The Beacon

The Newsletter of the Wisconsin Deafblind Technical Assistance Project

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Routines...Are They That Important?

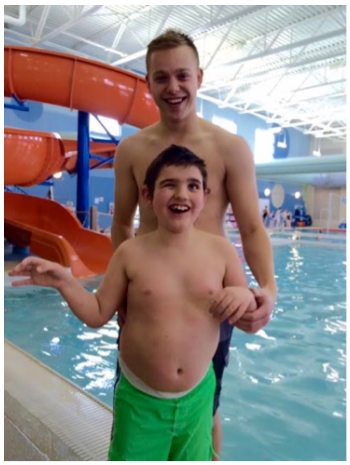
By Jodi Anderson
WDBTAP Family Specialist

For children, especially for children with deafblindness, routines provide consistent, repeated experiences that allow them to anticipate what is about to happen, communicate in a structured and familiar setting, and actively participate to the greatest extent they can.

A routine should have a clear signal to the student that the activity is starting. The steps of the activity should always occur in the same order, be cued in a consistent way, and take place in the same place. When the routine ends, there must be a clear signal that the activity is finished.

My son Liam, who is totally blind and has a cochlear implant on the right side, loves the pool. He takes private lessons with a young man named Josh, who is a sophomore in college. Josh is awesome with Liam; they have a really special relationship. Josh, however, does not know sign, let alone tactile sign. Liam has a special waterproof cochlear processor he wears in the pool so Josh can talk to Liam and Liam can understand.

One day, we went to the pool and after changing Liam into his suit, I tactile signed for him to remove his regular processor. He put the swim one on and it did not work. I tried all our usual strategies. I turned it off and turned it back on: Nothing. I thought maybe the battery was dead so I switched it out with the battery on his regular processor: Nothing. The swim cochlear processor was a no-go. What to do? Liam cannot wear his regular processor in the pool. It would be ruined if it got wet. We have an old swim cover we used prior to getting the waterproof processor but that was at home and would take 20 minutes to get. Liam was already changed, so not having the swim lesson would result in a very upset Liam. So I signed to him that we would be going to the pool without the C.I. and away we went.



Liam (front) and swim teacher Josh

I explained the situation to Josh who, although a little apprehensive, was willing to give it a try. I told him if it didn't work out that we could just cut the lesson very short. I told him to just do what he normally does and come get me if there was a problem, and away they went. I went back to the tables outside the glass windows where parents are allowed to wait and watch. Time went by, and Josh never came to get me. Things seemed to be going very well. After the 45-minute class was done, I met them. Josh was beaming. Liam did awesome.

How did things go so well when Liam is truly profoundly deaf and totally blind? The answer is simple: A routine. Josh does the same order of activities for his swim lessons every week. Liam knows his routine and was able to follow along because he knew exactly what was going to happen, plus he trusts Josh.

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It turned out the cable was bad on Liam's swim cochlear processor and thanks to awesome customer service, we had a new one before his next lesson.

It was because of a consistent and familiar routine that Liam was able to participate and have fun. This was a great example of the importance of using routines in daily activities for children who are deafblind. Are they that important? Yes, because they work!

Interveners Help Students Belong

By Heidi Hollenberger
WDBTAP Deafblind Consultant

This article is dedicated to the memory of Alden Grade (3/7/01 - 6/30/16)

"A sense of belonging is a human need, just like the need for food and shelter. Feeling that you belong is most important in seeing value in life and in coping with intensely painful emotions." (Hall, Karyn, "Create a Sense of Belonging," *Psychology Today.com*; March 20, 2014). This is true regardless of your age, regardless of your gender, regardless of your abilities or inabilities. This is true for our students with deafblindness.

Heidi Hollenberger, WDBTAP Deafblind Consultant

Our students with deafblindness are not always able to develop social relationships on their own. They often rely on others in their environment to help facilitate these opportunities. This is just one way that interveners provide a critical support to our students. Interveners provide a sense of belonging. Through trust building and positive interactions, they learn what our students enjoy (and what they don't enjoy). They involve our students in activities that highlight what they ***can*** do and not what they can't do. They provide opportunities to practice communication skills and are able to be the voice of the student in social situations. This, in turn, provides opportunities for engagement and interactions with other students within the school community.

