



Hand-Under-Hand Technique

NCDB Practice Guide

The hands often serve as the eyes and ears of children who are deaf-blind. The hand-under-hand technique involves gently placing your hands underneath or alongside the hands of a child with deaf-blindness to help them explore and engage with the world around them. When used effectively, the hand-under-hand technique provides respectful, tactile support to encourage children to interact and communicate.

NCDB Practice Guides outline the essential components of instructional practices commonly used with children who are deaf-blind. For more information on the hand-under-hand technique, go to nationaldb.org.

Rationale

The hands of someone with deaf-blindness serve multiple functions: “as tools, sense organs, and voice.” Because of this, “it is crucial for educators, parents, and friends of people who are deafblind to become especially sensitive to hands” (Miles 2003). Using the hand-under-hand technique will help you more effectively connect and communicate with a child who is deaf-blind and present tactile information in ways that support their learning, self-determination, and exploration of the environment.

Essential Components

Each bolded item below is an essential component of the hand-under-hand technique. The bullets are the skills a teacher or other adult working with a child or youth who is deaf-blind would display if implementing the components correctly. The elements refer to a “child,” but the information is applicable to individuals of all ages.

Treat the Hands Gently and with Respect

The teacher or other practitioner

- Interacts with the child by gently placing hands underneath or alongside the child’s hands
- Is always sensitive to and respectful of the child’s hands
- Invites access and asks permission to use one’s own hands by making them available to the child in a relaxed, palms-up position (another signal of availability may be necessary if the child has no usable hearing and vision)

- Avoids restricting the child’s hands or hand movement (unless for safety)
- Models and demonstrates a variety of activities by allowing the child to follow the movement of own hands
- Observes the child’s face and body as well as hands for evidence of their interest and emotional state
- Shares attention of an activity or object with the child through mutual touch (this sometimes involves imitating the child’s hand movements)
- Is attuned to how one’s own emotions and feelings are often expressed by the hands
- Keeps own hands and nails in good condition

Respect the Child’s Uniqueness

The teacher or other practitioner

- Allows the child’s interests to guide choices and movement
- Gives the child enough time to become comfortable with touch (e.g., to unlearn negative experiences, such as highly directive or forced touch)
- Makes appropriate adaptations to materials and the environment if the child has difficulty simultaneously looking at and reaching for or touching an object (a characteristic behavior of children with CVI)
- Lets the child control their level of engagement
- Allows the child time to explore and process information, including time to synthesize a “whole” object through touch, particularly if it is large
- Provides plenty of time for the child to observe through the hands how one models movement and activities
- Gradually withdraws the use of the hand-under-hand technique as a prompt for activities where the child demonstrates increasing independence (e.g., as the child learns to brush teeth)

Tactile Learning Activities

The teacher or other practitioner

- Creates tactile activities that reflect an understanding of the child’s interests, abilities, and needs
- Prepares activities that are appropriate given the child’s past experiences and sensitivity to touch
- Selects age-appropriate, engaging materials that stimulate the child’s curiosity and exploration through touch

- As much as possible, uses authentic settings (e.g., bathroom, kitchen) and objects as well as natural contexts to help teach hand skills involved in routine activities

Physical Support to Encourage Use of Hands

The teacher or other practitioner

- Collaborates with physical therapists, occupational therapists, and other specialists to prepare appropriate hand and body supports (e.g., some children may need support at the wrist, elbow, or shoulder)
- Positions the child to accommodate their physical needs while allowing for unrestricted/free movement of arms and hands
- Positions self close to the child according to the child's preferences (e.g., next to, behind, or across from the child)

You'll know the practice is working if the child . . .

- Reaches out when your hand is offered
- Engages in tactile exploration more frequently
- Independently uses their hands during routines and activities
- Initiates interactions to indicate shared interest in an object or activity

Learn More

To learn more about hand-under-hand and the importance of the hands and touch, see [Hand-Under-Hand Interactions](https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/educational-practices/hand-under-hand/) on the NCDB website (https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/educational-practices/hand-under-hand/).

NCDB Practice Guides are created using a process adapted from the Practice Profile format developed by the National Implementation Research Network (Metz, 2016). Although NCDB Practice Guides do not provide information about how to plan or implement practices, they outline their essential components. This makes them a useful tool for state deaf-blind project personnel and practitioners to identify training and coaching needs related to specific practices for children with deaf-blindness. They also serve as quick reminders of the purpose and key elements of a practice.

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