through sight, sound, or touch?
* Are they wearing their glasses, hearing aids, or other devices (and are they working)?
* Are positioning or environmental changes needed to better support them and their receptive communication?
* Do objects, materials, and instructional strategies take advantage of their sensory learning channels and skills?
* And are you slowing down, being present, and giving the child time to respond or initiate conversation?

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

True or False?

1. Emerging communicators who are deafblind often express their thoughts and feelings using facial expressions, gestures, body movements, or vocalizations.

True. They communicate in all of these ways.

1. Because many children who are deafblind resist having their hands touched, using the hand-under-hand technique can delay a child’s communication development.

False. It’s extremely important that you use hand-under-hand and never hand-over-hand. Place your hands underneath a child’s hands, or alongside them, to help the child explore objects and materials.

1. Imitation and turn-taking are excellent ways to engage in reciprocal interactions with children who are emerging communicators.

True. These are both excellent strategies to use to engage an emerging communicator in meaningful conversations.

This is the end of Lesson 2. In Lesson 3, we’ll examine how to support children who communicate using symbols.

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

Developed and produced by NCDB

Narrated by Shelby Morgan

Written by Ann Biswas

Edited by Brian Daigle

Content Expert: MaryAnn Demchak

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.

© 2024 National Center on Deafblindness