I recently received an email from one of our interveners. The student she supports is a middle schooler with non-verbal communication skills and multiple disabilities, in addition to deafblindness. This student enjoys riding his tricycle through the school hallways; this has typically been done when the hallways are empty. During one visit, WDBTAP staff were watching the student ride through the empty hallways and wanted to see what would happen if we didn't provide direction. We just let the student go where he wanted to go, regardless of how long it took him. He showed us how he could back up when he got stuck in corners. He knew to choose between the ramp instead of the stairs. He showed us that he knew the way to the elevator (which is a favorite activity for him). It was fun to watch what he was able to do independently when given the opportunity. He spent so much time exploring through the hallways that classes switched and the halls flooded with middle school students. The middle school students weren't quite sure what to do, so they walked around the bike and offered glances toward the student. None of the students, however, really stopped to say "hi." This may have been due to the short time allowed to

Alden laughs with his intervener, Lisa.

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Interveners continued from Page 2

transition between classes or if may simply be due to not knowing what to say or how to interact. What was obvious, though, was the pure joy in the face of the student with deafblindness. Pure joy. He smiled from ear to ear. He made eye contact with his intervener and gave his behavioral cue that said, "This makes me happy! I like this!" When the halls emptied again, he pedaled back to his classroom.

The intervener did not forget this experience. She took this experience and worked with the classroom teacher to incorporate this activity into his schedule. After a few months, I received this email from the intervener: "As I have been working with my student on socializing with the typical students in the hallways, we have made some awesome progress. My student is looking around for the voices that he hears when someone says 'hi' to him and he is raising his hand for a "high five" with a small amount of assistance. A couple of 8th grade girls walked by him and said 'hi.' I asked if they would mind going back to give him a high five. Both girls went back and gave him a high five. When they left, one of the girls said to me, 'That totally made my day!' I smiled at her and told her that she had totally made ***HIS*** day!"

Belonging. This intervener has shown many, many general education peers how to say 'hi' and how to interact with her student with deafblindness. Using a preferred activity (bike riding), she has been able to facilitate social communication and is helping to develop social belonging within the school community. Interveners are so much more than a one-to-one aide. They fulfill some the most basic needs that are critical for positive outcomes and improved quality of life.

For more information about interveners please visit www.intervener.org

For more information about becoming an intervener, please contact Heidi Hollenberger at heidi.hollenberger@wesp-dhh.wi.gov.

Optimizing Auditory and Visual Access for Deafblind Children

By Stacie Heckendorf
WESP-DHH Educational Audiology Consultant

Stacie Heckendorf , WESP-DHH Educational Audiology Consultant

Ever wonder why your Deafblind child responds differently in different environments or situations? This difference could be related to how they are able or unable to access auditory and visual information. Children with combined hearing and vision loss require even greater attention on our part to insure that their environment provides as much auditory and visual access as possible. Depending on the specifics of your child's hearing and vision loss, they will require your support to maximize their auditory and visual access by paying attention to what is happening around them. The purpose of this article is to give you some ideas of things to keep in mind so you can maximize your child's potential to be successful in a variety of environments.

As pediatric audiologist Carol Flexer (www.carolflexer.com) shared in her recent presentation during the May 6, 2016 "Partners in Listening: Building the Brain as a Path to Listening and Language" Conference, all of the senses are pathways or doorways to the brain. We need to open those doorways to the extent possible to make sure we are building brain pathways by providing as much sensory information as we can. In this case we are talking about building auditory and visual pathways to stimulate the brain.

Auditory Access:

1. **Listening Technology.** If you are using listening technology such as hearing aids or a cochlear implant, make sure you are using it every day, as long as your child will tolerate. Technology "off" means auditory doors will be narrower or closed.

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2. **Background Noise.** Reduce or eliminate background noise to the extent possible. Quiet is a good thing. Turn off the radio or TV during story or meal time.
3. **Clear Speech.** Use "clear speech," meaning slow down and monitor how much information you are providing.
4. **Intentional Pauses.** Use intentional pauses to allow time for processing information or responding.
5. **Play with Sound.** Play with sound by introducing a variety of music, identifying noise sources such as the dishwasher or keys jingling, exploring toys or common objects such as pots and pans for the sounds they make, singing to your child and playing with the "suprasegmentals" of speech such as pitch, intensity and rhythm.

Visual Access:

1. **Glasses.** If you have glasses for your child, make sure you are using them every day, as long as your child will tolerate. Again, the goal is to maximize what is going to the brain with as much clarity as possible.
2. **Lighting.** Pay attention to lighting. Does your child do better in bright or dim light? How does lighting affect their ability to see? Does it improve or decrease their access?
3. **Visual Field.** Does your child see better in a particular direction such as centered or to the right or left? Top or bottom?
4. **Visual Distance.** Does your child see better close up or farther away? How far is too far?
5. **Proximity.** Get in their space at their level. Up close and personal will provide more consistent and clear information than interacting with them from across the room or standing over them.

