

Children & Youth: Combined Hearing & Vision Loss

WHAT IS DEAF-BLINDNESS?

“It may seem that deaf-blindness refers to a total inability to see or hear. However, In reality deaf-blindness is a condition in which the combination of hearing and vision loss in children and youth 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) or multiple disabilities.”

HOW PREVALENT IS DEAF BLINDNESS IN CHILDREN AND YOUTH?

- Kentucky has 161 individuals under the age of 21 who are deaf-blind.
 - 1% have no vision or hearing; 99% have some residual hearing or vision.
- 87% of children who are deaf-blind have one or more additional disabilities/health problems.
- Many deaf-blind children are never counted (KY Deaf-Blind Project)

EARLY IDENTIFICATION

- Deaf-blindness is often underestimated and misunderstood, which limits referrals to early intervention programs.
- In Kentucky, children from birth to 3 years of age who are deaf-blind are typically eligible for early intervention services under the Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities program of IDEA (Part C).
- Children with deaf-blindness need to be identified early in life when the brain is most sensitive to learning and begin receiving appropriate intervention as infants and toddlers.
 - Vision and hearing are critical to early and ongoing development.
 - What children see and hear helps them form their understanding of the world.
 - Children learn by imitating what they see and hear.
 - When children see or hear something they are motivated to move.
 - Seeing and hearing piques a child’s curiosity, providing incentive to learn.

SCHOOL MATTERS

“It is important that children experiencing both a vision and hearing loss are appropriately identified and receiving accommodations and/or modifications to ensure access to education.”

Deaf-blindness has a significant impact on learning. Of the five senses, vision and hearing are the primary senses through which we collect information. When these are impaired or not functioning, it impacts a child’s development in several areas:

- Communication/language development
- Movement and motor development
- Cognitive development and the ability to learn
- Emotional/social development
- Body image and self-concept

TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD

When a person who is deaf-blind nears the end of his or her school-based education, transition and rehabilitation help will be required to assist in planning, so that, as an adult, the individual can find suitable work and living situations.

- Age 14 is the time to begin careful planning and preparation for successful transition to employment, post-secondary education, and life in the community after school.
- Because of the diversity of needs, careful and respectful teamwork is required among specialists and agencies concerned with such things as housing, vocational and rehabilitation needs, deafness, blindness, orientation and mobility, medical needs, and mental health.
- The adult who is deaf-blind must be central to the transition planning. The individual's own goals, directions, interests, and abilities must guide the planning every step of the way.
- Skilled interpreters, family members, and friends who know the person well can help the adult who is deaf-blind have the most important voice in planning his or her own future

RESOURCES

The Kentucky Deaf-Blind Project provides statewide technical assistance and training to persons who have a combination of vision and hearing challenges. Services are offered free of charge to persons from birth to 22 years of age, as well as their families and service providers.

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First Steps is a statewide early intervention system in Kentucky that provides services to children with developmental disabilities from birth to age 3 and their families.

(877) 417-8377

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The Kentucky Department of Education Office of Special Education and Early Learning (OSEEL) works to improve educational outcomes for diverse and early learners through training and coaching for local district staff and teachers, technical assistance, guidance and policy documents, and providing supports for students and families.

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The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Deaf-Blind Program coordinates services to individuals who have been identified as having a combination of significant hearing and vision loss, providing assistive technology, employment services, and specialized training to help people who are deaf-blind improve the quality and ease of their everyday lives.

(800) 372-7172

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Information contained in this document was taken from the following sources:

- <https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/deaf-blindness-overview/>
- <https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/national-child-count/>
- <https://www.nationaldb.org/products/national-child-count/report-2019/>
- <https://www.helenkeller.org/hknc>
- <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/news/2011/nidcd-resources-available-deaf-blind-awareness-week>
- <https://education.ky.gov/specialed/Documents/Critical%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Kentucky%20Deaf-blind%20Project.pdf>
- <http://www.projectidealonline.org/>
- <https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/>
- <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED419342>

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