

**Nebraska Deaf-Blind Project
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Assessment of Children With Dual Sensory Impairments

By

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Children and youth who are deaf-blind have very unique needs when it comes to assessment. Many of these children have additional disabilities which also impacts the assessment and evaluation process. The combination of having both a hearing and vision loss will impact the child's interactions with people and objects, access to information, incidental learning, and concept development. Some key strategies for effective assessment for children who are deaf-blind include family participation and transdisciplinary assessment. Below is a list of some of the key elements:

- Include the family throughout the assessment process seeking input
- Conduct a Mapping process and/or interview the family in regard to priorities, preferences of the student, goals, future dreams, and activities of the family and student
- Let family members assist with assessment activities when possible
- Give attention to family concerns throughout the assessment process
- Assess the child across natural environment/settings (i.e. home, classroom, community, etc.)
- Use a transdisciplinary team approach
- Focus IEP goals and objectives on life-long skills that are based on input from family which includes the child's likes, dislikes, future dreams, modes of communication, use of vision and hearing, etc.

Assessment Areas That Are Essential:

1) Social/Communication: (Vocalizations, gestures, eye gaze, changes in movement, alertness, verbalizations, touch, signing). What methods does the

child use for receptive and expressive communication? Teams can conduct expressive communication maps and receptive communication maps to capture this information.

2) Sensory/Motor: What are the child's likes and dislikes? How does the child's muscle tone affect the child's ability to participate in activities? What type of motor planning is used (stamina, reach and grasp)? What supports and physical modifications are used? What positioning works best for the child?

3) Functional Vision: Does the child have useful remaining vision? What focusing and tracking patterns are present? How does the child use near and distance vision? What is observed about the visual field? Do visual fields appear to be intact? Does the child look at an object while interacting with it or look away, and then act? Does the child show color preferences? Does the child show preference for movement rather than still objects? Are eyeglasses or low vision aids recommended? Are they used? What is the child's preferred learning mode: visual, auditory, or tactual?

4) Functional Hearing: Is the child aware of sound? Does the child alert to sound, orient to sound, localize sound, isolate a specific sound in the presence of other sounds? Does the child respond to a selected sound among other sounds? Does the child appear to use hearing to respond during the assessment to voice? music? speech? Are hearing aids recommended and used? Are listening devices recommended and used?

5) Orientation & Mobility (O&M): Students with dual sensory impairments including those who have additional disabilities should receive an orientation and mobility assessment from a certified O & M specialist. Some of the skills that should be considered are: developing environmental awareness and early movement patterns (reaching, crawling); developing body awareness; teaching

travel within rooms, within familiar buildings, from building to building, and within the community. For students who use wheelchairs, walkers, crutches, or canes, the O & M specialist should be part of the team to assist with adapting protective techniques, sighted guide techniques, and appropriate cane use.

The above areas need to be assessed because of the child's ability to make sense of his/her world. The combined loss of both hearing and vision requires the team to have accurate assessment information. Conducting functional hearing and vision assessment are critical for making programming decisions that are different for a child who is just visually impaired or a child who is just hearing impaired. The combined loss of the distance senses of hearing and vision requires different programming.

Some Recommended Assessment Strategies:

- Use the child's current communication system.
- Choose activities based on family routines.
- Include components that apply to classroom instruction and appropriate age level activities
- Ask the child to make choices, follow steps in a routine, or indicate what comes next in an activity
- Select toys or other objects that use the child's preferred colors, textures, and sounds. Present the objects in the positions where the child has the best vision and hearing.
- Determine what level of prompts or support is needed.
- Use assessment tasks and activities that are meaningful to the student
- Use multiple observations of the child's communication behaviors and social interaction skills while he or she participates in natural activities and routines
- Focus on the process of learning (how the child actively acquires new information), rather than on test scores.

Resources:

“Key Elements for Effective Assessment of Children who are Deafblind”.
Evelyn P. Kelso, ATECH/ASSETT, New Hampshire.

“Psychological Evaluation of Children who are Deaf-Blind”. Harvey Mar,
DB-Link August 1998, Flyer.

“Teaching Students With Visual and Multiple Impairments”. Millie Smith
and Nancy Levack, TSBVI, 1999 (2nd edition).

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