



IN FOCUS

MISSOURI DEAFBLIND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROJECT

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How Functional Vision Assessments Help IEP Teams

A functional vision assessment (FVA) is an important assessment to assist the educational team support the child/youth with visual impairments including deafblindness. The FVA is completed by a person trained to complete these assessments. Usually this person is a certified teacher for the visually impaired and/or certified orientation and mobility specialist. Results of the FVA will help the educational team with strategies to modify materials, distances to best present materials, and environmental modifications to support visual needs including lighting, seating, reading and writing tools, and other related educational adaptations. The goal of the FVA is to determine how the child/youth sees and how to best present educational materials to facilitate the learning process.

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The FVA is not a tool to replace the clinical vision report from the ophthalmologist, but a tool to be completed once current information is received from the doctor. The FVA assessor uses this information to understand the child/youth's eye condition and prognosis. Just as vision changes as we age and develop so do the student's visual needs

for the classroom change. Therefore, functional vision is an evolving, dynamic process. Periodic reviews are beneficial to the team in planning effective instructional strategies.

Areas assessed include the following:

- ✓ **How vision is used in structured and unstructured situations:** includes observation of the child/youth in a variety of situations and identifying the needed visual skills, plus how the child/youth is currently responding in these situations.
- ✓ **Visual skills need for functional activities:** includes what are the functional visual needs and what skills need to be performed within the child/youth's natural routines.
- ✓ **Position of the child/youth:** includes the best position for the child/youth to use vision, location where the child/youth can best access materials (especially if there are motor limitations), and most comfortable position for the child/youth to access materials.
- ✓ **Lighting:** includes type of lighting (bright, diffused, natural, etc.) and the best location for the materials to be positioned in relation to the lighting.
- ✓ **Activity:** includes preferred activities that increase and sustain attention. It also includes nonpreferred environmental activities that interfere visually and auditory with the child/youth's ability to engage in the activity.
- ✓ **Other senses:** includes additional cues to enhance response.
- ✓ **Position of the materials presented:** includes location of materials to the front or to the side.
- ✓ **Child/youth's response:** includes reactions of the child/youth to the materials/activity that demonstrate the child is using his/her vision, such as turning of head, reaching, etc.
- ✓ **Color and contrast:** includes the colors that enhance attention, boldness, contrast with background, etc.
- ✓ **Space and arrangement:** includes presentation of materials (present one at a time or can the child/youth respond to an array of three and the distance between them).
- ✓ **Size and distance:** includes the size that the object needs to be to enhance response, the distance the materials needs to be from the child/youth to elicit responses, etc.

Once the assessment is completed, the assessor reviews the observations with the educational team and provides recommendations to address guidelines and strategies that are needed to

impact the student's learning. The recommendations include adaptations and modifications needed for the student to access the curriculum and assist him/her in achieving the goals of the IFSP/IEP. This report is important for the entire educational team to ensure coordination and consistency with the strategies needed to facilitate learning.

Resources:

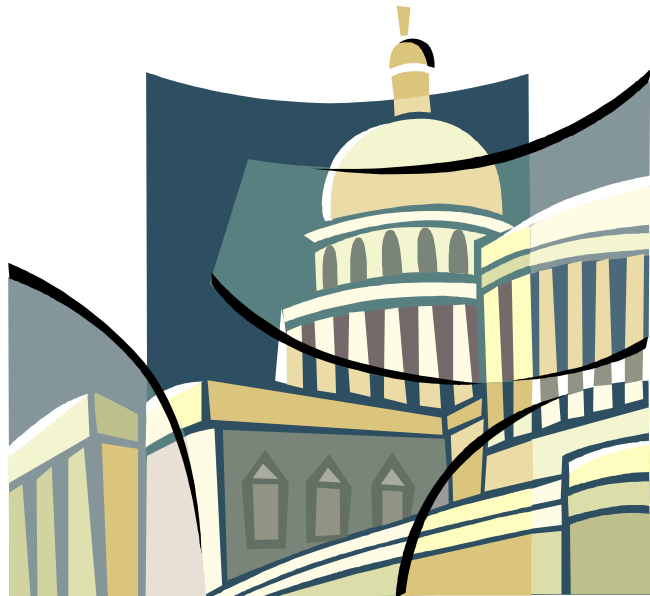
Functional Vision Assessment for Children Who Are Young and/or Multi-Disabled. Tanni L. Anthony, Colorado Department of Education. Condensed handout (1995) from a prior publication "Proceedings of the 8th International Conference on Blind/Visually Impaired Children, 1993."

On the LOOK OUT for Functional Vision Assessment/Evaluation. Cyral Miller, Texas SBVI, Outreach Director. <http://www.tsbvi.edu/outreach/seehear/winter99/fva.htm> . Winter 1999.

