**Communication With Children Who Are Deafblind**

**Lesson 4 Part 1 Described Transcript**

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

Communicating With Children Who Are Deafblind

Lesson 4: Complex Language

**[Visual Description]** A teenage boy wearing headphones smiles broadly while he sits at a desk with a number of electronic devices, including two computer monitors and a microphone.

Children who are deafblind and use complex language, sometimes called “proficient communicators,” are fluent in American Sign Language, English, or another language.

In this lesson, you’ll learn

* What complex language use looks like for children who are deafblind
* Strategies you can use to support the communication of a child who uses complex language
* And ways of expanding a child’s communication and concept developmentBefore we begin, let’s check what you know…

True or False?

1. Children who use complex language take statewide alternate assessments.
2. Children who use complex language often struggle to keep up with the pace of instruction in a typical classroom.
3. Most children who use complex language will benefit from scheduling their more intensive, challenging classes in the morning due to fatigue that is possible later in the day.

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

Lesson 4 has three learning objectives. After completing the lesson, participants should be able to

1. Describe the ways children who use complex language communicate
2. Explain why two common assumptions about children who use complex language are incorrect
3. Identify strategies that can be used to help expand the vocabulary and understanding of basic concepts of children who use complex language

Part 1: How Do Children Who Use Complex Language Communicate?

**[Visual Description]** A young boy sits on a couch and signs to his mother. He then places his hands on her hands while she signs back.

Liam was born with typical hearing and vision. At age two and a half, he contracted meningitis, which left him profoundly deaf and able to see only high-contrast shapes and some colors.

**[Visual Description]** Teenage Liam sits at a school lunch table having a conversation with a teenage girl. He places his left hand on her right as she signs to him. He signs back. She invites him to take a bite of her apple slice.

Liam is now 14 years old and a freshman in high school. He communicates using American Sign Language, or ASL. He receives signs tactilely, by placing his hands over the hands of a person who is signing to him.

**[Visual Description]** Liam uses an electronic braille device at a desk in a classroom.

Liam is also a skilled braille user and has learned to use a wide range of technologies to communicate with those who don’t understand ASL.

**[Visual Description]** Liam is being interviewed, communicating through an interpreter sitting next to him.

**[On-Screen Text]** Interpreter: What kind of technology do you use?

**Liam (Interpreter's voice):** I use a laptop and F14.

**[On-Screen Text]** Interpreter: More technology?

**Liam (Interpreter’s voice):** And I use a screen with F14 and F40, with a keypad, with a refreshable keypad.

**[On-Screen Text]** Interpreter: How does that help you communicate with your teacher? Technology, how does it help you communicate?

**Liam (Interpreter’s voice):** Like, we communicate kind of back and forth on my computer.

**[On-Screen Text]** Sandra Gillam

Liam’s Mom

Teacher of Students With Visual Impairments

**Sandra Gillam:** We had a need. How does he communicate on his own with somebody that doesn't sign? That's gonna be a big thing, I think, for his, for now, for his future.

**[Visual Description]** Liam uses a refreshable braille device in his classroom.

And so, it's a refreshable braille screen that hooks up to technology where, you know, he can type, but then it also shows up on the screen. So if you don't know braille or sign, they can read what he's writing so you can have conversations back and forth with him, using technology typing.

Backing up to when he was little and he had to learn sign language in the beginning.

**[Visual Description]** Liam and his teacher sit facing each other on one side of a table. There is a large paper on the table that has many columns and rows. Liam signs to the teacher and feels the teacher signing back with his left hand, while he explores the paper with his right hand.

Once he learned that was power and could help him communicate, I mean, he just picked it up fast. So, same when we introduced technology when he learned like, I can express my needs and wants, I can talk to somebody else, I can get what I need through this device. Then he picks up things so fast that way, too. So I think a lot of it's intrinsic motivation. Helps us to just teach him new things and new ways to communicate.

**[Visual Description]** A series of images - A teenage boy and his teacher sit side by side looking at something on a table. The boy looks at a laptop as the teacher gestures to him.