Helping family members and child care providers understand what your child hears and sees will help maximize their auditory and visual access during all interactions. If you are not sure yourself, ask your service providers to explain things in a functional, child-centered way so that you are able to understand and provide the best support possible. Remember, our goal is to build your child's brain by opening as many sensory doorways as possible.

For questions or additional information, contact Stacie Heckendorf, anastasia.heckendorf@wesp-dhh.wi.gov or 608-355-2023.

It's All About Me!

Accessible to Deaf, Hmong, and Spanish-speaking participants.

Register Now!

Annual Statewide Professional & Family Conference

Friday, November 11 & Saturday, November 12, 2016

Radisson Paper Valley Hotel, Appleton

Sponsored by WESP-DHH Outreach & WDBTAP

For families of children who are hard of hearing, deaf, deafblind, or deaf with additional disabilities, and for professionals who work with these children. The focus will be on building a positive sense of self in students and increasing the understanding of the role of each educational team member.

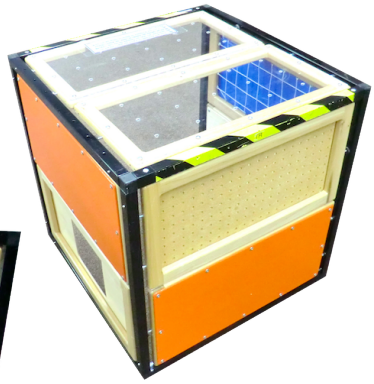
WDBTAP offers scholarships to enable families of children with deafblindness to attend this conference. Funding for these scholarships is limited, so applications will be taken on a first come, first served basis. Scholarships are limited to the registration fee and hotel costs. If you are interested in applying for a scholarship, access the 2016 Conference Scholarship Application at http://wdbtap.wi.gov/images/pdfs/2016ConferenceScholarshipApplication.pdf or call WDBTAP at 608-356-2023.

A Visit to Our Lending Library

Visit www.wdbtap.wi.gov/library to see these or any WDBTAP materials. Send us a message at wdbtap@wesp-dhh.wi.gov to make a borrowing request.

Little Room

Little Room is a core Active Learning environment, providing a resonant, warm, rich and safe place for children to engage. When properly populated with acoustically responsive toys that hang from top and sides, it naturally feeds back to the child for every movement. Panels are all two-sided, positive-lock and easy to rearrange, providing a fluid, long term interesting environment. Can be used on top of a Resonance Board.



Little Room
(back exterior view)

Little Room (front interior view) placed on top of resonance board.

Essef Board

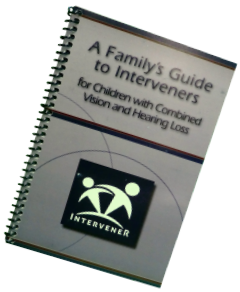
The Essef Board is made of two pieces of plywood joined together by six springs. It provides a bouncy platform that is highly responsive to a child's pressure. It's an effective tool to engage the child in pushing and kicking activities.

Essef Board

A Family's Guide to Interveners for Children with Combined Vision and Hearing Loss

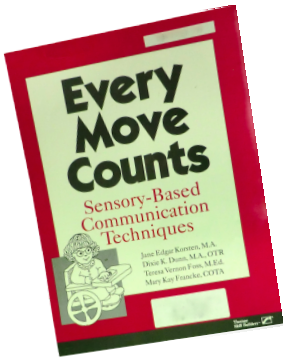
This booklet helps families answer the following questions:

- What is deafblindness?
- What is an intervener?
- What is effective intervention for children who are deafblind, and what role does the intervener play in providing that intervention?
- How can the need for an intervener be determined through the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process?



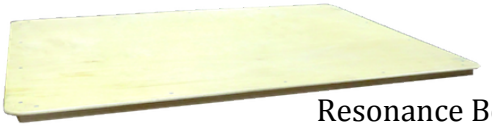
Every Move Counts: Sensory-Based Communication

Families and professionals are guided in identifying sensory activities a child enjoys and how the child expresses this enjoyment. The child's response to preferred sensory activities can be used as a basis for a more functional communication system.



Resonance Board

The Resonance Board is a slightly raised platform with a thin, smooth plywood panel that vibrates to every movement a child makes on it.



Resonance Board

What Types of Technical Assistance does WDBTAP provide?

- Parent/Family trainings and assistance in connecting families with one another
- Statewide and regional workshops for service providers and families
- Observation, support and coaching in programming for children
- Intensive deafblind training series for paraprofessionals who work one on one with children and youth who are deafblind
- Assistance in identifying children and youth who are deafblind
- Referral to relevant local, regional and national agencies
- Lending library with materials, equipment and toys to benefit deafblind children/youth on the Registry

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