

Deaf-Blindness: Vision & Hearing Loss Facts

IN THE UNITED STATES...

Close to 2.4 million adults are deaf-blind (2014 study by Molloy College)

IN KENTUCKY...

158+ children and youth (ages 0-22) are identified as deaf-blind (National Center on Deaf-Blindness, 2019)

Deaf-blind children/young adults are under-identified (Kentucky Deaf-Blind Project)

DEAF-BLINDNESS GENERAL INFORMATION

- Deaf-blindness is a rare condition in which an individual has combined hearing and vision loss, thus limiting access to both auditory and visual information.
- There are many causes of deaf-blindness including illness, accident, genetic syndrome or the process of aging.
- Deaf-blindness encompasses a spectrum from mildly hard of hearing plus mildly visual impaired to totally deaf and blind or combinations of the severity of vision and hearing loss.
- Many adults who are deaf-blind lead independent or semi-independent lives and have productive work and enjoyable social lives.
- Among the greatest difficulties deaf-blind people face are those related to communication and mobility; communication barriers in particular can lead to a profound sense of isolation and loneliness.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION & MOBILITY

COMMUNICATION FACTS:

- Individuals who are deaf-blind use a variety of nonverbal and verbal communication.
- No particular combination is appropriate for every person.
- Communication needs must be addressed on an individual basis because of wide variations within the population with regard to visual, hearing, cognitive and motor abilities as well as overall learning style.

COMMUNICATION METHODS:

- Tactile Sign Language
- Close-Vision Sign Language
- Fingerspelling
- Writing notes in large print or Braille
- Print-on-Palm
- Cued Speech
- Gestures
- Pictures
- Lip-reading
- Tactile Symbols
- Touch Cues

MOBILITY:

People who are deaf-blind rely on various techniques and tools to navigate within their environment including white cane, dog guide, human guide and use of residual vision and/or hearing loss.

INTERACTING WITH SOMEONE WHO IS DEAF-BLIND

- Treat the person the same way you would treat anyone else.
- Get the person's attention by gently touching them on the arm or shoulder, then wait to be acknowledged before you begin.
- Encourage the person to express themselves. Be sure to give them enough time to respond.
- Ask the person how they prefer to communicate, where you should sit, etc. so that the person can maximize their remaining hearing and/or vision.
- Wear clothing that contrasts with your skin tone.
- Identify yourself every time you enter or leave a room, join a conversation, etc.
- Don't leave the room without telling the person.
- Be sure to tell the person how long you'll be gone.
- If other people are present, introduce them one by one. Let the person who is deaf-blind know where everyone is seated.
- Communicate directly with the person who is deaf-blind, even when communicating through an interpreter, family member or other support person.
- Express yourself naturally. Don't worry about using words like "see," "look" or "hear."
- Don't interrupt or speak when the person who is deaf-blind is talking.
- Don't move objects, such as a glass of water or chair, without telling the person who is deaf-blind that you have done so.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ADULTS WHO ARE DEAF-BLIND

Adults who are Deaf-Blind need access to direct support services, employment opportunities and opportunities to be independent, which can include the following:

- Ongoing individualized supports that promote independence, not "programs."
- Waivers and other funding sources to support their independence.
- Opportunities to socialize and be involved in their communities.
- Respect for their unique dreams and goals and access to the information, supports and resources needed to achieve them.
- Transportation, community activities and appropriate supports.
- Trained Support Service Providers (SSPs), interpreters and other direct service providers who can help them to live independently.
- Meaningful employment opportunities and job accommodations that will help the person to be more successful at work.
- Safe, supportive living environments, including independent or group living options, etc.

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

- National Center on Deaf-Blindness (NCDB) website | <https://www.nationaldb.org/>
- American Association of the Deaf-Blind (AADB) website | <https://www.aadb.org/>
- <https://www.helenkeller.org/hknc/lesson/orientation-and-mobility-supports> | <http://www.deafblindinfo.org/>

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