**Module 1 Lesson 1 Part 3 Descriptive Video Transcript**

**Narrator:** Teaching Children Who Are Deafblind: Professional Development for Educators  
Module 1: The Impact of Deafblindness on Learning and Development  
Lesson 1: An Introduction to Deafblindness Part 3: Identifying Deafblindness

**[On-Screen Text]** Michelle Clyne, Project Coordinator, Project Reach Illinois DeafBlind Services

**Michelle Clyne:** Sometimes, even if a child is born with that combined vision/hearing loss they're not identified as deafblind right away, and there's a variety of reasons for that. Sometimes the family’s dealing with a variety of life issues and the deafblindness identification is not uppermost on their mind. Sometimes there's other medical concerns keeping the child alive and well, that take priority. And sometimes even if there happened to be vision and hearing tests completed, and even if those have both shown that the child has vision loss or hearing loss or the combination of both, that haven’t put it together that the child, because of this, has a unique concern, deafblindness, that requires specific and special intervention.

**[Visual Description]** A woman sits next to a girl who is deafblind and has a cochlear implant. The woman holds a binder containing objects on the girl's lap. The girl is exploring the objects with her hands.

**Narrator:** The impact on learning is exponentially greater for combined vision and hearing loss than for vision or hearing loss alone. Because of this, identification of a child’s deafblindness is essential. Unfortunately, sometimes a child’s deafblindness isn’t identified.

**[Visual Description]** Two maps from the National Deaf-Blind Child Count show the percentage of the total number of children identified with deafblindness in each state who are ages birth to 2 and 3 to 5.

For example, the annual National Deafblind Child Count found that far fewer children have been identified in the birth-to-2-year range than in the 3-to-5-year range. Although there are a number of possible reasons, the disparity is troubling.

**[Visual Description]** A series of images - A boy sits in a wheelchair with a half marathon tag on his chair. A boy sits in a wheelchair and holds a baseball bat. A man stands beside him and supports the bat with his hands. A girl with glasses holds her dolls. A boy with glasses and a hearing aid holds a magnifying device and looks at a book.

Children who are deafblind may not be identified because they have additional complex impairments that are more “noticeable” or that would seem to take precedence, such as cerebral palsy, severe cognitive disabilities, or complex medical needs. Characteristics that may be associated with severe intellectual disabilities or autism, like unresponsiveness or lack of eye contact, are also common in children who are deafblind. If a child’s deafblindness isn’t identified, they won’t be referred to appropriate services that provide the critical interventions and support they need and deserve.

**[On-Screen text]** Maurice Belote, Former Project Coordinator, California Deafblind Services

**Maurice Belote:** Many times, people will say to us this child has motor impairments, they have complex medical needs. Those are the most pressing issues. Hearing and vision right now are the least of their problems, and what I say to that, as a teacher of children who are deafblind, is

I think of that very differently. I think that vision and hearing are so important and play such an important role in the way that we learn and communicate and interact with the world that if we can help children use the vision and hearing that they have, or if we can help them to compensate for missing vision and hearing, then that child is going to be much more engaged. They're going to be accessing the curriculum, they're going to be accessing their friends, and they're going to be enjoying school so much more.

**[Visual Description]** A girl sits on a blanket at the beach. She wiggles her toes and feet in the sand. An adult puts their feet in the sand next to the girl’s feet.

**Narrator:** Identifying hearing and vision loss at any age is important, but the sooner the better. Experiences early in life have a profound influence on a child’s ability to learn, move, and communicate with others. This is especially the case with children who are deafblind.

**[Visual Description]** A boy with glasses reads a children’s book that has large print and images.

Any child with a known vision or hearing loss should have the other sense evaluated. And all children with severe or multiple disabilities should have both senses evaluated.

**[Visual Description]** A teacher and a boy sit at a desk. The teacher holds yellow and red lego pieces close to the boy so he can see them.

But even if a child is screened, a vision problem can be missed. For example, assessing a visual acuity problem is complicated with infants or young children who often communicate in ways that are subtle and hard to recognize.

**[Visual Description]** A boy stands in an assistive support device with a cup in his hands. A woman stands next to him and holds three fingers to her chin.

Likewise, visual development in the early years is ongoing, and a problem can develop later that wasn’t initially identified.

