



Fact Sheet

Awareness of Medical Issues in Relation to Changes in Behavior

Individuals with dual sensory impairments may demonstrate behaviors that are frequently viewed as inappropriate. These behaviors can be interpreted as strange head movements, odd body postures, unexplained emotional reactions, self-stimulatory movements, noncompliance, tantrums, etc. Individuals with dual sensory impairments may be attempting to compensate for the loss of vision, hearing and/or the physical impairments which may be related to their specific disability. Many of these behaviors are caused by reactions to medical issues and/or the effects of medications needed to manage the medical issues.

These behaviors are more important if there is a change from the individual's usual behavior. The change in behavior may indicate a change in the medical condition of the individual with dual sensory impairments. Prompt medical attention should be considered to rule out medical issues as a cause in behavior.

The following charts give an overview of some medical conditions frequently associated with deaf-blindness. The behavior should be thoroughly discussed with the personal physician to determine diagnosis and resulting medical treatment.

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Fact Sheets from Colorado Services to Children with Deafblindness are to be used by both families and professionals serving individuals with vision and hearing loss. The information applies to students, birth through 21 years of age. The purpose of a Fact Sheet is to give general information on a specific topic. More specific information for an individual student can be provided through personalized technical assistance available from the Colorado Services to Children with Deafblindness Project. For more information call (303) 866-6681.

Topic	Components	Behavioral Signs	Questions for Physician	Evaluation	Home/Classroom Management	Emotional Reactions
VISION ISSUES	Near and distance vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holding close to face • Inattention • Squinting • Responding to near or far objects, not both 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cause • Need for glasses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam by eye specialist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glasses • Seating • Positioning of objects and people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withdrawal • Social isolation • Fear
	Field Loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head turning/tilting • Task avoidance • Clumsiness • Impaired mobility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Areas of field loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam by eye specialist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positioning of people and objects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear • Frustration • Withdrawal • Refusal of specific activities requiring use of impaired field
	Glaucoma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tantrums • Eye-poking • Head-hitting • Pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the ocular pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam by ophthalmologist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eye drops • Surgery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger • Confusion
	Cataracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cloudy lens • Eye-poking • Lack of visual focus • Seeking light 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treatment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam by ophthalmologist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surgery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjustment to blindness
	Nystagmus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small, rapid eye movements (horizontal or vertical) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cause • Treatment • Effect on visual field and focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam by ophthalmologist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positioning of people and objects • Allow time for processing visual information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frustration • Fatigue
	Light Sensitivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoiding light • Head down • Eyes closed • Crying • Pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cause 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam by ophthalmologist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visor, hat • Sunglasses • Classroom lighting • Support for student as light changes when moving from one setting to another 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fear • Discomfort • Anger

Topic	Components	Behavioral Signs	Questions for Physician	Evaluation	Home/Classroom Management	Emotional Reactions
HEARING ISSUES	Conductive loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Congestion • Fingers in ears • “Not listening” • Pulling on ears • Talking too loud 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Infection • Allergies • Treatment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam by physician 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medication • Tubes • Surgery • Hearing aids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frustration • Paranoia • Withdrawal
	Sensorineural loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Not listening” • Not responding to particular/all sounds 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cause • Treatment 	Exam by ear-nose-throat specialist and audiologist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hearing aids • Auditory training • Surgery • Augmentative communication systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frustration • Confusion • Social isolation • Difficulty with self-concept
	Allergies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluctuating inattention • Congestion • Pain • Respiratory difficulties • Rashes • Sleepiness • 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensitivities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam by allergist or ear-nose-throat specialist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medication • Allergy shots • Environmental modification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frustration • Confusion

Topic	Components	Behavioral Signs	Questions for Physician	Evaluation	Home/Classroom Management	Emotional Reactions
PHYSICAL ISSUES	Heart/ endurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fatigue Shortness of breath Change in skin color/temperature 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limitations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exam by physician 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medications Surgery 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frustration Fear
	Asthma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wheezing Tightness in chest Fatigue Pain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limitations Cause 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exam by physician 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medication Relaxation training Environmental modification Positioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fear Frustration Embarrassment
	Diabetes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frequent urination Volume of urination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limitations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exam by physician and ophthalmologist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medication Diet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Frustration Embarrassment
	Premenstrual Syndrome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional liability Irritability Food Cravings Monthly behavior change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diet Vitamins Exercise Medications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exam by physician and dietitian 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diet Vitamins Exercise Medications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full range
	Nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fatigue Difficulty attending Crying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diet Vitamins Food allergies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exam by physician 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diet Vitamins Gastrointestinal tube 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Withdrawal Depression
	Psychomotor seizures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pattern of “tantrum” Sleeping after “tantrum” Lack of responsiveness during “tantrum” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exam 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exam by neurologist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confusion Anger
	Medications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behavior Seizure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small tremor-like movements Sleepiness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Weighing side effects vs. benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exam by physician; re-evaluate during puberty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Close communication with physician 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confusion Frustration

Topic	Components	Behavioral Signs	Questions For Physician	Evaluation	Home/Classroom Management	Emotional Reactions
PHYSICAL ISSUES (Cont.)	Puberty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change in behavior • Change in vision • Clumsiness • Weight change • Growth pain • Odd sensations • Skin and body sensitivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normal development and effects on medications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exam by physician 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Laugh a lot • Counseling • Education • Peer support groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confusion • Embarrassment • Withdrawal • Anxiety • Egocentrism

Topic	Components	Behavioral Signs	Questions for Physician	Evaluation	Home/Classroom Management	Emotional Reactions
POSITIONING ISSUES	Cerebral Palsy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor regulation of movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ways to inhibit reflexes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exam by therapist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positioning Therapy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excitement Fear
	Hypotonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fatigue 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limitations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exam by therapist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
	Dislocated hips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pain Crying Resisting movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Treatment Handling Limitations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exam by physicians 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Braces Surgery Positioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fear Discomfort
	Scoliosis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curvature of spine Pain Crying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Treatment and therapy advisement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exam by physician 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Braces Surgery Positioning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discomfort

Neurologist: evaluate cause of physical impairment, need for medical treatment or therapy

Physical/Occupational therapist: provide specific therapy *as prescribed by a physician* to increase movement (e.g., range of motion, mobility, ambulation, or specific movements/adaptive *devices* needed for vocational or independent living skills, etc.)

Learning Disabilities

Association for Children and Adults with Learning Disabilities (ACLD)

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)

Attention Deficit Disorder Clinic-UCI