



Fact Sheet

Developing Independence

The learner who has vision and hearing loss may need your help to explore the world through touch and movement. Sometimes family members and professionals are overprotection because they are afraid the child will get hurt. All children receive a few bumps and bruises as they grow up, including those with disabilities. The child needs to get out and move around to increase development in all skill areas.

We each can encourage independence in the child in the following ways:

1. Child-proof the home or classroom to allow the child to learn to avoid obstacles in a safe way. Remove dangerous or valuable objects, which may be of concern. This strategy is no different than one would use with any other young child.
2. Teach the learner new skills by doing activities together, with your hands underneath his or hers. This is called hand-under-hand where the learner can feel your actions, but has the choice of participating in the activity. As the child builds a trusting relationship with new people, he or she will want to follow the direction of another's hands as it means "we are going to learn something new together: or "I am going to show you something."
3. It is important that you point out to the child the natural cues that are available in the environment which tell him or her to do. For example, the child can be taught to feel his hands for stickiness or to smell his hands to determine if hand washing is needed. In this way, the child will do it for him/herself when necessary, rather than waiting for someone to tell him to wash his or her hands.
4. The child should be encouraged to use his sense of touch in all activities to provide for greater independent movement and safety in exploration. The child should be taught to feel for the seat of his chair before sitting. He should search for dropped objects by touch. He should be allowed to touch his food and drink to locate them on the table and to determine when he is finished. A

*Adapted from Sternberg - White, S., Chen, D., Watts, J., 1992
Developing Social-Emotional Skills, INSITE, Utah
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*Fact Sheets from the Colorado Services to Children and Youth with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss Project are to be used by both families and professionals serving individuals with vision and hearing loss. The information applies to children, birth through 21 years of age. The purpose of the Fact Sheet is to give general information on a specific topic. More specific information for an individual student can be provided through personalized technical assistance available from the project. For more information call (303) 866-6681 or (303) 866-6605.
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