

# Deafblindness or Combined Vision and Hearing Loss Fact Sheet



## Definition of Deafblindness Under IDEA

Deafblindness disability means concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.

*Note: Multiple Disabilities does not include deafblindness.*

## Further Explanation

Although the term deafblind implies a complete absence of hearing and sight it refers to children with varying degrees of vision and hearing losses. The key feature of deafblindness is that the combination of losses limits access to auditory and visual information. Children under this disability category are singled out educationally because impairments of sight and hearing require thoughtful and unique educational approaches to ensure that children with this disability have the opportunity to reach their full potential. More than 90% of children with deafblindness have one or more additional disabilities or health problems and some may be identified as having multiple disabilities rather than deafblindness. In these cases, it is important for team members to recognize and address the need for services for vision and hearing impairment.

## Incidence

Over 10,000 children between the ages of birth through 22 have been identified as deafblind in the United States. Annually, the WV Sensibilities census reports between 70 and 100 children and youth, birth to 22, with combined vision and hearing losses. With this data, it is important to realize that throughout the professional career of a teacher they may only experience teaching a student with deafblindness once or twice in their career.

## Intervener

An intervener is a person who works consistently one-to-one with an individual who is deafblind and has training and specialized skills in deafblindness. An intervener provides a bridge to the world for the student who is deafblind. The intervener helps the student gather information, learn concepts and skills, develop communication and language, and establish relationships that lead to greater independence.

## Teach Tips/Instructional Strategies

Deafblindness is a disability of access. This includes access to the world beyond the limited reach of his or her eyes, ears, and fingertips. The child must be presented with information that others would receive incidentally and effortlessly. If not, the child will be isolated and will not have the opportunity to grow and to learn. If they are exposed to this information in a way that is meaningful for them, the student will be afforded the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential.

Communication and language diagnostics and interventions for a student with deafblindness must be broken into receptive and expressive modes. A student may use multiple means of receiving information and giving information. Communication options should be designed specifically for the student and may include touch cues, object symbols, sign language, gestures, picture symbols, braille, large print and others, all individualized based on sensory access.

Concepts (the ideas that give meaning to our world) must be intentionally taught to a child with deafblindness. Concepts build upon one another. The more ideas and memories that a child has about the way the world and relationships work the easier it is to develop further ideas.

The use of consistent routines and the inclusion of calendar systems for structuring the child's day, week, or event are necessary best practices in working with a student with deafblindness

## Resources

### Blindness and Low Vision

- National Center on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB) [Improving services, results, and quality of life for children and youth who are deaf-blind \(nationaldb.org\)](https://www.nationaldb.org/)
- [WVDE Communication Matrix Intervention Modules](#)
- [WVDE Deafblindness Resource Page](#)
- [Home - Intervener.org](#)