**Narrator:** Dalton is 15 and a sophomore in high school. He was born with Usher syndrome, a condition characterized by partial or total hearing loss and vision loss that worsens over time.

Dalton wears cochlear implants in both ears and communicates verbally. Like Liam, he’s a whiz at technology, using computers and tablets and a wide array of software to support his receptive and expressive communication.

**[Visual Description]** Dalton sits at a desk and looks at one of three computer monitors. His hand is on a keyboard.

In class, he wears an FM system connected to his cochlear implants to help him understand his teacher’s voice.

**[Visual Description]** A series of videos -Dalton and his teacher sit side-by side at a table. They are speaking and showing each other some ASL signs. The teacher shows a sign where she moves her hands by her head with her thumbs up and Daltonsigns “America.” The teacher shows a sign with her left hand touching her right palm.

And he’s learning a new way of communicating.

**Dalton:** What about

**Teacher:** America. Alright my turn. Do you remember this one?

**[Visual Description]** Dalton and his mother sit at a table participating in an interview.

**[On-Screen Text]** Dalton McKittrick

Lanya McKittrick

Dalton’s Mom

**Dalton McKittrick:** I decided to kind of learn ASL, because I've only known how to speak English until very recently, because about like, three years ago, I started learning ASL, and because I got, oh, you take a world language. What are the options? I have to take like French, Spanish, and there's ASL, and I'm like, “Oh, I'll take ASL.” I think it could be useful, especially since I talk to a lot of deaf people every year, just like saying at conferences or anything like that. I can talk to them.

**[Visual Description]** A toddler girl sits on her father’s lap on a couch.

**Father:** I. Love. You.

**Narrator:** Laci was born with CHARGE syndrome.

**[Visual Description]** Lacy sits on her knees on the floor and plays with paper, waves her arms, and wiggles her fingers.

Because of a missing auditory nerve, Laci has no hearing in one ear, but wears a cochlear implant in the other. She has some limited vision—mostly in the right eye.

**[Visual Description]** Lacy as a teenager smiles and in front of her stand up desk in her room. She has a large computer monitor and a keyboard.

Laci is now 17 and in the eleventh grade. She reads with the words held close to her face or on a screen with the help of technology that magnifies text. She is a highly verbal communicator.

**[Visual Description]** Lacy and her mom sit side by side participating in an interview.

**[On-Screen Text]** Laci Lowell

Becky Lowell, Laci’s Mom

**Laci Lowell:** I also use my phone and my iPad from, well, I mainly used the phone, the big screen. The iPad is also used when it's needed. Oh, and then, yes, I guess my keyboard, except a cable that’s attached to the computer. Right?

**Laci’s Mom**: But that's typically how you answer questions. You would rather type than write.

**Laci Lowell:** I can write some stuff, but I'm just a very bad person at writing. But, like, let's see, do we have an example?

**Laci’s Mom:** You're not really bad. You're just much better at typing.

**[Visual Description]** Laci looks at enlarged type on her computer screen.

Yes. but since she learned typing she's very, very fast. She's very proficient. She does a really good job. The only issue would be when it comes to commas and periods. She doesn't always see them, and I think she's not really got the key down right.

But other than that, she's very good at typing, and she can type out stories that are pages long. So she's very good.

**[Visual Description]** Lacy smiles and points to a sentence on a computer screen. She has a pencil in her hand.

**Narrator:** The young people you’ve just seen are all deafblind and use complex language.

**[Visual Description]** A series of images - Liam sits on a bench reading a braille book. Dalton sits at a desk with two computer monitors. A teenage boy works on a computer in an office setting.

Through a lot of hard work, they’ve found a combination of supports, technology, and adaptations that help them communicate with a wide range of people.

In addition to being fluent in a formal, conventional language, children in this population typically

Take regular state assessment tests—with or without accommodations, and

most do not have an intellectual disability.

