

What is Deaf-Blind?

Definition: Any combination of hearing and vision loss that interferes with access to communication and the environment and requires interventions beyond those necessary for hearing or vision loss alone. For educational purposes in most states, the child needs to meet the criteria for deaf/hard-of-hearing as well as for blind/visually impaired (check with your own DeafBlind Project director)

Deaf-Blind rarely means totally deaf and totally blind. No other succinct term has been found that fits all of the conditions listed in the table below. Dual sensory loss, Hard of Hearing/Visually Impaired, etc. are cumbersome. Most parents and educators have finally settled on DeafBlind even though that term is a somewhat inaccurate and, often, a scary term.

The importance of having a DeafBlind label, however, cannot be underestimated. The educational needs are truly different when both senses are affected. It is not enough to have the consultants come in and give their input without considering the effect of the other sensory loss. The reason is that the techniques used to compensate for vision loss often involve hearing and those used for hearing loss frequently involve vision. Note in the table below that the term DeafBlind is used even if the child is found to be just visually impaired and hearing impaired. The combination makes a HUGE difference in the way information should be presented.

What combination of vision & hearing is present?

When one or more senses are impaired, additional educational consultants are needed, even (or perhaps especially) during the Early Childhood phase of development. Research out of Denver shows that, if a communication system is established BEFORE six months of age, a deaf child can develop completely normal language. Even if they learn to read sign language, they do not fall behind their hearing peers in expressive language and reading. The implications are staggering. Even though medical issues in CHARGE occupy the thoughts and minds of parents and caretakers during the first 2 years of life, it would appear to be very important to start some form of communication as early as possible.

The table below introduces the kinds of special educational consultants needed to address the vision and hearing issues. However, physical therapists, occupational therapists and a variety of other consultants may also be needed (just like in the hospital and clinic). Note that the kinds of modifications given depend on the nature of sensory input.

Sensory Status	Consultant Needed	Modifications	Comments
Hearing Sighted	None		
Hearing Visually impaired	B/VI teacher +/- O& M	Large print, contrast, placement of student	
Hearing Blind	B/VI teacher +O& M	Braille, O&M, audio tapes & instruction	
Hard of Hearing Sighted	D/HH teacher +/-SPL	Hearing aids, +/- FM or other amplification, noise reduction, classroom placement	
Deaf Sighted	D/HH teacher +/- Interpreter	Deaf classroom or program, interpreters	
Hard of Hearing Visually Impaired	B/VI, O&M, D/HH, SPL, DBP consultant	Amplification, large print, be within the "Communication Bubble"	Deaf-Blind
Hard of Hearing Blind	B/VI, O&M, D/HH, SPL, DBP consultant	Amplification, Braille, O&M, +/- sign language	Deaf-Blind
Deaf Visually Impaired	B/VI, O&M, D/HH, DBP consultant	Modified sign language, O&M, large print, be within the "Communication Bubble"	Deaf-Blind
Deaf Blind	B/VI, O&M, D/HH, DBP consultant	Modified sign language (possibly tactile), Braille, O&M	Deaf-Blind,

Table modified from Rob Last

B/VI = Blind/Visually Impaired

D/HH = Deaf/Hard of Hearing

SPL = Speech/Language

O&M = Orientation & Mobility (learning how to know where you are and move safely with low or no vision)

DBP = DeafBlind Project