



# The National Consortium On Deaf-Blindness

The Teaching Research Institute  
Helen Keller National Center  
Perkins School for the Blind

DB-LINK, The National Information Clearinghouse  
On Children Who Are Deaf-Blind

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## COMMUNICATION INTERACTIONS: IT TAKES TWO

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### What is Communication?

Communication is the exchange of a message between two or more people. Everyone communicates in many different ways and for many different reasons.

Communication can be **expressive** or **receptive**. Children who are deaf-blind may never learn to talk. However, they can **express** themselves to you. They can **receive** the messages you send them.

Through communication, children can make changes in their world. They can express their wants and needs. They can make choices.

Through communication, you can teach your child to play, to learn about the world, to interact with you, to do daily tasks, and to work.

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### How Can We Increase Communication?

One of the best indicators of a child's use of effective communication is the *rate of communication*. What does this mean? The more a child communicates, the better he/she will communicate. How does he communicate more? Children communicate more when they are provided frequent opportunities to communicate. Opportunities to communicate should be included across functional activities and caregiving routines.

Let's take a look at the functional activities that occur at home or at school. For the younger child, these may be eating, bathing, changing clothes, and playing with a sister or brother. For an older child, these may include swimming, cooking, and working. Providing opportunities and being responsive are two of the most frequent methods to increase a child's communication.

#### 1. Ask the following questions:

- ◆ How many different people interact with your child or your student in a day?
- ◆ How many interactions occur in teaching an activity?
- ◆ What are the daily activities in which you interact with your child or student?
- ◆ How many opportunities to communicate with you does the child have in different activities? None? One? Five? Ten?

#### 2. Notice your child's actions during functional activities. For example –

Functional Activity	Ways Child May Communicate
Eating	Opens mouth for "more."
Drinking	Extends cup for "more."
Swimming	Raises hand for "out."
Dressing	Touches Mom for "help."
Working	Signs "More."
Transitioning	Says, "Bye."

- ◆ In what ways is your child communicating with you?
- #### 3. Make sure every person who interacts with the child knows how he or she receives and sends messages.

Each child will do this in unique ways. It is necessary to stop, watch the child, and read the message.

- ◆ Does each person take time to watch and listen to the child?
- ◆ Are good records being kept so each caregiver knows what to expect?

Parents and teachers need to work together to do the following:

- ◆ Increase the opportunities the child has to communicate.
- ◆ Increase the different ways in which the child communicates.
- ◆ Increase the different reasons the child has to communicate.
- ◆ Increase the number of people, things, and activities the child communicates about.
- ◆ Increase your attention to support positive communication attempts.

5. Give Lee an opportunity to communicate with you.
6. Always communicate to Lee what will happen next or where Lee is being taken *before* the activity or movement takes place.
7. Post an actual example of an interaction in your classroom; so that, everyone (peers, buddies, and all service providers) can follow this.

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## What Can You Do?

In the following material, we will use the name "Lee" to represent an infant, child, or young adult who is deaf-blind. Think of Lee as your child, or as the student in your classroom.

What can you do for Lee to increase his interactive communication?

1. Interact often with him. Give Lee a chance to understand what you are going to do before you do it. Give Lee a chance to make a choice, or to request "more."
2. Allow Lee to participate in activities as much as possible.
3. Make sure Lee has a name sign. This may be the first initial of Lee's name to be worn on Lee's chest.
4. Make sure that you have a way to identify yourself to him.
  - ◆ For Sister, her long braids.
  - ◆ For Dad, his beard.
  - ◆ For Mom, her rings.
  - ◆ For teacher, her short hair.

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## An Example of Communication Interaction for Lee:

- ◆ Approach Lee slowly; let Lee smell or sense your presence.
- ◆ Use Lee's name sign.
- ◆ Let Lee know your identification cue, as in Mom's ring.
- ◆ Let Lee know you are going to the car by letting Lee take or feel a set of keys.
- ◆ Have Lee open or close the car door.
- ◆ Let Lee buy something at the store.
- ◆ Help Lee hand the money to the clerk if Lee can't do this by himself.
- ◆ Let Lee know the activity is finished by putting the keys in a box or on a hook.



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## Communication is Worth the Effort

- ◆ Learn the most effective ways to express your messages.
- ◆ Listen and watch in order to receive messages from your child.
- ◆ Give your child practice in receiving and expressing messages.
- ◆ Make sure your child's Individual Education Plan contains both receptive and expressive communication objectives.
- ◆ Help your child WANT to communicate. Let your child see that communication gives power.
- ◆ Initially, help your child communicate in the "here and now."
- ◆ Communication is a critical self determination skill at all ages.