Understanding Deafblindness: Issues, Perspectives and Strategies. Linda Alsop. SKI-HI Institute, HOPE Inc., North Logan, Utah. 2002.

Missouri Deafblind Grant

The purpose of the Missouri Deafblind Project is to develop partnerships, coordinate service networking and provide systematic training. Technical assistance, training and resources are available for the over 140 identified students (birth through 21 years) on the Missouri Deafblind Census, their families and service providers. Leadership and support is provided by the Missouri School for the Blind Outreach Team. Services are coordinated with local education agencies, adult service providers and deafblind task forces to enhance networking and to build expertise in the



community.

Services

- Assistance in the identification and tracking of children with deafblindness
- Missouri Deafblind Census

- On site technical assistance and consultation on assessment, education and employment
- Inservice training on specific content areas
- Active state and local deafblind task forces
- Transition assistance including personal futures planning
- Parent training including a home program for children birth through 5 years (MoSPIN)
- Parent-to-Parent Networking
- Early childhood training, such as VIISA and INSITE workshops
- Deafblind coursework, such as Hand-In-Hand
- Loan library of resources on effective practices

One of the major activities of the Missouri Deafblind Technical Assistance Project is on site consultation. Children, students, and youth with deafblindness may require unique educational and other programming considerations. Features of school curriculum, programming, instructional methods, and design of educational and habilitational materials may need to be modified. The Missouri Deafblind Technical Assistance Project provides consultants who are available to coordinate and provide consultation, training, and other possible activities for direct service and supervisory staff.

Consultations and other technical assistance

activities are available throughout the year and may be provided in classrooms, residences, and other settings depending on the type of assistance requested and provided.

These on site consultations and other technical assistance activities are provided to direct and supervisory staff of education and other agencies serving children, students, and/or youth with deafblindness. Some intake information plus signed releases, from the legal guardian, are required to conduct on-site consultations.

For more information or to schedule an onsite consultation, contact:

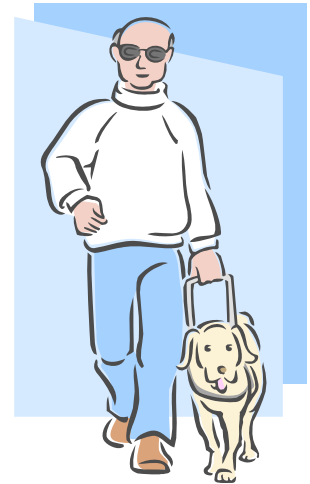
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Missouri is in the process of developing our grant proposal for the next cycle with the Office of Special Education Programs, United States Department of Education. Some activities of the grant may change as the outcomes of the Missouri Deafblind Technical Assistance Project need to be aligned with the national priorities. As the proposals to Missouri's grant are approved, the Missouri Deafblind Technical Assistance Project will keep families and service providers informed.

Orientation & Mobility: Importance to a Child with Deafblindness

Orientation and mobility (O & M) instruction provides the means for a child with deafblindness to use residual vision, auditory and other sensory information to understand and to move throughout the environment. Orientation involves knowing where you are, where you are going and how you are going to get there. Whereas, mobility includes the movement to that location.

Historically, instructional techniques were developed for children and youth who are able to effectively respond to verbal and/or auditory cues. Therefore, communication is an important component of O & M instruction for children with deafblindness. This requires the ability to respond to instructional cues. Additionally, children with deafblindness require hands-on instruction to help them understand the concepts associated with their environment. Educators agree that children with deafblindness learn best through performing skills in their environments. When given effective O & M instruction, students will learn landmarks, clues, and memory tasks specific to the sequence of the activity. Thus, the student becomes a semi-independent traveler. Therefore, instruction needs to be functional and meaningful.



Some of the components of O & M instruction include the following:

- ✓ **Communication:** Comprehending concepts regarding positional and directional cues; responding to the directions of an intervener, sighted guide, teacher and/or paraprofessional.
- ✓ **Motor development:** Using body to move to desired location; using touch and grasp skills to respond and to access environmental cues; and using adaptive equipment to read and move within the environment.
- ✓ **Concept Development:** Understanding environmental concepts that a sighted person readily understands such as multi-story building, a mile, over/under, etc.
- ✓ **Sensory Development:** Using residual vision and hearing to respond to environment as well as other senses. (i.e.: Change of floor from carpet to tile to detect different rooms,

read Braille words to select correct restroom, “bing” sound with flashing light in car to remind you to fasten seatbelt, etc.)

