

Communication Strategies for Persons with Deafblindness

Missouri Deafblind Technical Assistance Project

Susan Bonner, Project Coordinator

August, 2010

Adapted from training module developed by

St. Louis Deafblind Task Force

&

Missouri Deafblind Project

Missouri School For the Blind

Susan Bonner and Larry Rhodes



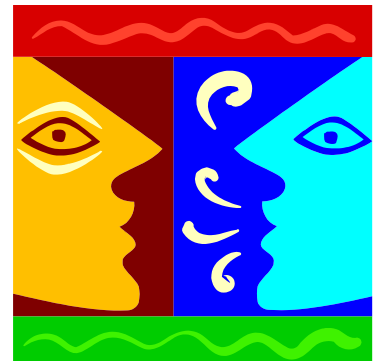


Overview

- ◆ This module serves as a general overview of communication and the impact for a student with deafblindness.
- ◆ The workbook accompanies the Six Modules.
- ◆ A copy of the completed workbook may be submitted to Susan Bonner, Deafblind Project Coordinator, 3815 Magnolia, St. Louis, Mo 63110, sbonner@msb.k12.mo.us for review. Certificate of completion with feedback on content will be given to person submitting the workbook.

Module 1

What Is Communication?





Definition of Communication

- ◆ It is the process of exchanging a message between two or more people
 - One person sends message
 - One person receives the message
- ◆ Communication takes on many forms
 - All forms are used frequently, but not always considered



Forms to Send Messages

- ◆ Talking
- ◆ Sign language
- ◆ Eye contact
- ◆ Facial expressions
- ◆ Body gestures
- ◆ Written text
- ◆ Change in muscle tension (pain-tighten up, happy-relaxed muscles)
- ◆ Augmentative communication devices (voice-output device, picture cards)

Let's look at further explanations of these forms.



Talking

- ◆ Using voice to make sounds or formulate words and/or sentences to express thought
- ◆ This is the most common form of communication that we use, but a child with dual sensory impairments may use other forms of communication.





Sign Language

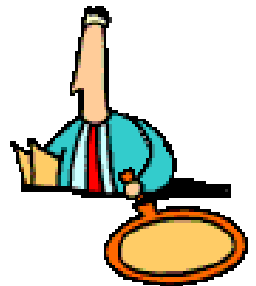
- ◆ Using hands and fingers to express words and/or sentences for thoughts
- ◆ American Sign Language (ASL) is the most common type of sign language used in the United States, but often student's may develop signs unique due to their motoric needs or they develop their own signs that have meaning to them.





Eye Contact

- ◆ Using eye movements to express thoughts
- ◆ Sometimes people communicate by blinking their eyes (one blink is yes and two blinks is no)
- ◆ Eye movements may be used to control augmentative communication devices that have scanning capabilities.
- ◆ Also, an eye gaze may be used to identify communication needs by gazing at a specific location on a communication wheel.





Facial Expressions

- ◆ Using facial movements and/or grimaces to express thoughts
- ◆ Students with dual sensory impairment may show facial emotions differently. People close to them may be the best interpreters of their facial expressions.





Body Gestures

- ◆ Using body movements to express thoughts
- ◆ For a child with dual sensory impairment, they may have developed many gestures to express their needs. It is a quick way to get needs expressed.





Change in Muscle Tension

- ◆ Using tightening or relaxing of muscles to express thoughts
- ◆ For children with severe multiple disabilities, this may be the most recognizable means of communication that they have.





- [illegible]





Forms to Receive Messages

◆ Hearing

- Voice
- Environmental sounds
- Recording

◆ Seeing

- Written text
- Picture board
- Body movements
- Sign language

◆ Feeling

- Change in muscle tension
- Tactile signs



Hearing

- ◆ It is important to understand the child's hearing loss and how best they are able to receive information.
- ◆ Hearing is responding to sounds/vibrations in the environment from
 - Voices
 - Environmental sounds of animals, nature and man-made items
 - Electronic duplication of voices and sounds



Seeing

- ◆ It is important to understand the child's vision loss and how best they are able to receive information.
- ◆ Responding to communication presented in visual forms
 - Written text
 - Photographs, line drawings, objects or other icons
 - Body movements in gestures and/or responses to environmental stimuli
 - Sign language from formal signs to simple gestures associating a meaning to the sign



Feeling

- ◆ It is important to understand the child's physical needs and how best they are able to access information.
- ◆ Responding to communication presented by touch
 - Changing muscle tension to communicate pleasure/displeasure
 - Tactile signing on the palms of hands denoting certain symbols for various meanings



Implications for Persons with Deafblindness

- ◆ Dual sensory impairment affecting person's ability to send and receive communication
- ◆ Communication needs vary based upon onset of sensory losses
- ◆ Minor losses may have major implications on communication
- ◆ Remember behavior is a form of communication with meanings of refusing something, wanting something tangible, or a sensory need.



