NORTH CAROLINA
DeafBlind Project

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DB INTERVENER NEWSLETTER

• MARCH, 2026 •

COMMUNICATION ACROSS THE SENSES

Communication is far more than speech or signs—it's the heartbeat of connection. For individuals who are DeafBlind, communication happens through movement, touch, rhythm, and shared experience.
Every gesture, pause, or change in muscle tone can carry meaning. When Interveners learn to listen across all the senses, we discover that communication is ongoing.

DB INTERVENER NEWSLETTER

CONNECTIONS

ECU DB Teacher Support Program Blogs

ECU TSP Website

NCDBP Facebook

NCDBP Resources

WHAT IT MEANS TO COMMUNICATE ACROSS THE SENSES

- True communication includes intentional and unintentional signals—facial expressions, body tension, hand movements, and breath changes.
- Learners who are DeafBlind may communicate meaning through touch, movement, gesture, or object cues before using formal systems like sign language or Braille.
- Interveners assist others in interpreting the learner's communication and response appropriately.

THINK ABOUT IT

When a student pushes away a cup, pauses, then smiles when it's offered again—communication is happening. The Intervener's role is to interpret, expand, and validate that message.

TRY THIS:

During one daily routine, focus solely on the learner's nonverbal communication. What messages do you notice that you might have missed before?

STRATEGY SPOTLIGHT: EXPANDING COMMUNICATION OPPORTUNITIES

- Recognize all forms of communication.
- Treat movements, gestures, and changes in expression as meaningful attempts to connect.
- Pair experiences with consistent cues.
- Use the same object or tactile signal to represent familiar activities (e.g., a spoon for snack time).
- Model tactile signing or gestures during shared action.
- Always pair touch and movement with context.
- Follow the learner's lead.
- Notice how the learner initiates, such as through reaching, turning, or pausing as though they've spoken.

VOICES FROM THE FIELD

"My student used to tap the table when she wanted a break, but no one recognized it. Once we started responding to that tap, she smiled and relaxed. That moment reminded me that communication starts when we listen differently."

— Intervener Reflection, North Carolina

ADDITIONAL TIPS FOR COMMUNICATION ACROSS THE SENSES

• Notice before you name. Pause to observe the learner's natural movements or reactions before offering language or cues—this helps you build on what they are already communicating.

• Keep cues consistent. Use the same gesture, object, or tactile sign each time an activity occurs. Predictability helps the learner attach meaning over time.

• Respond immediately to communicative attempts. Even small signals, like a turn of the head, a pause, or a hand movement, deserve a response. This teaches the learner that their communication matters.

• Make communication mutual. Mirror the learner's touch, rhythm, or hand movements to show, "I hear you," even without words.

RESOURCE ROUNDUP: TOOLS FOR MULTISENSORY COMMUNICATION

OHOA Module: Understanding Communication Principles
https://www.nationaldb.org/products/modules/ohoa/

NCDB Resource: Communication Forms Used By Individuals Who Are DeafBlind
https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/communication/

Tangible Symbol Systems - Rowland & Schweigert (2000):
https://www.designtolearn.com/uploaded/pdf/Tangible-Symbols-Primer-07-09x.pdf

Barbara Miles: Talking the Language of the Hands to the Hands of the Language
https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/talking-hands-to-hands-factsheet/?utm_source

Barbara Miles - Hand-Under-Hand Technique Guide:
https://www.asharedvision.org/uploads/8/8/2/7/88271548/hand_under_hand.pdf

National DeafBlind Center — Communication Foundations:
https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/educational-practices/conversation/?utm_source

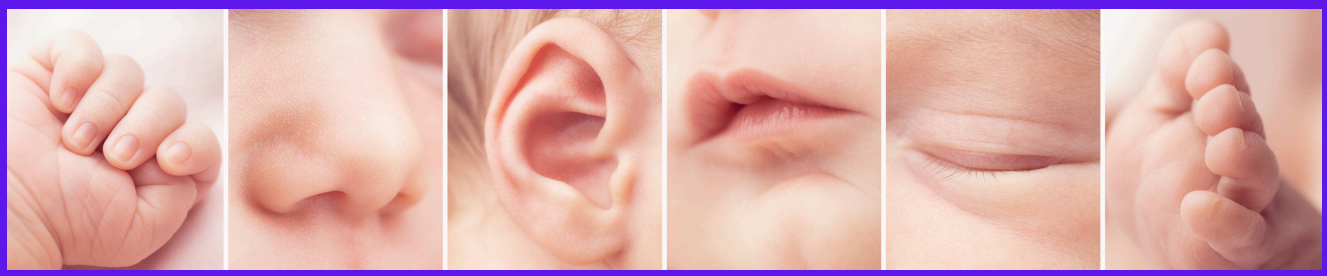
Communication Fact Sheets for Parents
Communication Development Resource (NationalDB PDF)

REFLECT AND RESPOND

- How does your learner communicate when words aren't available?
- What new forms of communication can you recognize, respond to, and expand this week?

FINAL THOUGHT

When we respond to every form of communication, we teach the learner that their voice matters.



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.

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