



Provincial Outreach Program for Students with Deafblindness

Creating a Responsive Environment

A Responsive Environment refers to a setting that responds to a student with deafblindness. The learner has some influence over the things they do.

Observational or incidental learning is not usually a learning strength for an individual with deafblindness. Due to their visual and auditory differences, they may not be drawn to interacting with others, nor see the effect of their actions on the environment. Consequently, learning about the environment may not be naturally motivating in the same way that their peers may experience it.

One of the responsibilities of the Intervenor is to create an environment so that the individual is motivated to interact, explore, and learn. There are 6 elements that the Intervenor considers when creating a Responsive Environment. These elements are:

1. Establishing a trust bond with the individual who is deafblind. The trust bond is a basis for motivation to learn, communicate, and establish social connections.
2. Acting as a communication partner with the learner who is deafblind, to provide clear, non-distorted information, and to ensure that the child has control over his/her world by being an expressive communicator.
3. Ensuring that the learner is an active participant in every activity and that s/he has the information needed to be an informed participant.
4. Helping the learner to explore and communicate about the things that interest him/her. Following the learner's lead and sharing in a two-way conversation about these interests.
5. Challenging the learner to think for him/herself and problem solve.
6. Providing an increasing range of experiences in an evolving and growing environment.

Intervenor's Motto: Do with, not for

There are many ways to go about creating a Responsive Environment. The following is a list of some suggestions that may help create a Responsive Environment for the learner with deafblindness you support.

- Motivate the student to interact with the environment and with you by establishing a trust connection.
- Establish a connection with the learner by participating together, in activities that are fun and enjoyable. The individual will realize that they have an influence on the world through you.
- Create a need to communicate. If there is a reason to communicate, they will.
- Provide a motivation to communicate, such as a reason. Use lots of facial expressions, enthusiasm, and exaggerate your actions if necessary.
- Be present and ready to receive all attempts at communication and to respond appropriately.

- Provide opportunities for problem solving. Encourage the student to develop problem solving skills and to think for him/herself.
- Take time to help the learner become familiar with their environment.
- Provide feedback to the student.
- Be consistent with your expectations and procedures.
- Repetition and consistency are important elements because they provide security, safety, and predictability for the learner.
- Teach the student how to play and have fun.
- Be mindful of the visual, auditory, and tactile cues you are sending through voice, sign, hands, body language, facial expressions. The student with deafblindness may interpret actions in a way that is different from your intentions.

Talk to your POPDB Teacher-Consultant about other ideas to create a Responsive Environment.