



Deaf-Blindness

Deaf-blindness is a combination of vision and hearing loss, not necessarily complete deafness and complete blindness. There is a wide range of thinking and developmental ability among deaf-blind individuals from gifted to profoundly multiply handicapped. Deaf-blindness creates additional problems in the areas of mobility and communication, as well.

Estimates indicate that there are approximately 40,000 people in the United States who are deaf-blind. A study by Teaching Research Division at Western Oregon State College has identified over 5,000 children and youth. It is estimated that this number could be as high as 11,000. It is generally believed that dual sensory impairment occurs in three of 100,000 births. There are many causes of deaf-blindness; Rubella, CHARGE Association, Usher's Syndrome, genetic disorders, accident and illness are some of the more common ones.

Federal legislation defines children with deaf-blindness as individuals between the ages of birth and 21 years of age who have "auditory and visual impairments, the combination of which creates such severe communication and other developmental and learning needs that they cannot be appropriately educated without special education and related services, beyond those that would be provided solely for children with hearing impairments, visual impairments, or severe disabilities, to address their educational needs due to those concurrent disabilities."

Individuals who are deaf-blind need early intervention and personal attention to stimulate their understanding and interest in the world around them. The information that most children pick-up naturally must be deliberately introduced to children with dual sensory impairments.

Communication and mobility are often the most affected areas of life for a person with deaf-blindness causing feelings of isolation and loneliness. Development of compensatory skills can help bridge this gap. Trainings and instructional strategies are available to parents and educators relative to communication and mobility. Upon request California Deaf-Blind Services provides assistance to families and schools to address individual needs.

Adapted from Deaf-Blindness: A Fact Sheet, Gallaudet University.

Fact sheets from California Deaf-Blind Services are to be used by both families and professionals serving individuals with dual sensory impairments. The information applies to students 0-22 years of age. The purpose of the fact sheet is to give general information on a specific topic. More specific information for an individual student can be provided through individualized technical assistance available from CDBS. The fact sheet is a starting point for further information.

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