**[Visual Description]** A boy sits at a table. He claps his hands and then touches a variety of objects—a ball, a soft blanket, and stuffed toy giraffe. He claps his hands again.

Basic vision and hearing tests may not tell the whole story, particularly when a child has significant multiple disabilities. Tests may not reflect how a child uses their vision and hearing in various everyday environments.

So what can you do as a practitioner to help ensure children who might have deafblindness are identified? Here are some signs that might indicate a vision problem. The child

* Doesn’t make eye contact
* Looks at lights instead of people or toys or
* Seems to notice things only on one side

Some behaviors that might indicate a *hearing* problem include

* Not noticing voices or sounds
* Favoring one ear by often turning it toward a voice or other sound or
* A speech or language delay

**[On-Screen text]** Maurice Belote, Former Project Coordinator, California Deafblind Services

**Maurice Belote:** So I often tell teachers and families to trust their instincts, trust their gut. If medical reports or past educational reports suggest that a child does not have any functional vision and/or hearing, but you are seeing responses to vision stimuli and hearing stimuli, then look into that and get more information. Conversely, if the medical records are suggesting that the child does have some usable vision or usable hearing, but you are not seeing responses that align with those past reports, then look into that as well. Listen to family members, listen to parent educators, listen to the people in your program, because that's really important information about how the child is functioning in real environments, whether it's at school or at home.

**Narrator:** If deafblindness is suspected, specialists will be able to assist with the diagnosis and help determine the extent of any usable hearing and vision. For example, among other tests, a teacher of students with visual impairments will perform a “functional visual assessment,” which provides information on how well a child uses vision in different environments and situations.

A teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing will assess a child’s functional hearing to see how the child uses their hearing in a variety of environments in order to make recommendations for needed accommodations. During any assessment it’s important to also have input from a teacher with expertise in deafblindness, and other experts like orientation and mobility specialists and physical therapists, and the family, who can each provide their perspective.

**[Visual Description]** The State Deaf-Blind projects page on the NCDB website.

Many state deafblind projects offer technical assistance and training on identification of children who are deafblind.Reach out to your deafblind project to learn more.

For contact information, visit the National Center on Deaf-Blindness, at nationaldb.org.

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

This video shows an adult who is trying to get a child to comb her hair. There could be a lot of things involved here, but what do you notice in the child’s behavior that might indicate the child has trouble with hearing and/or vision?

**[Visual Description]** A woman is combing a girl’s hair. The girl’s head is down. She is not looking at the woman. The girl first puts her hands on the woman’s hands as the woman combs her hair. The woman then puts the comb in the girl’s hand and says, “Lauren’s turn.” The girl holds the comb briefly but doesn’t look at it. She pulls it through her hair once.

Let’s watch again. Notice that she doesn't look at the comb or make eye contact with the adult who’s assisting her. She also doesn’t seem to be responding to the adult’s voice.

Again, although many issues could be involved, these behaviors might indicate the child has problems with hearing and/or vision. It would be prudent to discuss your observation with others on the educational team and the family so the child's vision and hearing could be assessed by specialists, if needed.

**Narrator:**

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

1. Like Helen Keller, children who are deafblind have no vision or hearing

False! A majority of children who are deafblind have some usable vision and/or hearing. A small percentage have no hearing or vision. Helen Keller was born a sighted-hearing child but completely lost her vision and hearing at around 19 months from what is thought to be scarlet fever or meningitis.

1. If children who are deafblind cannot casually observe or overhear things, they will have problems with communication and concept development.

True!Children who are deafblind have limited incidental learning, which means they can’t access information that most sighted-hearing children pick up naturally.

1. Basic vision and hearing tests are the only way to confirm whether a child is deafblind.

False! Although basic vision and hearing tests are helpful, they can miss things like auditory and visual processing disorders and other issues that might indicate a child has deafblindness. Other assessments can be done to help identify deafblindness. And, it’s important to listen to what family members think...and trust your own instincts.

This is the end of Module 1, Lesson 1. In Lesson 2, we’ll examine how deafblindness impactsyou as a practitioner and discuss learning strategies you can implement right away in the classroom or home.

**[On Screen text]** National Center on Deaf-Blindness  
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Special thanks to: the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, State deaf-blind projects, families, and educators who shared their photographs and videos with us for this program.   
IDEAS that Work logo. The contents of this video program were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, #H326T180026. 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, Susan Weigert.   
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