Challenge Module I

Use Workbook

- ◆ List how your child expresses these feelings:
 - Anger
 - Happiness
 - Discomfort
 - Wants/needs
 - Other
- ◆ List how your child understands information received using these senses:
 - Hearing
 - Seeing
 - Feeling
 - Other

Module II

Expressive and Receptive Communication





Expressive Communication

- ◆ Means of expressing wants/needs as a result of interactions with person's environment
- ◆ A child with dual sensory loss may not communicate their needs in the typical ways. They may a variety of forms explained in Module I.



Reasons to Use Expressive Communication



- ◆ **Protest:** Throw an object, tantrum, bite
- ◆ **Attention:** Point, press beeper, wave
- ◆ **Choice:** nod, point, choose object
- ◆ **Requesting More:** Reach, point, sign “more”
- ◆ **Offering:** Hand object
- ◆ **Greeting:** Wave, handshake
- ◆ **Commenting:** Point, frown
- ◆ **Asking:** Gesture to object
- ◆ **Replying:** Nod, point to self



First Steps to Build Expressive Communication

It is important to learn/know the child for planning how to teach.

- ◆ Observe the child
- ◆ What is their response to a variety of environmental influences? Positive/Negative?
- ◆ How is attention sought?
 - How often?
 - When and during what activities?
- ◆ How is displeasure communicated?
- ◆ What are likes? How do you know?



Receptive Communication

- ◆ Means of receiving information as a result of interactions with the person's environment
- ◆ A child with dual sensory loss may not receive communication in the typical ways. They may a variety of forms explained in Module I.





Variables to Receive Communication

1. Hearing:

- Does the person hear?
- How well?
- Is technology needed? to assist hearing?

2. Motor

- Are there any motoric restrictions?
- Any related medical issues?

3. Vision

- How well does person see?
- Would eyeglasses enhance vision?
- Other technology?

4. Touch

- Able to use hands?
- Are there are sensory issues?



First Steps to Build Receptive Communication

- ◆ Observe cues that consumer uses to respond to environment
- ◆ Start with objects, then gradually build to abstract concepts of pictures or signs
- ◆ Set up opportunities for consumer to make choices or communicate the need for more or less of something



First Steps to Build Receptive Communication

- ◆ Allow adequate response time. Remember the consumer has sensory deficits that may also affect response time to process information
- ◆ Provide a variety of routines and activities
- ◆ Use age-appropriate activities
- ◆ Provide instruction to build on success



Characteristics of Expressive and Receptive Communication

There are several common characteristics for communication to occur. They are:

- ◆ Forms
- ◆ Function/intents
- ◆ Content
- ◆ Partners
- ◆ Physical Environment

Let's look at these in more detail



Forms

- ◆ It is the way we receive and send communication
- ◆ Learning begins with simple (objects) and then moves to abstract symbols that are either oral, signed or pictorial
- ◆ It includes nonsymbolic communication such as vocalizations, body movement, use of objects and gestures.
- ◆ Also included is symbolic such as manual signs, speech or augmentative communication device
- ◆ Children who are deafblind often use one form to express and another form to receive communication



Functions/Intents

- ◆ It is the reason to communicate
- ◆ As the child learns communication, use simple expressions before complex ones. Then follow this hierarchy of learning
 - Protest
 - Attention
 - Request
 - Comment
 - Offer
 - Question
 - More complex: joking, lying, & persuading



Content

- ◆ This characteristic of communication involves something in one's life:
 - People
 - Locations
 - Actions
 - Possessions
 - Feelings
- ◆ Students with deafblindness need to experience different people, objects, and activities to be able to communicate



Partners

- ◆ Who you communicate with
- ◆ Learning progression to builds from caregivers, to family, to peers, to others
- ◆ All partners with the child must use and understand the same communication system needed by the child with deafblindness to be successful.



Physical Environment

- ◆ As the student acquires communication skills, build from frequently used environments to less frequently visited locales.
- ◆ In the home, you communicate in a variety of rooms.
- ◆ At school, you communicate in a variety of classes and settings.
- ◆ In the community, you communicate at variety shops, businesses and recreation sites.
- ◆ The child with deafblindness needs access to many environments to learn to communicate as he/she develops knowledge of concepts related to persons, places and things.