- ✓ Orientation Skills: Using environmental cues to move in the environment. (i.e.: Smell of cookies to enter kitchen, feel of breeze to close an open window, flashing light to respond to fire drill, etc.)
- ✓ Mobility Skills: Moving throughout the environment and the related accommodations that may be needed such as a sighted guide, cane, related safety items, etc.

Overall, the delivery of O & M services will help the student gain some level of independence in their environment based on their individual skills. Thus, the child and/or youth will gain self-esteem, awareness of the body in space, and control over their environment.

Resources:

The Importance of Orientation and Mobility Skills for Students Who Are Deaf-Blind. Gense, D. Jay & Gense, Marilyn. October 2004 Revised. Retrieved 02/25/2008 from www.dblink.org/lib/o&m.htm

Orientation and Mobility for children Who Are Deafblind. New York State Technical Assistance Project. New York, New York. Retrieved 02/25/2008 from www.tc.columbia.edu/NYSTAP

Peter-John’s Special Relationship with his Horse, Darlin’



Peter-John is profoundly deaf and legally blind, with other developmental disabilities. Peter-John is a student in the Hartville, Missouri School District. Peter-John and his mother live on a 132 acre farm in southwest Missouri. On this farm, Peter-John’s mother, Anneatha Newton, raises horses.

Darlin,’ a filly, was born from World Grand Champion (WGC) lines. Her grand sire was a World

Grand Champion. Darlin' has all the traits to be a world class champion herself. Peter-John's first spring in Missouri brought Darlin' and him together. Ms. Newton was looking to get a horse for Peter-John. Finding a horse to be compatible with Peter-John's needs was not an easy task. Peter-John cannot hear a horse approaching or see well enough to read the horse language. Peter-John uses a wheelchair for mobility and also a walker. This equipment can easily spook a horse.

So, Peter-John and his mother went horse shopping. The first encounter with Darlin' was love at first site. Both showed an endearing friendship to each other. Ms. Newton had to be sure this was a horse that she could purchase for her farm. A second visit was arranged. When Peter-John arrived at the farm for the second visit, Darlin' stopped her workout and ran over to the fence to greet Peter-John. Peter-John was still in the car, but Darlin' knew her friend was there. Peter-John did not need to say a word. He squealed with joy at the site of his horse, Darlin.' His friendship with Darlin' is strong. Ms. Newton knew this was the one horse to buy.

Today, Peter-John helps brush and feed Darlin.' Darlin' has learned some of Peter-John's sign language. The two of them play the "Grain Game." Peter-John tells Darlin' to "put your head here," then points to the grain bucket, and then tells her "and I will pet you." With the help of assistants, Peter-John is able to ride a horse and loves this experience. Just one look at this beautiful, strong, majestic animal, with a spirit as gentle as a lamb, everyone can see Darlin' has a life-long friend, Peter-John.



Social Security and Supplemental Security Income (SSI): Understanding the System

"How come Mrs. Jones gets benefits for her son and I don't?" "The Smith family gets more money each month for their daughter, but my child has many more needs." "Five years ago, they told me that we earned too much money, my child is not eligible for any Social Security benefits." These are some common comments often

spoken by families of children with disabilities who have attempted to apply or are interested in applying for Social Security benefits. So how does your child become eligible for benefits?

First, let's learn more about Social Security. Persons are eligible for Social Security benefits because they are disabled, a spouse or child of someone who receives Social Security, a spouse or a child of a worker who has died, or a dependent parent of a worker who has died. If you feel that you meet any of these criteria, then apply at your local Social Security office.

SSI was established to provide monthly benefits to people 65 and older or who are blind or disabled. SSI recipients may earn some income and still be eligible for the benefits. Some children may be eligible for SSI benefits due to the nature of their disability and the expenses associated with their care, but the parent/guardian's income is a factor for eligibility. SSI benefits are given to help with normal expenses required for the individual. Therefore, if an individual moves into a setting outside of their natural home, these benefits must be applied to the individual's cost of care. When a person turns eighteen (18), for all practical purposes the individual is considered an adult. Therefore, the individual should be a contributing member of the household. The SSI requirements for considering the parent/guardian's income do not apply. Individuals previously not eligible may now be eligible for SSI benefits. Also, if the individual was receiving SSI benefits, the amount of the benefits may increase to the maximum allowed of \$623.00. Application for SSI is made at your local Social Security office.

Individuals may receive both SSI and Social Security benefits. If a child has received Social Security prior to age 18 and is disabled, he/she may be eligible for additional benefits from SSI at age 18. Also, if an individual has significant disabilities and is a recipient of SSI, he/she may be eligible for additional benefits from Social Security after a time period when their parent begins drawing Social Security or deceases.

To learn more about these and other benefits go to www.socialsecurity.gov or call 1-800-772-1213 or TTY: 1-800-325-0778.

