

# DEAF-BLINDNESS

## ■ Definition of Deaf-Blindness under IDEA

Deaf-Blindness disability means concomitant [simultaneous] hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness. 34 CFR 300.8(c)(2)

## INCIDENCE

Approximately over 10,000 children between the ages from birth through 22 years have been classified as deaf-blind in the United States.

About 50 percent of people in the deaf-blind community have Usher Syndrome. This is a genetic condition where a person is born deaf or hard of hearing, or with normal hearing, and loses his or her vision later on in life from retinitis pigmentosa (RP).

## POSSIBLE CAUSES

### Syndromes

- Down
- Trisomy 13
- Usher

### Post-natal Causes

- Asphyxia
- Encephalitis
- Head injury/trauma
- Meningitis
- Stroke

### Multiple Congenital Anomalies

- CHARGE Syndrome
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)
- Hydrocephaly
- Maternal drug abuse
- Microcephaly

### Prematurity

### Congenital Prenatal Dysfunction

- AIDS
- Herpes
- Rubella
- Syphilis
- Toxoplasmosis

## TEACHING TIPS/INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Educators who work with individuals who are deaf-blind have a unique challenge to ensure that the person has access to the world beyond the limitations of their reach. The most important challenge for teachers (as well as parents and caregivers) is to meaningfully communicate. Some basic guidelines for communication include:

Individuals who are deaf-blind will often need touch in order for them to be sure that their partner shares their focus of attention. Exploring objects should be done in a “nondirective” way, allowing the individual who is deaf-blind to have control. The individual may have very slow response times. Therefore, the teacher should allow time for the student to respond.

Symbolic communication can be utilized by individuals who are deaf-blind. The principal communication systems include:

- Touch cues
- Object symbols
- Sign language
- Gestures
- Picture symbols
- Fingerspelling
- Signed English
- Braille
- American Sign Language
- Lip-reading
- Pidgin Signed English
- Tadoma (method of speech reading)
- Large print

## This information developed from the following resources:

- **American Association of the Deaf-Blind (AADB)**  
[www.aadb.org](http://www.aadb.org)
- **Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youth and Adults (HKNC)**  
[www.hknc.org](http://www.hknc.org)
- **National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB)**  
[www.nationaldb.org](http://www.nationaldb.org)
- **National Family Association for Deaf-Blind (NFADB)**  
[www.nfadb.org](http://www.nfadb.org)
- **Training and Educational Resources Program Perkins School for the Blind**  
[www.perkins.org](http://www.perkins.org)