![National Center on Deaf-Blindness]

Building Trusting Relationships
NCDB Practice Guide

We all need close connections with other people—the good feeling of being with someone who understands you and with whom you can share experiences and emotions. They are essential for all human beings . . . and form the foundation of our well-being and quality of life. (NCDB, 2007)

Rationale

This practice guide outlines the essential components and associated skills for building trusting relationships. Relationships grounded in trust and mutual respect increase opportunities for learning and communication. They create a sense of safety, minimize anxiety, and empower individuals to explore and engage with the world. They are the basis for educating children and youth.

The skills involved in establishing a trusting relationship with children or youth who are deaf-blind involve slowing down and participating in a "deaf-blind world of touch and proximity" (Janssen et al., 2003, p. 201). This is especially true for those who are emerging communicators—for whom conversations do not involve words or signs—or who have additional disabilities or complex medical needs that create even more barriers to interactions. To many educators this different way of interacting may feel unfamiliar and out of sync with busy classroom activities.

Essential Components

Each bolded item below is an essential component of the practice of building a trusted relationship. The bullets are the skills a teacher or other adult working with a child or youth who is deaf-blind would display if implementing the components correctly. The elements refer to a "child," but the information is applicable to individuals of all ages.

Welcoming Environment
- Puts effort into developing a relationship over time
- Effectively uses background information (e.g., written and video records, information from the family) to aid in relationship building
- Focuses on the child's strengths and abilities
- Allows the child time to become comfortable in the relationship

- Arranges the environment in a way that is predictable, makes sense to the child, and is easy to navigate

Presence and Availability

During all interactions . . .

- Is fully present, not engaged in other interactions or activities when interacting with the child
- Stays open and available, waiting calmly and quietly for initiatives or responses
- Waits calmly for as long as the child needs to give a response
- Takes advantage of the here and now as a learning opportunity
- Does not rush through activities

Security and Predictability

- During initial interactions, obtains an introduction to the child from someone they already trust (e.g., family member)

Always . . .

- Uses the child's name or name sign when beginning an interaction
- Uses a consistent greeting, including a self-identifier, that matches the child's communication mode
- Makes sure child is in a stable, comfortable position
- Provides structure and routines with clear beginnings, middles, and ends, to let the child know what is going to happen
- Helps the child feel secure before ending an interaction and leaving the child
- Lets the child know when pausing or ending an interaction

Respect for Child's Uniqueness

- Recognizes and responds to the child's unique communication signals (e.g., movements, gestures, vocalizations)
- Uses the child's communication mode
- Makes the child's interests the initial focus of interactions
- Shares the child's interests and range of emotions (often done through movement and touch)
- Joins the child (e.g., by copying body movements) in activities they enjoy
- Shares enjoyment of interactions in a way that is understood by the child

Reciprocal Interactions (Turn-Taking)

- Positions self at the child's level
- Responds immediately to child's signals in a way the child can understand (e.g., reflecting back movements and vocalizations) to show they've been heard
- Allows plenty of time for the child to provide a response to every interaction
- For children who interact through touch, places hands palm up under the child's hands to indicate listening

- Allows the child to share control of each interaction (e.g., sits near the child without making demands, uses hand-under-hand technique)
- Responds to the child's need to regulate the intensity of the interaction (e.g., taking time to process information or turning away)

You'll know the practice is working if the child . . .

- Initiates and engages in positive interactions more often
- Shows increased participation in learning activities
- Transitions between activities more easily
- Has more moments of joy

Learn More

NCDB Practice Guides are created using a process adapted from the Practice Profile format developed by the National Implementation Research Network. Although *NCDB Practice Guides* do not provide extensive information about *how* to implement practices, they outline their essential components. This makes them a useful tool for state deaf-blind project personnel and practitioners to identify training and coaching needs related to specific practices for children with deaf-blindness. They also serve as quick reminders of the purpose and key elements of a practice.

To learn more, visit Trust and High-Quality Interactions (nationaldb.org/info-center/educational-practices/trust/).

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