Deaf-Blind Overview
Key Points for Success

- Dispelling Myths
- Knowledge of Deaf-Blindness
- Communication Access
- Modifications & Supports

Strategies for Successful Interactions
Identify common myths and assumptions regarding Deaf-Blind people.
Myth

- I have never worked with a Deaf-Blind person before.

**FALSE**

If someone asked you to make some type of modification, you were probably working with someone who falls along the ‘deaf-blind spectrum’.
FALSE

If someone has asked you to...

- sit closer
- sit further away
- angle your chair away from the windows/light
- sit in better lighting
- sign smaller
- slow down
- put on a sweater for better contrast
- repeat the fingerspelling/numerical production
- read what was written on the board
Key Points for Success

Strategies for Successful Interactions

- Dispelling Myths
- Knowledge of Deaf-Blindness
- Communication Needs
- Modifications & Supports
## Combinations of Hearing & Vision Loss

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<tbody>
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<td><strong>0 – 25 dB Normal</strong></td>
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<td><strong>26 – 40 dB Mild</strong></td>
<td>Low Vision &amp; Functional Hearing</td>
<td>Minimal Vision &amp; Functional Hearing</td>
<td>Blind &amp; Func Hearing</td>
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<td><strong>50 – 70 dB Moderately Severe</strong></td>
<td>Low Vision &amp; Very Limited Hearing</td>
<td>Minimal Vision &amp; Very Limited Hearing</td>
<td>Blind &amp; Very Limited Hearing</td>
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<td><strong>71 – 90 dB Severe</strong></td>
<td>Low Vision &amp; Deaf</td>
<td>Minimal Vision &amp; Deaf</td>
<td>Blind &amp; Deaf</td>
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<td><strong>91 + dB Severe</strong></td>
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Visual Acuity:
- 20/20: Normal vision
- 20/70 – 20/200: Mild vision loss
- 20/200 – 20/400: Moderate vision loss
- 20/400 – 20/1000: Severe vision loss
- 20/1000: Blind

Light Perception:
- 20/20: Normal perception
- 20/400: Partially blind
- 20/1000: Totally blind

Designed by DB-TIP, Susanne Morgan Morrow
Types of Deaf-Blindness

- Congenitally Deaf, Adventitiously Blind
- Congenitally Blind, Adventitiously Deaf
- Adventitiously Deaf-Blind
- Congenitally Deaf-Blind

Photo courtesy of DB-TIP, Susanne Morgan Morrow
Types of Visual Impairments

- Acuity Loss
- Field Loss
  - Central Loss
  - Peripheral Loss
Acuity

• Has blurry vision
• Cannot see items at a distance
• Has difficulty making out details
• Has a hard time following fast moving objects
Acuity Loss

Photo courtesy of DB-TIP, Susanne Morgan Morrow
Central Field Loss

- A person who has difficulty seeing items directly in front
- Cannot access printed materials easily
- Must use eccentric viewing to optimize visual field
- Uses peripheral vision, loses details
  - Ex. Macular Degeneration
Central Field Loss

“Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.”

- Helen Keller

Photo courtesy of DB-TIP, Susanne Morgan Morrow
Reduced Peripheral Fields

- Has limited use of the typical peripheral fields of vision
- Can access information directly in front
- Has clear central vision
- Needs signed information presented in a smaller area
Reduced Peripheral Fields

Normal

~20 degrees

~7 degrees

Photo courtesy of DB-TIP, Susanne Morgan Morrow
Myth

People who are deaf-blind do not have any usable vision.

FALSE
Most Deaf-Blind people have residual vision and/or hearing that can be utilized to support communication.
Types of Eye Diseases

• **Normal Vision**
The eye can produce a sharp, clear, wide angle image under a variety of conditions.

• **Retinitis Pigmentosa**
Inherited condition that gradually impairs the retina’s ability to respond to light. Vision is further impaired by *blind spots and severely restricted peripheral fields*.

• **Cataracts**
Cloudiness in the lens of the eye which interferes with *clarity of vision*.

• **Macular Degeneration**
Inherited condition that gradually impairs the macular area of the retina causing loss of *central vision*.
Types of Eye Diseases

- **Retinal Detachment**
  Separation of the light sensitive layer of the retina from the underlying tissue causing large *blind spots or total blindness*.

- **Diabetic Retinopathy**
  The blood vessels on the retina hemorrhage causing *partial or complete blindness*. If the retina is not damaged the blood will be absorbed and vision will be restored temporarily.

- **Glaucoma**
  Inherited condition that gradually impairs peripheral vision as increased pressure in the eye damages the optic nerve resulting in *tunnel vision*.

- **Combination**
  Loss of *peripheral vision and central vision*.
- Glaucoma or Retinitis Pigmentosa
• Diabetic Retinopathy
• Combination
Myth

- People who are legally blind cannot rely on vision for communication purposes.

FALSE

Many people who are legally blind read print, rely on their vision for communication, ambulate independently and use VRS services.
Myth Buster

- Many people who are legally blind may function as visual communicators and ambulate completely independently.
- They are, most likely, also consumers of VRS.
Legal Blindness

• Legal blindness can be defined in two ways; through \textit{central visual acuity} or through \textit{peripheral visual fields}.

• People who are legally blind may still have very \textit{functional vision} that is helpful on a daily basis for communication and ambulatory purposes.
Legal Blindness - Acuities

- When measuring central visual acuity, an individual with **20/200** vision is considered legally blind.
- As the bottom number increases, the more significant the vision loss.
- The bottom number is a measurement of distance.
We use approximately 180 degrees of vision.

In measuring peripheral vision, when an individual has an approximate 20 degrees of remaining functional fields of vision, a person is considered legally blind.