Task Forces Help Transition Teams



Since 1989, the evolution of the deafblind task forces and employment teams in Missouri has resulted in a mechanism that now effectively identifies and addresses service delivery issues facing individuals with deafblindness, their families, and the agencies that serve them.

In the years leading up to 1989, individuals with deafblindness and their families experienced problems in securing appropriate services and supports along with the necessary funding. Individuals, families, and service agencies often felt they were working in isolation when trying to resolve these problems. The two most challenging problems are those related to the transitioning of individuals with deafblindness from school into adulthood and transitioning individuals with deafblindness from a residential education/habilitation facility into their home communities.

As individuals, families, and professionals more closely examined these problems, it became clear that the origins of most of the problems were systemic in nature. A systems approach, therefore, was needed to address these problems. Missouri developed a network of State and Local Deafblind Task Forces that address interagency collaboration through a case study approach to identify system issues. Task Forces encourage person-centered-planning strategies to develop desired outcomes for the consumers. Task Forces provide resources and consultation on best practices for individuals with deafblindness to resolve roadblocks and barriers faced by the individual support team that help support the person-centered plan. Also, task forces share their knowledge and skills to the individual's team and support agency to build capacity by providing training on best practices for individuals with deafblindness.

Currently, Missouri has a state Task Force to support local task force teams and address state issues where there are no local deafblind Task Forces. Local task forces are in St. Louis, Kansas City and Central Missouri. The Missouri Deafblind Project is in the process of developing a fourth deafblind task force in southwest Missouri. This is due to a growing number of deafblind children and youth including those age sixteen to twenty-one, in southwest Missouri. Task Forces help the transition team focus on effective practices to support individuals with deafblindness and provide training to service providers, help provide resources to linkages, and strategize ideas to address barriers to achieve the person-centered planning

process. For more information contact Susan Bonner, Project Coordinator (sbonner@msb.k12.mo.us).

Calendar of Events

April, 2008

Date: April 2, 2008 – April 5, 2008
Topic: Council for Exceptional Children Convention & Expo
Location: Boston, Massachusetts
Audience: Teachers, service providers, and administrators
Contact: www.cec.sped.org

Date: April 18 - 19, 2008
Topic: Auditory Neuropathy / Dyssynchrony: Putting the Pieces Together
Location: Wisconsin Rapids, WI
Audience: Teachers, service providers, parents, and administrators
Contact: www.wesp-dhh.wi.gov

Date: April 21, 2008
Topic: Customized Employment (sponsored by the Missouri Deafblind Project)
Location: Independence, Missouri
Audience: Teachers, service providers, and administrators
Contact: sbonner@msb.k12.mo.us

Date: April 27, 2008 – May 2, 2008
Topic: Ass. for Research in Vision and Ophthalmology Annual Meeting
Location: Fort Lauderdale, Florida
Audience: Teachers, service providers, and administrators
Contact: www.arvo.org

June, 2008

Date: June 22-25, 2008
Topic: Deafblind Transition Camp
Location: Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan
Audience: Young adults with deafblindness (16 – 19 years old) planning to go to college
Contact: www.dbcentral.org

Date: Summer, 2008
Topic: Project STEP
Location: St. Louis, Missouri
Audience: Students with visual impairments planning post-secondary school training / education
Contact: kjhollinger@sbcglobal.net



July, 2008

Date: July 6 - 18, 2008
Topic: Summer Seminars for High School Students
Location: Sands Point, New York
Audience: High School Students with Deafblindness
Contact: drchknc@aol.com

Date: July 7 -10, 2008
Topic: Vision 2008: Ninth International Conference on Low Vision
Location: Montreal, Quebec, Canada
Audience: Teachers, service providers, and administrators
Contact: www.vision2008.ca

Date: July 11 – 13, 2008
Topic: CHARGE Syndrome/Deafblind Weekend for Families & Professionals
Location: Kingsport, Tennessee
Audience: Teachers, service providers, and parents
Contact: jennifer.l.miller@vanderbilt.edu

Date: July 22- 27, 2008
Topic: Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) Biennial International Conference
Location: Chicago, Illinois
Audience: Teachers, service providers, and administrators
Contact: www.aerbvi.org

October, 2008

Date: October 22-26, 2008
Topic: 2008 Southeastern Regional Institute on Deafness and Touch the Future – Transition conference
Location: Atlanta, Georgia
Audience: Teachers, service providers, and administrators
Contact: Valencia.Thomas@dol.state.ga.us

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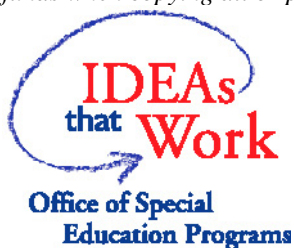
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In Focus

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