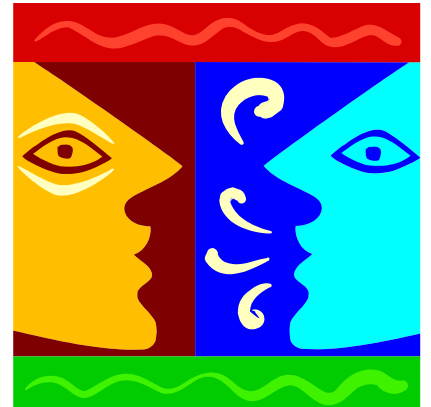
Challenge Module II

Use Workbook

- ◆ Look at what you wrote about the child's expressive communication.
- ◆ List current reasons the child communicates.
- ◆ Describe how the child communicates for each reason.
- ◆ Look at what you wrote about child's receptive communication.
- ◆ Describe how the child uses each sensory area to receive information.

Module III

Communication Forms and Modes





Communication Forms

- ◆ Form is the way a person communicates
- ◆ The progression of communication forms moves from simple to complex such as crying, smiling to speech and sign language
- ◆ Categories of forms:
 - Non-intentional versus Intentional
 - Pre-symbolic versus Symbolic



Non-intentional vs. Intentional

- ◆ Non intentional messages are interpreted by others as meaningful
 - Cries when showing discomfort
 - Drop a toy means I need it back
- ◆ Intentional messages that are expected to receive a response by the one expressing himself/herself
 - Learns that when I cry then the caretaker will come
 - Throw a toy means I will get attention



Pre-symbolic vs. Symbolic

- ◆ Pre-symbolic messages convey a message within context
 - Eye gaze
 - Touching
 - Pointing
 - Vocalizing
 - Gesturing
- ◆ Symbolic messages convey message using symbols
 - Speech
 - Sign language
 - Printed language
 - Assistive communication devices

Challenge Module III

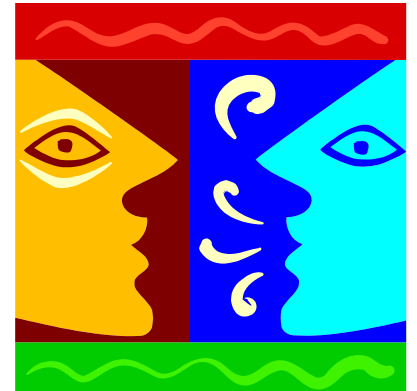
Use Workbook



- ◆ Based on previous information,
 - What is the most effective way communication is received by your child? Why?
 - What is the most effective way communication is expressed by your child? Why?

Module IV

Reasons to Communicate





Characteristics of Communicative Intent

- ◆ The child may act a certain way to get an outcome – “cause and effect.”
- ◆ The child’s communication is purposeful.
- ◆ It is a means for the child to have control over self and environment.
- ◆ The child may use behavior to communicate a message.

Effect of Communicative Intent for Deafblindness



- ◆ Movement, visual, and/or auditory items are of no interest or motivating to the child.
- ◆ Natural objects may not serve as motivators.
- ◆ The child's motivation may be more sensory related:
 - Vibrations
 - Touch/deep pressure
 - Bright lights
 - Loud noises



Importance of Communicative Intent

- ◆ It is difficult for children with deafblindness to learn “cause and effect” concepts, rather they become dependent on others. A pattern of learned helplessness occurs because they have no control over themselves or environment.
- ◆ The child is unable to see or hear the “effect” that has been “caused.”



Strategies to Teach Cause and Effect

- ◆ Adaptive toys and/or switches to stimulate control over objects and the environment.
- ◆ Use of motivating materials within child's range of hearing, seeing and/or reach to be accessed.
- ◆ New skills should be based on already known information of children.
- ◆ Hand-over-hand assistance should be avoided as it continues the cycle of learned helplessness, rather hand-under- hand and tactile cues.



Behavior Is Communication

- ◆ Over time a consumer will learn “if I do this, then this will happen.”
- ◆ It serves as a means to have control over the environment as well as an expression of needs
- ◆ Your goal is to teach the child an appropriate means to communicate.



Functional Purposes of Behavior

- ◆ Tangible: The student wants a task and/or item
- ◆ Refusal/Escape: The student avoids tasks, people and/or environments
- ◆ Attention: The student seeks interaction with others whether negatively or/positively
- ◆ Sensory: The student receives items and/or activities that provide sensory stimulation and/or feedback
- ◆ Or the purpose may be a combination of these or may use the behavior to have multiple meanings.

