



Communication Development

[Adapted from NTAC: The National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind. (2002). Communication fact sheets for parents.]

Communication development is an active process that occurs through interactions with others and during routines and play. Typically developing infants first respond to a parent's smile, to physical closeness, and to the quality and intonation of a parent's voice. They make eye contact and learn to smile in response to others' smiles. They begin to vocalize in response to their parents' faces and voices.

Young children learn that their reason for communicating is to elicit responses from caregivers. They first learn to communicate with basic behaviors such as crying, vocalizing, body movement, facial gestures, and touching. Communication development is progressive and gradual.

COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN WHO ARE DEAF-BLIND

Communication development does not happen in the typical way for a child who is congenitally deaf-blind. The nature and rate of progress is highly dependent on when vision and hearing loss occurred (e.g., at birth or later in childhood) and the severity of the sensory loss. Because children cannot use vision and hearing to learn from a distance, communication with caregivers and others must be adapted for close-up interactions.

Children who have motor or cognitive disabilities in addition to deaf-blindness, may need even more time and more intense strategies to learn to communicate effectively. Without the development of communication, they may demonstrate "learned helplessness," thinking that they cannot impact other human beings.

Communication development can never happen too early. It is also never too late for a child or youth to learn to communicate.

IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Children must be active, not passive, learners
- Touch may be the primary sense by which a child with deaf-blindness receives messages
- Social relationships and interactions are essential
- Children need time and many, many opportunities to communicate

- They must have multiple reasons to communicate
 - They may use many different forms of communication
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