

COLORADO

Assistance for those

SERVICES TO

with both vision

CHILDREN WITH

and hearing loss

DEAFBLINDNESS

(303) 866-6681 or (303) 866-6605

Fact Sheet

Creating a Need to Communicate

Individuals with vision and hearing loss may show communication skills in many ways. This communication may take the form of body movement, gestures, facial expressions, vocalizing, use of objects or people, pointing to pictures, or more formal systems. As these skills begin to develop, it may be helpful to create a need for increasing the use of these new communication forms.

1. You may do movements together with the individual that the person really enjoys (e.g., rocking, dancing or swinging). You can stop your movement, pause for a few seconds, and see if the individual indicates he wants to continue. He may indicate he wants to continue by his body movement, facial expression, gestures, vocalizing, etc. This is the beginning of communicating needs and wants.
2. As the individual becomes familiar with various routines, you can watch to see if he or she anticipates each step of the routine. As you do the familiar routine, pause before moving on to the next step of the activity. During the waiting period of a few seconds, watch for movement, body posture, facial expression, gestures, vocalizing, etc., which indicate that the individual wants to complete the activity. (For example, you may assist the individual with dressing and may pause after the socks are placed on his toes. He may wiggle his toes to indicate a desire to finish dressing).
3. Many times a person with vision and hearing disabilities learns a variety of tasks well that do not require the need to communicate. You can create a need to communicate within the routine/task by “forgetting” to put out all materials he will need for finishing the task (e.g., putting out a can of soup without the pan, putting out the toothpaste without the toothbrush, or placing a desired objects just out of reach.) The individual will then need to ask for the missing item in whatever way he can. You should not, however, interrupt his independence by removing materials he is currently using. It is also not recommended to insist he describe what he is doing in order to continue his task (e.g. the teacher removes the child’s cookies for each bite until he child says/signs/gestures, “I want the cookie”). If you interrupt by removing materials he already has, the individual may feel punished and may not wish to communicate. If you block his independence by requesting a description of what he is doing, he may stop functioning independently and may always wait to be prompted to continue actions.

4. After the child expresses his desire to continue these activities, it is very important to let him know that you understood his attempts to communicate. You may say “Oh, you need the toothbrush!” or “You want your socks on?,” etc. Your movements as you speak can be an imitation of his movement. Your statements should tell him that you “heard” what he was saying and that you respect his wishes. Be sure that your facial expression, body language, vocalizations, and speech all give a message of positive feelings about his communication.

For more information:

Tanni Anthony or Gina Quintana
Colorado Department of Education
Exceptional Student Leadership Unit
Colorado Services to Children and Youth with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss Project
1560 Broadway, Suite 1175
Denver, CO 80202

Tanni’s phone and email: (303) 866-6681 anthony_t@cde.state.co.us
Gina’s phone and email (303) 866-6605 quintana_g@cde.state.co.us
Fax: (303) 866-6767
TTY: (303) 860-7060

Fact Sheets from the Colorado Services to Children and Youth with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss are to be used by both families and professionals serving individuals with vision and hearing loss. The information applies to children and youth, 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 Colorado project. For more information call (303) 866-6681 or (303) 866-6605. Updated 1/09.

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