

Recreation and Leisure for Children Who Are Deafblind

By Lauren Lieberman, Ph.D.



**National Center
on Deafblindness**

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People participate in recreational activities for many reasons—fun, exercise, and meeting others. They look forward to Tuesday bowling, Saturday hikes, and Sunday book discussions.

Best of all, when people take time off from everyday responsibilities, they can return to them later, more refreshed. In a way, recreation re-CREATES us.

Children and youth who are deafblind enjoy recreational activities just like their peers with typical hearing and vision. In fact, they may need those activities even more to help combat the isolation and lack of independence that often result from deafblindness.

Children who are deafblind can enjoy a wide variety of activities, especially when adaptations are made based on their available vision, hearing, and other abilities. Everyone—educators, family, and friends—should encourage them to add enjoyable recreational activities to their daily lives.

Which Activities Are Best?

Children and youth who are deafblind can be exposed to many of the same recreational activities as their peers, with modifications if necessary. That way they can learn about a variety of activities and find out which they like best and how the activities can be adapted for their needs.



To get started, explore the child's interests:

- What types of recreation have they participated in previously?
- What are their favorite activities?
- With whom do they prefer to spend leisure time?
- At what time of day is recreation most enjoyable for them?

Exploring Activities in Your Area

Find out what recreational activities are available in the child's community. For example, check out what's available at

- Local schools
- YMCAs/YWCAs
- Places of worship
- Community leagues
- University-affiliated programs
- Local deaf clubs
- Local associations for the blind
- [Ski for Light](#)



Potential Activities

Fitness Activities

Aerobics
Swimming
Walking
Track and field
Wrestling
Running
Cross-country skiing
Weightlifting
Gymnastics
Bicycling (stationary/
tandem)

Outdoor Activities

Fishing
Hiking
Kayaking
Sledding
Camping
Canoeing
Horseback riding
Rowing
Paddle boarding
Rock climbing

Home Activities

Cooking
Needlepoint
Arts and crafts
Gardening
Knitting
Corn hole
Listening to music
Video games

Table Games

Card games
Dominoes
Bingo
Board games

Community Activities

Bowling
Roller skating
Martial arts
Ice skating
Dancing

Sports

Special Olympics
Baseball
Soccer
Volleyball
Hockey
Beep baseball
Golf
Softball
Basketball
Swimming
Rollerblading
Goalball (for persons
with hearing)
Diving
Bowling

What To Do Before Beginning a New Activity

Planning and preparation help make new recreational activities successful and enjoyable. Before beginning any new activity, make sure to check with the child's physician. Then, to get started, you'll need to learn how the child communicates and what communication and other skills are required for the activity.

Understanding a Child's Communication

All recreational activities rely on effective communication, so before getting started on any activity, it's important to understand the ways in which the child expresses and receives information. The modes of communication a child uses are highly individualized based on their individual sensory learning channels as well as their social, physical, perceptual, and cognitive skills.

For example, they might express themselves using

- Body language
- Gestures
- Vocalizations
- Symbols
- Sign language

They might receive information using

- Object symbols
- Touch cues
- Braille
- Sign language
- Hearing (e.g., with hearing aids or cochlear implants)

Additionally, children who are deafblind often use specialized devices, like tablets and touch screens, refreshable braille devices, communication boards, hearing aids, glasses, and so on, to support their interactions with others. Some children rely on specialists, such as interpreters, interveners, teachers of the deaf, and teachers of the visually impaired, to support their communication.

To learn about a child's unique way of communicating,

- Review their medical records and educational documentation
- Talk to family members, the child's teachers, and related service providers
- Observe the child

Steps to clear communication

- Experience the activity yourself so you know what to communicate. For example, if you are teaching rock climbing, doing it first will give you a better idea of how to explain and direct the activity.
- Allow time for exploration of the space, equipment, and boundaries. Include key terminology and describe the rules.
- Break continuous activities into segments. Some skills, such as archery, bowling, or shot put, have built in time for feedback, but others, like swimming, biking, running, or canoeing, do not.
- Ensure that receptive and expressive communication is available during the activity. This must be set up and planned ahead of time. For example, if a child is using a kickboard while swimming, how will they communicate to the instructor or intervener?

Teaching Strategies

These strategies can help make learning a new activity fun and enjoyable.

Develop a Plan

Create a plan that includes short- and long-term objectives that have been developed, if possible, by a team consisting of the child, family, and educators or other service providers. Remember that the overall goal is to find an activity (or activities) that will be fun and provide relaxation. A good plan helps set the stage for successful recreation.