Photo courtesy of DB-TIP, Susanne Morgan Morrow
Educational Objective #2

- Recognize their current skill set that will allow them to work with any individual, regardless of vision.
Self-Assessment

• What types of accommodations have you been asked to make in the past? What did you do to meet the needs of the individual?

• When someone informed you that they had a vision loss, how did you handle the situation?
Self-Assessment

• Answer the following questions…
  ◦ Can I describe the term ‘deaf-blindness’ to a colleague?
  ◦ Can I identify three different types of visual experiences?
  ◦ Do I understand what legal blindness is and why that is important?
  ◦ Can I describe three communication methods used by individuals who are Deaf-Blind?
Educational Objective #3

Apply suggested accommodations for both the environment and the interpreting process.
Myth

People who are deaf-blind need significant accommodations.

FALSE

Many people who are legally blind read print, rely on their vision for communication & ambulate independently.
Modifications & Supports

- **Environmental Adaptations**
  - Seating/Positioning
  - Contrast
  - Lighting

- **Process Adaptations**
  - Space/Pace
  - Time
Modifications & Supports

- Environmental Adaptations
  - Seating/Positioning
  - Contrast
  - Lighting
Seating/Positioning

- Being on the same plane with the individual will assist in facilitating communication
  - Adjust your chair up or down accordingly
  - Discuss optimal seating options with PT

- Be sure you and the individual both have sufficient support during communication interactions

- Depending on the type of vision loss, alternate seating may be necessary
Contrast

- The interpreter or signer needs to provide contrast to her hands/arms for sign language production
  - This applies to the color and style of clothing
  - Dark colors for light pigmentation (not red/pink), light colors for dark pigmentation (not white)
  - No open collars or v-neck shirts
  - No patterns
  - Avoid cumbersome and/or reflective jewelry
- Be aware of the backdrop behind you while signing
- Color contrast of printed materials may be needed
Contrast

YES!
Lighting

- Some individuals may need additional illumination in order to enhance visual access to sign language production
  - You may need additional lighting that can be turned on and off when necessary and a type of lamp that can be angled for best illumination
Modifications & Supports

- Process Adaptations
  - Space/Pace
  - Time
## Space & Pace

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<tr>
<th>Space</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Between the Interpreters and the Deaf-Blind individual gets larger or smaller</td>
<td>• Speed of sign language production may need to be altered (slowed)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Use of personal space is altered</td>
<td>• Fingerspelling &amp; numerical production is slowed</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Signing space can get larger or smaller</td>
<td>• Moving from place to place may be slowed</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How an individual uses his/her space to ambulate, view materials and people may be different</td>
<td>• Accessing printed/Braille materials takes longer</td>
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Myth

- People who are deaf-blind are all tactile communicators.

**FALSE**

The majority of Deaf-Blind people rely on their vision for communication interactions.
Key Points for Success

- Dispelling Myths
- Knowledge of Deaf-Blindness
- Communication Access
- Modifications & Supports

Strategies for Successful Interactions
Communication Access

- **Visual with adaptations**
  - Close/low vision
  - Reduced peripheral fields (top, bottom, sides)

- **Visual with tactile support**
  - Tracking
  - Print-on-Palm

- **Tactile**
  - One-handed
  - Two-handed
Communication Access

- **Qualified** Sign Language Interpreters
- Assistive Technology
  - Communication devices
  - Adaptive Equipment
- Materials
Key Points for Success

- Dispelling Myths
- Knowledge of Deaf-Blindness
- Communication Access
- Modifications & Supports
Myth

• People who are deaf-blind rely on a cane or person to guide them.

FALSE

Many people who are deaf-blind travel independently (either with or without a cane).
Many Deaf-Blind people travel completely independently, without the use of support persons.

- Presumably they have received orientation & mobility training, which assists them in getting around safely.

- They may rely on their vision for communication purposes or utilize a system that they have created to assist in communication interactions with the public.
Modifications & Supports:
Support Service Providers

Deaf-Blind People

Deaf-Blind People with SSPs
What is an SSP?

- A support service provider can be any person, volunteer or professional, trained to act as a link between persons who are deaf-blind and their environment. They typically work with a single individual, and act as a guide and communication facilitator.

Taken from white paper: “Support Service Providers for People who are Deaf-Blind”- AADB, November 2006
Self-Assessment

- What are some actions/responsibilities of the interpreter/signer when working with someone with a vision loss?
- What are five environmental modifications that can be made in order to enhance communication interactions with Deaf-Blind people?
- When interpreting with Deaf-Blind people what are some possible ergonomic factors the interpreter/signer needs to be aware of?
- In regards to lighting, what is one critical aspect that will assist with the communication interaction?
Deaf-Blind Resources

**National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness** - www.nationaldb.org
- The National Consortium on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB) is a national technical assistance and dissemination center for children and youth who are deaf-blind. Promote academic achievement and results for children and youth (from birth to age 26) who are deaf-blind and assist in addressing state-identified needs for highly qualified personnel who have the necessary skills and knowledge to serve children and youth who are deaf-blind.

**American Association of the Deaf-Blind (AADB)** - www.aadb.org
- The national organization of and for Deaf-Blind people. They have recently announced their next symposium. To volunteer or become a member: http://www.aadb.org/membership/membership.html.

**Helen Keller National Center (HKNC)** - www.hknc.org
- National training center for individuals who have combined hearing and vision loss. The comprehensive program provides training on communication, independent livings, vocational, orientation & mobility, etc. hkncinfo@hknc.org
Professionals Serving Deaf-Blind Consumers

• To join the PSDBC Listserv: to keep abreast of news, trainings, workshops, and events
  • Send an email to LISTSERVE@TR.WOU.EDU
  • In the body of the message type “subscribe PSDBC” (w/o the quotes). You will receive a confirmation email.