*This fact sheet was adapted from one originally written by Kathleen Stremel and published and distributed within the state of Mississippi by the Mississippi Statewide Project for Individuals who are Deaf and Blind.*

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## Additional Resources

DB-LINK has extensive resources on the topic of Communication. Please contact us with your questions about the availability of these or other materials.

**Communication At Home and In the Community: Helpful Strategies & Suggestions From Parents & Families With a Child Who is Deaf-Blind** - *The National Family Association for Deaf-Blind (NFADB); The National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind (NTAC), 2000.*

A collection of strategies, advice and suggestions from parents of children who are deaf-blind for promoting communication in the home and community. Available from DB-LINK or on the web at: <http://nationaldb.org/NCDBProducts.php>

**Communication Fact Sheets for Parents** - *Stremel, Kathleen; Bixler, Betsy; Morgan, Susanne; Layton, Kristen. — National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind (NTAC), 2002.*

These fact sheets provide information to better understand the communication and language modes and systems that may be appropriate for children who are deaf-blind. Available from DB-LINK or on the web at: <http://nationaldb.org/NCDBProducts.php>

**Communication Matrix: Especially for Parents** - *Rowland, Charity. — Oregon Health & Science University: 2004.*

A communication skill assessment tool to be used with individuals operating at the earliest stages of communication. This no cost, online version allows the user to enter data on a child and print out a profile and a list of communicative behaviors and intents. A print version is also available. This document is available on the web at: <http://www.communicationmatrix.org>

**Dimensions of Communication: An Instrument to Assess the Communication Skills and Behaviors of Individuals with Disabilities** - *Mar, Harvey H., Ph.D; Sall, Nancy, Ed.D. 1999.*

Assessment instrument designed to help teachers, educational specialists, speech-language therapists, psychologists, and other service providers evaluate the communication skills of persons with multiple disabilities including severe or profound mental retardation and deafblindness. Available from DB-LINK, (800.438.9376) or [info@nationaldb.org](mailto:info@nationaldb.org).

**Hand In Hand: Essentials of Communication and Orientation and Mobility for Your Students Who Are Deaf-Blind: Volume I** - *Huebner, Kathleen Mary (Ed.); Prickett, Jeanne Glidden (Ed.); Welch, Therese Rafalowski (Ed.); Joffe, Elga (Ed.) — AFB Press: 1995.*

This material is divided into three segments: Key Concepts, Communication, and Orientation and Mobility. Each of these segments is, in turn, divided into 20 self-contained modules which present essential information about deaf-blindness, how deaf-blindness affects learning, and how students who are deaf-blind can develop critical communication and O&M skills. Available from: AFB Press. Publisher's web site: <http://www.afb.org>

**Project SALUTE: Successful Adaptations for Learning to Use Touch Effectively.** 2001.

Federally funded model demonstration project to investigate and identifying effective tactile strategies for deaf-blind children who also have cognitive or physical disabilities. Outcomes for the project, including tools and strategies, are available online at: <http://www.projectsalute.net>

**Remarkable Conversations: Guide to developing meaningful communication with children and young adults who are deafblind** - Miles, Barbara (Ed.); Riggio, Marianne (Ed.) Perkins School for the Blind: 1999, 308.

A practical guide for teachers, family members or other service providers playing a role in the life of a child who is deafblind. Good communication is emphasized and illustrated with stories that are based on positive, real experiences. Available from Perkins School for the Blind.

Telephone: (617) 972-7328; fax: (617)972-7334.

**Understanding Deafblindness: Issues, Perspectives, and Strategies** - Alsop, Linda, M.Ed. (Ed.) – SKI-HI Institute, Utah State University: 2002.

A comprehensive 2-volume curriculum for parents, interveners, and service providers working with children who are deaf-blind. Aspects of deaf-blind programming covered include communication, concept development, vision, hearing, touch, sensory integration, intervention, family issues, physical education, additional disabilities, orientation and mobility, community support, and evaluation. Available from Hope Publishing, Inc. Phone/Fax: 435-245-2888. <http://www.hopepubl.com>.

**What Do I Do Now? Communication Skills and Strategies for Individuals Working with Young Children Who Have Sensory Impairments** - SKI\*HI. HOPE Inc. 1997.

This set of 24 instructional videos covers all aspects of communication and demonstrates techniques including: signals, turn-taking, active vs. passive, and choice-making. Available from HOPE, Inc., phone/fax: (435) 752-9533; <http://www.hopepubl.com>

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