

# SUPPORTING COMMUNICATION DEVELOPMENT NCDB Practice Guide

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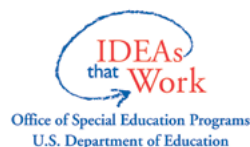
NCDB Practice Guides outline the essential components of instructional practices commonly used with children who are deafblind. For more information on supporting communication development, go to [nationaldb.org](http://nationaldb.org).

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**National Center  
on Deafblindness**





**This guide outlines the foundational skills needed to effectively support communication development. The components and skills covered are primarily appropriate for children who are emerging and early symbolic communicators.**

## **Practice Rationale**

Children with typical hearing and vision learn to communicate by watching and listening to others. But children who are deafblind have limited access to learning this way. They need knowledgeable educators who understand how deafblindness impacts learning—who know how to assess a child’s communication, plan for and engage in meaningful interactions with them, and fully support their communication development.

How a child who is deafblind communicates is highly individualized and depends on how they use their available sensory channels (e.g., usable hearing or vision, touch) as well as their social, physical, and cognitive skills. For example, early on they might use gestures, body language, facial expressions, and vocalizations. As communication develops, they may use objects, touch cues, manual signs, speech, braille, or assistive devices—separately or in combination.

## Essential Components

Each bolded item below is an essential component of supporting communication development for a child who is deafblind. The bullets are the skills a teacher or other adult working with a child or youth who is deafblind would display if implementing the components correctly.

### Assessment

#### The teacher or other practitioner

- ❑ Conducts a comprehensive assessment using high-quality methods appropriate for children who are deafblind (see the "Appropriate Assessment Strategies" Practice Guide)
- ❑ Continually collects data and assesses a child's communication as they have new experiences, develop abilities and needs, and expand their communication

### Communication Planning

#### The teacher or other practitioner

- ❑ Works collaboratively with family and other team members on planning decisions (e.g., assistive technology choices, vocabulary to teach)
- ❑ Creates a comprehensive written communication plan based on assessment findings and ensures the plan is up to date as new data and findings are obtained
- ❑ Ensures that the plan documents how a child communicates expressively and receptively, the types of communication support they will receive, and who will provide that support
- ❑ Identifies the communication modes that work best for the child through observation, getting to know the child, and learning from the family and other team members
- ❑ Ensures support for communication takes advantage of the child's best sensory learning channels as well as their social, physical, and cognitive skills

- ❑ Identifies and documents the environmental factors that create conditions that support a child's sensory channels and communication access, including background noise and lighting

### Appropriate Formats and Materials

#### The teacher or other practitioner

- ❑ Uses items the child loves best when initially selecting objects, symbols, and other materials
- ❑ Uses objects and materials that are personally relevant from a child's perspective and experiences, and avoids using miniatures
- ❑ Ensures that materials and other items are presented to the child in a format that takes advantage of their best sensory learning channels and other characteristics
- ❑ Ensures that the child uses their adaptive equipment and prescribed assistive devices, such as hearing aids, and that they are functioning properly

### Meaningful Interactions

#### The teacher or other practitioner

- ❑ Establishes a trusting relationship with the child (see the "Building Trusting Relationships" Practice Guide)
- ❑ Greets the child in a consistent manner at the beginning of every interaction and lets them know when leaving
- ❑ Is fully present and attuned to the child's communication, including their subtle and unconventional behaviors

- ❑ Communicates with the child about things that are interesting, meaningful, and memorable to them (e.g., shared experiences, experiences they have regularly)
- ❑ Ensures the child is included in meaningful interactions with multiple communication partners in ways the child can understand and be understood
- ❑ Provides meaningful experiences to create topics for communication
- ❑ Is patient when waiting for the child to interact and communicate, giving them plenty of time to process information
- ❑ Recognizes and immediately responds to the child's communication in whatever form it takes, for example, by affirming what they express
- ❑ Attends to the child's positioning, ensuring they are secure and well-supported

## Consistency

### The teacher or other practitioner

- ❑ Provides the family and other team members with access to the communication plan
- ❑ Encourages family and other team members to use the same system of communication with the child throughout the school day and at home
- ❑ Ensures that the child has access to their communication devices and materials at all times
- ❑ Embeds communication in the child's routines and activities throughout the day

## Uses Appropriate Instructional Strategies

### Depending on the child's level of communication and abilities, the teacher or other practitioner

- ❑ Uses joint attention and the hand-under-hand technique to mutually explore things like objects or textures
- ❑ Uses turn-taking and imitation of the child's communication behaviors to encourage reciprocal interactions
- ❑ Provides opportunities for the child to make choices as a way to express what matters to them and encourage communication
- ❑ Supports a child's communication development by pairing a method of communication the child knows well with a more advanced method
- ❑ Uses shaping to reinforce the child's communication behaviors, no matter how small or subtle, in ways that shape their understanding of communication and concepts
- ❑ Uses experience books, story boxes, and calendar systems to encourage the child to communicate about things that are not in the immediate environment as well as things that happened in the past and things that will happen in the future



## You'll know the practice is working if the child...

- Shows more trust and confidence when interacting with others
- Is more able to ask and answer questions, make choices, and share their feelings, wants, needs, interests, and ideas
- Initiates interactions with others
- Expands their communication skills and abilities (e.g., uses new gestures or assistive technology, increases vocabulary, moves from concrete to abstract symbols)
- Is more curious about and interested in engaging with others

## Learn More

NCDB Practice Guides are created using a process adapted from the Practice Profile format developed by the National Implementation Research Network (Metz, 2016). Although NCDB Practice Guides do not provide extensive information about how to implement practices, they outline their essential components. This makes them a useful tool for state deafblind project personnel and practitioners to identify training and coaching needs related to specific practices for children who are deafblind. They also serve as quick reminders of the purpose and key elements of a practice.

To learn more, visit

- [The NCDB Info Topics webpage](https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/info-topics/) (https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/info-topics/)
- Other [NCDB Practice Guides](https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/professional-development/practice-guides/) (https://www.nationaldb.org/info-center/professional-development/practice-guides/)
- [The Communicating With Children Who Are Deafblind professional development module](https://www.nationaldb.org/products/modules/pd/communication) (https://www.nationaldb.org/products/modules/pd/communication)

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