Provide Choices

When involved in recreational activities, children must use choice-making skills. Begin with simple choices that are chronologically age-appropriate. For example, offer two activities and allow them to choose the order in which they will be done. Next, give a choice

of two or three activities and let them choose which one to perform. As a child increases in their ability to make choices, remove prompting and allow more independence in decision making. It is also important to teach self-advocacy skills so they can ask for what they want in an appropriate way (Lieberman & Childs, 2020).

Help the Child Become Familiar with the Environment

Give the child an opportunity to explore and become familiar with an activity's environment and, if applicable, the equipment or materials and other people who will be involved. This might take some time, but helping a child become comfortable with their surroundings will make it easier for them to learn a new activity.

Explain Rules and Terminology

Consider the child's developmental age when deciding what to communicate about the activity's rules and terminology. They will need to understand enough for them to enjoy participating. Be patient. It may take a child who is deafblind much longer than their peers with typical hearing and vision to understand and fully participate in a new activity.

Demonstrate or Model the Activity

It can be helpful if you or another adult demonstrate each part of an activity in a way the child can understand, using their modes of communication. This can be done by allowing them to feel a peer or instructor perform the skill or movement or through visual demonstration for children with usable vision (Lieberman & Cowart, 2011). Provide immediate and accurate feedback so they can make necessary adjustments before the next attempt and repeat as many times as necessary to ensure the child understands.



Teaching Strategies (continued)

Use Physical Guidance

Once you or someone else has modeled the activity (i.e., performed a skill or movement), allow the child to take a turn. To avoid startling the child, let them know you will be touching them before giving physical assistance, using their mode of receptive communication (e.g., a touch cue, a sign). Provide them with any physical support they need. Give the child feedback so they can make any necessary adjustments. And allow them to repeat the actions as many times as necessary.

As the child begins performing the activity, give them whatever support and assistance they need to ensure their safety and build their confidence. As they begin to perform the actions of the activity more independently, you can gradually reduce the assistance. In other words, be aware of the child's responses and try to minimize assistance as soon as you feel they are learning the skill. In educational settings, be sure to document tactile teaching methods so all staff understand how they are used and why they are needed and appropriate.

Combine Teaching Techniques

Combine teaching techniques to ensure the child is learning as much as possible. In the following example, both explanations and physical guidance techniques are used: Eddie is learning the game of T-ball. He is deaf and has some usable vision. When at bat, he needs to be reminded of which way to stand as well as how and when to hit the ball. The instructor models how to stand, signs "hit the ball," and taps Eddie on the elbow to indicate it's time to hit the ball. Eddie then swings and bats the ball off the T.



Keeping it Fun

In addition to helping the child select activities they're interested in, there are a number of practical ways to help a child have fun and stay engaged.

Select Appropriate Modifications

Most recreational activities were developed with hearing and sighted people in mind. In many cases, minor adaptations can make these activities enjoyable and safe for children who are deafblind. For example, the children in Shannon's Girl Scout troop go roller skating every week. Shannon, like many children who are deafblind, has difficulty keeping her balance. By using a skate aid device that helps stabilize her body, she can safely participate.

Select the Best Time of Day for the Activity

Try to schedule activities for a time that best meets the child's needs. For example,

Amy is quick to get ready in the morning and, as a result, has 20 to 25 minutes every morning when she has nothing planned. When a recreation specialist noted that Amy loves to ride a stationary bike, one was made available to her. Now, she rides it every morning during her free time.

Commit to a Trial Period

Depending on a child's age, consider talking with them about how long it may take to learn an activity. You may want to establish a set time period for them to try out a new activity. For some children, this may help prevent initial frustration and feelings of failure. For example, 17-year-old Robert wants to learn Tae Kwon Do at a local community club. His parents suggest a six-week session to determine if he enjoys it. At the end of the six weeks, Robert may choose to continue or try another activity.



REFERENCES

Lieberman, L. J., & Childs, R. (2020). Steps to success: A sport-focused self-advocacy program for children with visual impairments. *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness*, 114(6), 531-537.

Lieberman, L.J., & Cowart, J. (2011). *Games for people with sensory impairments* (2nd ed.). Louisville, KY: American Printing House for the Blind.

Additional Resources

Camp Abilities

Camp Abilities is a one week educational sports camp for children who are visually impaired, blind, or deafblind. The camp is set up to provide a 1:1 instructional situation for each child. Camps are currently operating in the U.S. and worldwide. The “Instructional Materials” section of their website has free videos, tip sheets, checklists, and more.

Possibilities: Recreational Experiences of Individuals who are Deafblind

This online book highlights individuals who are deafblind doing a variety of activities from speed skating, to hiking, to horseback riding.

Lavelle Resources for Children with Moderate and Severe Disabilities

Resources and tip sheets for assessing and supporting physical activity.

Author Information

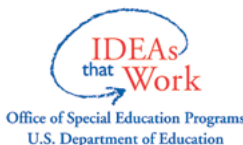
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