NORTH CAROLINA
DeafBlind Project

NORTH CAROLINA DEAFBLIND PROJECT

DB INTERVENER NEWSLETTER

• FEBRUARY 2026 •

TRUST IN TOUCH: BUILDING SECURITY THROUGH CONSISTENT CONNECTION

Touch is often our first language—long before words, before sight, before sound. For learners who are DeafBlind, it remains one of the most meaningful and reliable ways to connect, communicate, and feel safe in the world.

As Interveners, the way we use touch can either build trust or cause confusion. When our touch is gentle, predictable, and respectful, it communicates, "You are safe. I am here." Consistent touch becomes a bridge to understanding, helping the learner form secure relationships and explore their environment with confidence.

This month, we'll explore how touch—used with intention and respect—can open doors to emotional stability and learning.

DB INTERVENER NEWSLETTER

CONNECTIONS

ECU DB Teacher Support Program Blogs

ECU TSP Website

NCDBP Facebook

NCDBP Resources

THE LANGUAGE OF TRUST

Touch does more than guide hands or teach tasks; it builds relationship. For individuals who are DeafBlind, trust often begins through repeated experiences of consistent, respectful touch.

When an Intervener approaches the same way each time—offering their hand, pausing before contact, and maintaining a steady rhythm—the learner begins to recognize the pattern as safe and predictable. That trust allows curiosity and learning to grow.

Touch also communicates emotion—calmness, excitement, reassurance, or impatience. Interveners who are mindful of their emotional state use touch to share peace rather than pass on stress.

Predictability through touch helps learners understand: "I am not alone in this moment."

"Touch is the primary sense of all sensorimotor learners."
— Millie Smith, Sensory Learning Kit (2015)

TRY THIS:

Before beginning any routine, consider how long it takes the learner to process such communication and adjust the time accordingly. Pause for processing time, then gently extend your hand in greeting. Observe how your learner responds to that moment of shared calm and connection.

STRATEGY SPOTLIGHT: BUILDING SECURITY THROUGH TOUCH

Here are a few intentional ways to make touch a consistent and trusted form of communication:

- Always clearly signal your presence by gently identifying yourself in a consistent way (e.g., a touch cue or sign) before interacting, so the student knows who is with them.
- Use a consistent greeting.
- A familiar touch—such as a brief hand squeeze or shoulder pat—signifies connection and respect.
- Match your pace to the learner.
- Move slowly and pause often. Sudden or hurried touch can feel startling or confusing.
- Pair touch with emotional calm.
- The learner feels your tone through your hands. Approach with steadiness and peace.
- Create routines that use shared touch.
- A hand-under-hand “hello,” a shared tactile sign, or a consistent goodbye gesture builds confidence and predictability.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"At first, my student would pull away when I reached toward him. So I started each interaction the same way—hand-under-hand, letting him choose when to connect. Now he reaches out for me first. That simple shift changed everything."
— Intervener Reflection, North Carolina

TOUCH AS COMMUNICATION: BEYOND GUIDANCE

Touch is not just for physical assistance—it's a way to listen and speak without words. Through consistent, intentional touch, Interveners can share emotions, directions, and encouragement.

- A calm, steady touch says, "You are safe."
- A brief pause before contact says, "I respect your space."
- A light guiding movement says, "Let's explore this together."

When we treat touch as communication rather than control, it becomes a shared language—one that expresses both presence and partnership. "Our hands can teach, guide, and comfort—but most importantly, they can say, 'I see you.'"

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

Studies and training materials (Miles & Riggio, 1999; Smith, 2015; NCDB OHOA Modules) emphasize that emotional security is the foundation for learning. Without trust, engagement fades; with trust, the learner's brain is open to growth.

Touch is most effective when it is:

- Predictable: Always initiated in the same way.
- Respectful: Never forced or abrupt.
- Reciprocal: Inviting, not directing.

"In every moment of shared touch, we have the chance to say: 'You matter, and I am here with you.'"

RESOURCE ROUNDUP: TOOLS FOR BUILDING CONNECTION

- Barbara Miles – Hand-Under-Hand Technique Guide: https://www.asharedvision.org/uploads/8/8/2/7/88271548/hand_under_hand.pdf
- OHOA Module 4: Building Trusted Relationships and Concept Development https://www.nationaldb.org/products/modules/ohoa/
- NCDB Resource: The Role of the Intervener in Building Trust https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/role-of-intervener/
- Millie Smith – Sensory Learning Kit (TSBVI): https://www.tsbvi.edu/SLK
- National Center on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB): https://www.nationaldb.org/
- Texas Deafblind Project: https://txdeafblindproject.org/
- Texas Deafblind Project – Resources: https://txdeafblindproject.org/resources/
- Perkins School for the Blind Deafblind Services: https://www.perkins.org/school/deafblind/
- Perkins Resource Directory (DeafBlind links): https://www.perkins.org/nec/resource-directory/

REFLECT AND RESPOND

When has your touch helped a learner feel secure or connected? How can you make your touch more consistent, predictable, or respectful in daily routines?

FINAL THOUGHT

Every time we reach out with patience, consistency, and care, we teach more than a skill—we teach trust.

NC Deaf Blind
NORTH CAROLINA DeafBlind Project
North Carolina Department of PUBLIC INSTRUCTION
ecac exceptional children's assistance center
ECU

REACH OUT!

Do you have questions about the role of Interveners or how they support learners with DeafBlindness? We'd love to hear from you! Contact us at: ecutsp@gmail.com

INTERESTED IN JOINING OUR COHORT?

If you know someone who would make a great addition to our DeafBlind Intervener Cohort, please share this information so they can learn more!
And if you've completed the Intervener I Training and are ready to take the next step toward your National Intervener Certification, we'd be happy to help you get started. Contact us today at: ecutsp@gmail.com.

NC Deaf Blind NORTH CAROLINA DeafBlind Project | North Carolina Department of PUBLIC INSTRUCTION | ecac exceptional children's assistance center | ECU