



# The National Information Clearinghouse on Children Who Are Deaf-Blind

Helen Keller National Center  
Perkins School for the Blind  
Teaching Research

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## COMMUNICATION INTERACTIONS: IT TAKES TWO

By Kathleen Stremel, MA

### What is Communication?

Communication is the exchange of a message between two or more people. Everyone communicates in many different ways and for many different reasons.

Communication can be **expressive** or **receptive**. Children who are deaf-blind may never learn to talk. However, they can **express** themselves to you. They can **receive** the messages you send them.

Through communication, children can make changes in their world. They can express their wants and needs. They can make choices.

Through communication, you can teach your child to play, to learn about the world, to interact with you, to do daily tasks, and to work.

### How Can We Increase Communication?

One of the best indicators of a child's use of effective communication is the *rate of communication*. What does this mean? The more a child communicates, the better he/she will communicate. How does he communicate more? Children communicate more when they are provided frequent opportunities to communicate. Opportunities to communicate should be included across functional activities and caregiving routines.

Let's take a look at the functional activities that occur at home or at school. For the younger child, these may be eating, bathing, changing clothes, and playing with a sister or brother. For an older child, these may include swimming, cooking, and working. Providing opportunities and being responsive are two of the most frequent methods to increase a child's communication.

#### 1. Ask the following questions:

- ◆ How many different people interact with your child or your student in a day?
- ◆ How many interactions occur in teaching an activity?
- ◆ What are the daily activities in which you interact with your child or student?
- ◆ How many opportunities to communicate with you does the child have in different activities? None? One? Five? Ten?

#### 2. Notice your child's actions during functional activities. For example —

Functional Activity	Ways Child May Communicate
Eating	Opens mouth for "more."
Drinking	Extends cup for "more."
Swimming	Raises hand for "out."
Dressing	Touches Mom for "help."
Working	Signs "More."
Transitioning	Says, "Bye."

- ◆ In what ways is your child communicating with you?
- #### 3. Make sure every person who interacts with the child knows how he or she receives and sends messages.

Each child will do this in unique ways. It is necessary to stop, watch the child, and read the message.

- ◆ Does each person take time to watch and listen to the child?
- ◆ Are good records being kept so each caregiver knows what to expect?

Parents and teachers need to work together to do the following:

- ◆ Increase the opportunities the child has to communicate.
- ◆ Increase the different ways in which the child communicates.
- ◆ Increase the different reasons the child has to communicate.
- ◆ Increase the number of people, things, and activities the child communicates about.
- ◆ Increase your attention to support positive communication attempts.

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## What Can You Do?

In the following material, we will use the name "Lee" to represent an infant, child, or young adult who is deaf-blind. Think of Lee as your child, or as the student in your classroom.

What can you do for Lee to increase his interactive communication?

1. Interact often with him. Give Lee a chance to understand what you are going to do before you do it. Give Lee a chance to make a choice, or to request "more."
2. Allow Lee to participate in activities as much as possible.
3. Make sure Lee has a name sign. This may be the first initial of Lee's name to be worn on Lee's chest.
4. Make sure that you have a way to identify yourself to him.
  - ◆ For Sister, her long braids.
  - ◆ For Dad, his beard.
  - ◆ For Mom, her rings.
  - ◆ For teacher, her short hair.

5. Give Lee an opportunity to communicate with you.
6. Always communicate to Lee what will happen next or where Lee is being taken *before* the activity or movement takes place.
7. Post an actual example of an interaction in your classroom; so that, everyone (peers, buddies, and all service providers) can follow this.

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## An Example of Communication Interaction for Lee:

- ◆ Approach Lee slowly; let Lee smell or sense your presence.
- ◆ Use Lee's name sign.
- ◆ Let Lee know your identification cue, as in Mom's ring.
- ◆ Let Lee know you are going to the car by letting Lee take or feel a set of keys.
- ◆ Have Lee open or close the car door.
- ◆ Let Lee buy something at the store.
- ◆ Help Lee hand the money to the clerk if Lee can't do this by himself.
- ◆ Let Lee know the activity is finished by putting the keys in a box or on a hook.



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## Communication is Worth the Effort

- ◆ Learn the most effective ways to express your messages.
- ◆ Listen and watch in order to receive messages from your child.
- ◆ Give your child practice in receiving and expressing messages.
- ◆ Make sure your child's Individual Education Plan contains both receptive and expressive communication objectives.
- ◆ Help your child WANT to communicate. Let your child see that communication gives power.
- ◆ Initially, help your child communicate in the "here and now."
- ◆ Communication is a critical self determination skill at all ages.