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

Deafblind Consultant and Educator

**Maurice Belote:** Another way that we look at proficient communicators is by intellectual functioning or cognition, whatever you want to call it. But it's that ability to use critical thinking skills. So things like looking at information and data and, and drawing conclusions or making inferences based on the data that the person has collected. Understanding multiple perspectives, problem solving. There's all sorts of things that are, that are part of critical thinking.

**[Visual Description]** A teenage girl in a science classroom bends over a lab table to closely measure something on a large scale. Behind her, a teacher looks on.

**Narrator:** Those who use complex language, like Liam, Dalton, and Laci, learn the same material as their grade-level peers, but they usually require accommodations like

* Microphones and FM systems
* Computers
* Screen reader software
* And braille devices

Accommodations also include non-tech support, such as changes in seating arrangements to better accommodate any usable hearing and vision or extra time to complete assignments.

**[Visual Description]** A teacher holds an electronic tablet for a teenage girl who stands next to her. The girl’s hands are on the screen and she is smiling.

Tailoring accommodations to meet the needs of a specific student often involves adding specialists to the educational team, like interpreters, interveners, teachers of the deaf, and teachers of the visually impaired.

**[Visual Description]** Dalton and his teacher look at a handheld device.

Dalton has a teacher of the deaf who helps interpret and clarify information during class.

**[Visual Description]** Liam and his interpreter have a conversation using sign language.

And, as you’ve seen, Liam’s interpreter plays an integral role in supporting his communication.

**[Visual Description]** A teenage boy wearing a suit stands at a microphone giving a speech. A school banner is behind him.

**Hunter McGowen:** As a student with dual sensory loss of both hearing and vision, I must openly share the challenges of my disability with others around me.

**Narrator:** This is Hunter McGowen giving a speech at his high school. At this time, he’d been clinically diagnosed with Usher syndrome Type II, but later genetic testing found that he has a peroxisomal disorder on the Zellweger spectrum.

**[Visual Description]** A series of images - Hunter as a younger teen smiles and poses for a photo. Hunter as a young boy smiles; his arms are crossed and lie on top of an open book. Hunter as a young boy typing on a brailler.

Hunter has limited vision and wears hearing aids. As a youngster, he went to an oral school for the deaf, which focused on listening skills and speech.

**[Visual Description]** Hunter as a teenager sitting on a couch talking.

Let’s listen to Hunter when he was a sophomore describing his disability:

**Hunter McGowen:** Basically how I can describe my disability and how I describe it to anyone is basically I can do pretty much anything, anything that anyone else can do. I just have to do it in a different way or different steps to it. I, you know, I always go to the extreme, I mean, I may not be able to fly a plane, you know, be a pilot, but what's stopping me from being an engineer? Helping to design airplanes or whatever, you know? So I just think, a lot of my friends and family know that and realize that's how I think. I can pretty much do anything but in a different way to access that material, to achieve that goal.

**[Visual Description]** A series of images - Hunter and his mother smile, while a black dog sits at Hunter’s feet. Hunter, wearing a graduation cap and gown, holds a diploma. A black dog next to him wears a graduation cap, too. Hunter in cap and gown smiles while holding another diploma. 28-year-old Hunter smiles at the camera. A computer system with two monitors is behind him.

**Narrator:** Hunter went on to achieve a number of goals: He graduated from high school and went on to college, receiving an undergraduate degree and a dual master's degree in vocational rehabilitation and mental health counseling. Hunter is now 28 years old, works as a vocational rehabilitation counselor for his state’s bureau of blind and vision services, and lives independently.

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

Children who use complex language typically require accommodations like microphones, computers, and software. What kinds of non-tech support do they sometimes require?

Pause the video if you need time to think.

Non-tech support can involve moving their seat to better accommodate their sensory abilities as well as using specialists, like interpreters, interveners, teachers of the deaf, and teachers of the visually impaired.

This ends Part 1 of Lesson 4. In Part 2, we’ll discuss strategies you can use to support the communication of children who use complex language.

**[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