

Educational Interveners for Children Who Are Deafblind

Deafblindness:

Deafblindness is a unique disability. It involves a combined vision and hearing loss, to the extent that neither of these primary information gathering senses (vision or hearing) can adequately compensate for the lack of the other sense. For children with combined vision and hearing loss, the natural flow of auditory and visual information does not occur automatically. Bits and pieces of information may be available, but these will be incomplete, distorted, and/or unreliable. The incidental information that sighted and hearing children receive without effort is not readily accessible to those with combined losses. Deafblindness creates a disability of access to visual and auditory information about people, things, and events necessary for learning, communication, and overall development. This results in isolation and disconnection from the world, and can prevent equitable access to learning and participation in educational environments.



The Educational Impact of Deafblindness:

Children with deafblindness pose unique challenges to the educational system because they have a wide range of diverse needs that require highly individualized programming. The educational and functional impact of combined losses on each child will vary depending upon the degree and type of vision and hearing losses, the stability of the losses, the age of onset of each loss, and the presence or absence of additional disabilities. The effects of both vision and hearing loss together are not additive in nature but rather multiplicative. Sometimes even children with seemingly mild simultaneous vision and hearing losses can be greatly impacted by them. Deafblindness can result in significant difficulties in developing educational, vocational, avocational, and social skills.

Effective Intervention for Children Who Are Deafblind:

Effective intervention for children who are deafblind must connect them to the world and provide clear and consistent information needed for learning and development. This connection to the world can be made through an intervener. By definition, an intervener is a person who works one-to-one with children who are deafblind and who has specialized training and skills in deafblindness. The intervener helps the child gather information, learn concepts and skills, develop communication and language, and establish positive relationships. The intervener provides a bridge to the world for the child who is deafblind and encourages independence rather than dependence.



The Role of the Intervener in Providing Effective Intervention:

The role of the intervener is three-fold. The intervener: 1) facilitates access to environmental information that is usually gained through vision and hearing but which is unavailable or incomplete to the child who is deafblind; 2) facilitates the development and/or use of the child's receptive and expressive communication skills; and 3) maintains a trusting, interactive relationship with the child that promotes social and emotional development and well-being. This three-fold role of the intervener is the key to effective intervention for children with deafblindness.

The Intervener and IDEA:

"Access" is a key term in the requirements of IDEA, and under IDEA, a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is mandated for all children with disabilities. FAPE provides for access to general education, the general curriculum and activities, and specialized educational services in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Access is a critical issue for children who are deafblind. Many educational environments are restrictive to these children because of their inability to benefit from the flow of visual and auditory information that other children receive automatically and that is necessary for learning and interaction. The intervener is an individualized support that provides this needed access and facilitates participation and progress in general and special education environments.