*This fact sheet was adapted from one originally written by Kathleen Stremel and published and distributed within the state of Mississippi by the Mississippi Statewide Project for Individuals who are Deaf and Blind.*

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## Additional Resources

### **Communication: A Guide to Teaching Students with Visual and Multiple Impairments -** *Hagood, Linda. — Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI) 1997, xiv, 382.*

A resource guide for teachers and model for teaching communication skills to students with visual and multiple impairments is set forth. Assessment of communication skills, the planning of instruction, selection of communication methods and contexts, sample activity routines, and strategies for solving problems are discussed. Order from the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired, 1100 W. 45th St., Austin, TX 78756, (512) 206-9240. Publisher's web site:  
<http://www.tsbvi.edu/publications>

### **Dimensions of Communication: An Instrument to Assess the Communication Skills and Behaviors of Individuals with Disabilities -** *Mar, Harvey H., Ph.D.; Sall, Nancy, Ed.D. 1999, 70.*

An assessment instrument designed to help teachers, educational specialists, speech-language therapists, psychologists, and other service providers evaluate the communication skills of persons with multiple disabilities including severe or profound mental retardation and deafblindness. Part I addresses developing a communication profile and Part II addresses designing an intervention plan. Available from: Harvey H. Mar, Ph.D., St. Joseph's Children's Hospital, 703 Main Street, Xavier 6, Paterson, NJ 07503. Email: [hhm1@columbia.edu](mailto:hhm1@columbia.edu).

### **Hand In Hand: Essentials of Communication and Orientation and Mobility for Your Students Who Are Deaf-Blind: Volume I -** *Huebner, Kathleen Mary (Ed.); Prickett, Jeanne Glidden (Ed.); Welch, Therese Rafalowski (Ed.); Joffe, Elga (Ed.) — AFB Press: 1995, xlv, 687.*

This particular book is intended primarily for self-study. It is divided into three segments: Key Concepts, Communication, and Orientation and Mobility. Each of these segments is, in turn, divided into 20 self-contained modules which present essential information about deaf-blindness, how deaf-blindness affects learning, and how students who are deaf-blind can develop critical communication and O&M skills. Available from: AFB Press, Customer Service, P.O. Box 1020, Sewickley, PA 15143. Phone: 800-232-3044. Fax: 412-741-0609. Cost: \$64.95 for the 2 volume set. The complete series of Hand in Hand books and video are \$169.95. Publisher's web site:  
<http://www.afb.org/catalog99>

### **Parents' Perspective On...Behavior, Communication And Instructional Strategies - NTAC/NFADB Parent Workshop. National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind/National Family Association for Deaf-Blind: 1998, 4 pages.**

Created by 80 parents, this is a list of the most important practices to parents in the areas of behavioral issues, communication and instructional strategies in the education of their child who is deafblind. Available from DB-LINK.

**Remarkable Conversations: Guide to developing meaningful communication with children and young adults who are deafblind** - Miles, Barbara (Ed.); Riggio, Marianne (Ed.) Perkins School for the Blind: 1999, 308.

This book is a practical guide for teachers, family members and others who play a critical, direct role in the lives of children who are deafblind. Good communication is emphasized and illustrated with stories that are based on positive, real experiences. The beginning chapters lay the foundation for the development of instructional programs for children who are congenitally deafblind or who have become deafblind early in life. Later chapters look more specifically and sequentially at the nuts and bolts of providing meaningful experiences for these learners. The book is available from Perkins School for the Blind, 175 North Beacon Street, Watertown, MA 02472, Attn: Public Relations & Publications. Telephone: (617) 972-7328; fax: (617)972-7334. The cost is \$35.00.

**A Resource Manual For Understanding and Interacting With Infants, Toddlers, and Preschool Age Children With Deaf-Blindness** - Alsop, Linda, Ed. SKI\*HI Institute: 1993, 575.

The manual's purpose is to give insight, information, and strategies for intervention to service providers for infants, toddlers, and preschool age children who are deaf-blind. The manual is divided into fourteen sections containing topic information specific to deaf-blindness. Order information: (801) 752-9533.

**Teaching Communication Skills To Students With Severe Disabilities** - Downing, June E., Ph.D. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co. 1999, 198.

Helping students with severe disabilities communicate as effectively as possible with teachers and classmates in general education environments is the scope of this book. Much of the information may also apply to other settings such as home, community and workplace environments. The focus is on students with severe cognitive disabilities or developmental delay, autism, severe sensory impairments (including deaf-blindness), or severe physical disabilities. Order from Paul H. Brookes Publishing, (800) 638-3775. Publisher's web site: <http://www.pbrookes.com>

**What Do I Do Now? Communication Skills and Strategies for Individuals Working with Young Children Who Have Sensory Impairments** - SKI\*HI. HOPE Inc. 1997, various paginations.

This program provides inservice training for staff in preschool and elementary school settings on communication needs of children with sensory impairments. There are ten instruction units that cover communication topics and techniques including: signals, turn-taking, active vs. passive, and choice-making. Available from HOPE, Inc., 1856 North 1200 East, North Logan, UT 84341; phone/fax: (435) 752-9533; e-mail: [hope@hopepubl.com](mailto:hope@hopepubl.com) Publisher's web site: <http://www.hopepubl.com>

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