Items to Assess for Determining the Purposes of Behavior



- ◆ What was the behavior
- ◆ When did the behavior occur
- ◆ What was the scheduled activity
- ◆ What was the environment
- ◆ Who was present
- ◆ What was response of people in environment
- ◆ What is the hypothesis of the behavior

Challenge Module IV

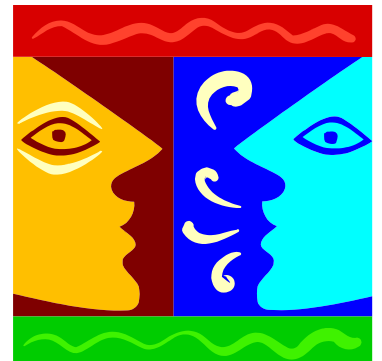
Use Workbook



- ◆ Observe your student and identify purposes of the communication
- ◆ Identify any challenging behaviors and identify possible hypothesis for behavior

Module V

Communication Partners





Communication with Partners

- ◆ Communication is the exchange of messages between at least two people.
- ◆ Feeling, wants, likes, dislikes, comments are expressed between partners.
- ◆ Partners are the primary persons that interact with student, they are usually a family member or primary caretaker. In case of a student with deafblindness, it may be the intervener.



Potential Communication Partners

- ◆ Parents
- ◆ Caretaker
- ◆ Sibling other relatives
- ◆ Teacher
- ◆ Intervener
- ◆ Paraprofessional
- ◆ Personal care assistant
- ◆ Therapists
- ◆ Employer
- ◆ Peer



Examples of Messages Required with Partners

- ◆ **Parents/Caretaker:** play, hunger, cuddle, help, move, toileting, recreation items, etc.
- ◆ **Sibling other relatives:** play, recreational items
- ◆ **Personal care assistant:** help, hunger, toileting, move
- ◆ **Teacher:** help, move, another choice, break
- ◆ **Therapists:** help, move, break, pain
- ◆ **Employer:** toileting, break, more work, help
- ◆ **Peer:** play, recreation items

Problems Establishing Partners for Students with Deafblindness



- ◆ They may have no interaction to limited interaction with others
- ◆ They have no movement beyond body space
- ◆ They may have inappropriate social behaviors
- ◆ They have no understanding of communication
- ◆ They may have no oral communication
- ◆ They have become dependent on others

Examples of No Interaction with Others



- ◆ Not smile
- ◆ Not respond to others
- ◆ Withdraw from touch

Examples of No Movement Beyond Body Space



- ◆ Poor sitting
- ◆ Poor standing
- ◆ Poor standing
- ◆ Poor walking



Inappropriate Social Behaviors

- ◆ Poke at eyes
- ◆ Hold head down
- ◆ Withdraw from touch
- ◆ Skewed day/night sleep patterns
- ◆ Refuse assistive devices
 - Eyeglasses
 - Hearing aids



No Understanding of Communication

- ◆ Nonresponsive to communication
- ◆ Requires adaptations to respond to communication
 - Vibrating materials
 - Braille and/or other tactile materials
 - Special lighting
 - Amplification



No Oral Communication

- ◆ Assess differential sounds
- ◆ Assess differential body movements to stimulation
- ◆ Assess response to tactile stimulation

Examples of Dependency on Others



- ◆ Learned helplessness, no ambition to try to do something for themselves
- ◆ Overly dependent on others to do routine activities for them
- ◆ No purpose to communicate



Establishing Communication Partners with Students with Deafblindness

- ◆ Utilize touch and sensory stimulation (lotions, swinging, rocking) to establish rapport
- ◆ Identify of list of sensory preferences that the student has and use them as medium to request item
- ◆ Provide a purpose to want more of preference
 - Stop activity after presentation
 - Look for sign, sound, and/or body movement that student wants more
 - Build on signal to use that is more appropriate to want more of activity



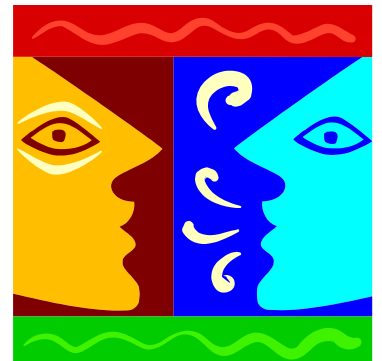
Challenge Module V

Use Workbook

- ◆ Identify how student communicates with others
- ◆ Identify those items the student prefers
- ◆ How does student show these are preferred items
- ◆ Who are the communication partners
- ◆ What are communication routines for a given day
- ◆ Establish how to utilize these preferences throughout consumer's daily schedule

