



Provincial Outreach Program for Students with Deafblindness

Best Practices

Establish Trust - Emotional Bond

The definition of a bond is "a feeling of trust and mutual respect." Motivation from external stimuli is often limited or nonexistent for a child with deafblindness. The establishment of trust between an individual with deafblindness and the key people in their life is essential to enable them to reach out and want to interact with the world. The trust bond motivates the individual with deafblindness to communicate and learn. Initially, this bond can often be established through a shared interest, physical contact, and movement. Find ways to become part of the learner's world and gradually expand their experiences and interactions.

Routines

Routines are important to the student with deafblindness for trust and security in an unpredictable world. Routines are also a great way to help the student with deafblindness learn about the world and anticipate what is going to happen. Routines should take place in as natural a setting as possible. Remember to build flexibility into routines to help the learner learn how to cope and respond to changes.

Involve the Learner in the Whole Process of any Activities

A student with deafblindness needs to be involved in the whole process of all activities. For example, if the learner is playing with a certain toy, they should help get it and put it away when finished. The student needs to learn where things come from and that they have responsibility for its care. Initially, the student may need hand-under-hand or hand-over-hand assistance, but that can be faded as the learner becomes independent with part of, or the whole, routine.

Utilize all the Senses

One of the goals of Intervention is to help a student with deafblindness learn to cope with sensory input and interpret it to the best of their ability. Encourage the learner to become aware of different textures, vibrations, smells, sounds, and visual cues. Help them use all senses to pick up small bits of information that may help them gain knowledge of the surroundings and relate to other people in the environment.

A student with deafblindness must be encouraged to use their residual vision and hearing when available, along with the senses of touch, taste, and smell. Be careful not to overload the learner with too much sensory input. Observe the individual to see what they can tolerate, interpret, and integrate. The Intervenor may need to moderate the amount of sensory information that the learner is receiving so that the learner is able to make sense of the sensory information they are receiving.

Learn by Doing

A student with deafblindness learns best by being actively involved in an activity, not by watching or listening. The learner will often respond to, and remember, an activity or object by how it feels, the actions, and by how their body interacts with it. Be sure to include motor programming throughout activities and routines.

Hand-under-hand

The use of hand-under-hand or hand-over-hand techniques allows a student with deafblindness to develop a feel for the sequence of movement throughout an activity. With this approach, the learner is actively involved while learning valuable lessons about motor planning and how the body and hands relate to an activity.

It is important to avoid creating problems with learned dependency. Initially, act as one with the student and gradually withdraw support, as they can do more on their own.

Generalizing Skills

A student with deafblindness may learn cues specific to one situation but have trouble generalizing them to other situations. The learner needs to use their cues in a variety of experiences and settings to help transfer skills from one situation to another.

Feedback

A student with deafblindness often has difficulty getting accurate feedback about the effects of their actions on the environment. The learner needs to be told when they have been successful with an activity or need to try again. Provide encouragement and support. If the student's behaviour or actions are inappropriate, let them know through sign, voice, body language, facial expressions, and/or mannerisms.

Note: when providing feedback to a student, be kind because the student is not aware of the results of their actions. Be mindful of the environment and avoid providing feedback in front of peers. By providing kind and constructive feedback in a respectful way, the student can maintain confidence in their abilities, feel safe to participate in class, feel safe around you, and feel comfortable to ask questions when they are unsure.

Time

It takes a student with deafblindness longer than their peers to gather and accurately process information. The learner often needs more time to learn new skills and implement those already acquired.

Organization and Environment Management

An organized, predictable environment is helpful for a student with deafblindness because the learner may not have reliable vision and hearing to see where things are stored and where obstacles, such as desk or chairs, are placed. By keeping materials and classroom items in the same place, it helps the learner move about the environment with confidence and locate materials with independence. Areas that need organizing may include work area, Circle Time floor area, calendar system, desk, locker, and kitchen area.

Independence

A student with deafblindness may need encouragement to try new things and to increase independence with familiar tasks. It may be easier for the learner to let someone else do things for them. Begin to fade support and prompts as soon as the learner shows signs of understanding expectations.