Module VI

Levels of Communication





Levels of Communication

- ◆ Intentional Communication
- ◆ Unconventional Communication
- ◆ Conventional Communication
- ◆ Concrete Communication
- ◆ Abstract Communication

Moves from
cause-effect to
abstract
communication



Intentional Communication

- ◆ The student uses a form of communication to bring about a response





Examples of Intentional Communication

- ◆ Smiles when cheek is stroked
- ◆ Grimaces when moved
- ◆ Moves arms when a familiar person approaches
- ◆ Withdraws hand when touches something cold



Unconventional Communication

- ◆ The student uses nonsymbolic actions, gestures or vocalizations that relate to their needs in the environment.
- ◆ Behaviors are communication.



Examples of Unconventional Communication

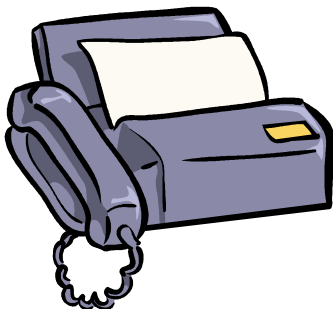


- ◆ Use hands to search for an item
- ◆ Pushes away item when done
- ◆ Screams when someone takes something away from him/her
- ◆ Makes gesture to indicate more (may look differently than sign for “more”)



Concrete Communication

- ◆ The student uses simple symbols and/or objects to identify objects, people, needs, actions, and activities
- ◆ The symbols are understood by a variety of people





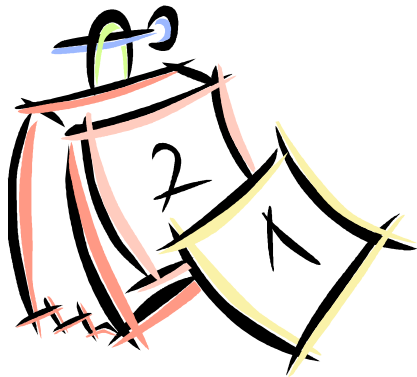
Examples of Concrete Communication

- ◆ Signs language and/or single words to express needs (more, eat, go, etc.)
- ◆ Points to picture symbols that represent item requested
- ◆ Call out names of familiar people
- ◆ Label common objects
- ◆ Hands person requested item



Conventional Communication

- ◆ The student uses symbols to convey a variety of meaning and/or extended thoughts.



Examples of Conventional Communication



- ◆ Comments about TV program
- ◆ Labels feelings
- ◆ Categorizes items
- ◆ Describe physical attributes of items
- ◆ Different words are used to convey same message (thirsty, drink)



Abstract Communication

- ◆ The student expresses ideas and concepts symbolically.
- ◆ The student makes inferences to future and past.





Examples of Abstract Communication

- ◆ Relate something that occurred a week ago
- ◆ Read a written story
- ◆ Write out messages to communicate a thought
- ◆ Plan schedule for following week

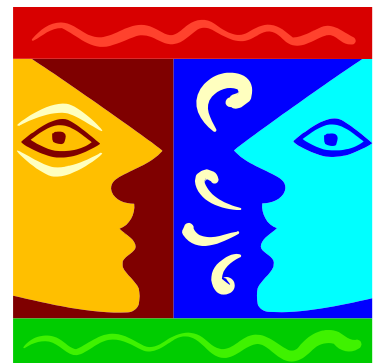
Challenge Module VI

Use Workbook



- ◆ Identify the communication skills that your consumer has for each level expressively and receptively
- ◆ Identify the consumer's mastery level, instructional level and emerging levels of communication
- ◆ Sketch out strategies to promote communication
 - To generalize mastery level of communication
 - To teach new communication
 - To build on emerging communication skills

Where to Go Next





Ideas to Support Team for the Consumer

- ◆ Utilize related services' therapists to support implementation of communication (speech therapist, occupational therapist, vision specialist, etc.)
- ◆ Identify any uses of adaptations/assistive technology required for communication
- ◆ Regularly review progress with team and discuss any changes



Resources

- ♦ Mar, Harvey & Sall, Nancy. (Funded by Grant from Us. Dept. of Education, Office of Special Education) *Dimensions of Communication*. St. Joseph' Children Hospital, 703 Main Street, Xavier 6, Paterson, New Jersey 07503. 1999.
- ♦ National Technical Assistance Consortium for Children and Young Adults Who Are Deaf-Blind. *Communication Fact Sheets for Parents*. NTAC Teaching Research, 345 N. Monmouth, Monmouth, OR 97361. 2002.